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doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/26163765>

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THINKING CIS: RACIALIZED CISSEXISM, CIS-HETEROSEXUAL MEN, AND CIS-LBQ
WOMEN

by

ALITHIA ZAMANTAKIS

Under the Direction of Katie Acosta, Ph.D.

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

ABSTRACT

While Trans Studies analyzes, critiques, and rethinks the epistemological, ontological, and material mechanisms through which gender shapes and is shaped by the social world, few studies in the Sociology of Trans Studies have thoroughly theorized and analyzed what exactly constitutes cis-ness. As such, I ask what constitutes cis-ness vis-à-vis sexuality, and how do the desirability discourse of cisgender-heterosexual men and cisgender-lesbian/bi/queer women enact necropolitical boundaries around Black trans women and trans women of color's subjectivity? Utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a sample of 32 predominantly Black, cisgender-heterosexual men and cisgender-lesbian/bi/queer women, in addition to a focus group with four white/white-passing participants, and photo elicitation methodologies, I elucidate how Western ontologies of "body reasoning" (Oyěwùmí 1997) and gender essentialism remain prevalent. I argue that participants constructed trans bodies as surplus to the binary logic of cis-ness and as not only undesirable but unnecessary. I explicate rankings of photos of trans women of various races and expressions and detail my finding that cisgender-heterosexual men participants' viewed a photo of a white, "cis-passing" trans woman as more desirable than photos of other women. I additionally conceptualize cis-ness as necropolitical by showing how violence becomes the justified vehicle for the symbols that circulate around "trans-ness" and functions to reconstitute masculinity, heterosexuality, and lesbian identity. Finally, I flesh out cis-ness as a multidimensional ideology. In doing so, I theorize cis-ness as an ideological, political, and social manifestation rooted in whiteness that disburses beyond the individual body.

INDEX WORDS: Trans Studies; Race, Class, and Gender; Intersectionality; Cis-ness Studies; Sexualities

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December 2021

DEDICATION

For Dustin Parker, Neulisa Luciano Ruiz, Yampi Méndez Arocho, Scott/Scottlyn Devore, Monika Diamond, Lexi, Johanna Metzger, Serena Angelique Velázquez Ramos, Layla Pelaez Sánchez, Penélope Díaz Ramírez, Nina Pop, Helle Jae O'Regan, Tony McDade, Dominique Rem'mie Fells, Riah Milton, Jayne Thompson, Selena Reyes-Hernandez, Brian Egypt Powers, Brayla, Stone, Merci Mack, Shaki Peters, Bree Black, Summer Taylor, Marilyn Cazares, Dior H Ova, Queasha D Hardy, Aja Raquell Rhone-Spears, Lea Rayshon Daye, Kee Sam, Aerrion Burnett, Mia Green, Michelle Michellyn Ramos Vargas, Felycya Harris, Brooklyn Deshuna, Sara Blackwood, Angel Unique, Skylar Heath, Yunieski Carey Herrera, Asia Jynae Foster, Chae'Meshia Simms, Kimberly Fial, Jaheim Pugh Jaheim Barbie, Courtney Eshay Key, Alexandria Winchester, Tyianna Alexander, Samuel Edmund Damián Valentín, Bianca Muffin Bankz, Dominique Jackson, Fifty Bandz, Alexis Braxton, Chyna Carrillo, Jeffrey JJ Bright, Jasmine Cannady, Jenna Franks, Diamond Kyree Sanders, Rayanna Pardo, Jaida Peterson, Dominique Lucious, Remy Fennell, Tiara Banks, Natalia Smut, Iris Santos, Tiffany Thomas, Keri Washington, Jahaira DeAlto, Whispering Wind Bear Spirit, Sophie Vásquez, Danika Danny Henson, Serenity Hollis, Oliver Ollie Taylor, and the countless, unnamed trans, nonbinary, and/or gender-nonconforming murdered each and every year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Katie Acosta for the hours upon hours she spent reading over drafts of each chapter, meeting with me to discuss ways to improve the analyses, and for pushing me to go further in my research. I would also like to thank my committee, Drs. Veronica Newton and Wendy Simond, for their support, the hours they spent reading over my dissertation, and their feedback throughout the process. I could not have made it through this process nor produced this dissertation without any of them.

Thank you to my sister scholars and best friends, Dresden Lackey and Monisha Jackson, for being my rocks throughout grad school and life. They both listened to my ideas, motivated me through the process, and were there when life fall apart. Thank you to my platonic soulmate and best friend, Margarita Ruiz Hernandez, for letting me vent to you, gassing me up, and inspiring me to do and be my best. You make life livable. Thank you to my best friend and mother, Misty, for crying with me through the pains of this research and for always fighting for me. Gracias a mi mamá transgénero, Lí An (Estrella) Sanchez, por ayudarme a afirmar todo lo que soy y por inspirarme a seguir luchando. Thank you to my friends/chosen fam, Tabitha Ingle, Kara Tsukerman, Andy Chang, V B Giovanni, Jennie Lambert, Andrew Thurman, Ella and Amanda Blanchard-James, Kira Kiko Lian, James Capello, Nico Climaco, and Sage Shabaaka Taharka P Smalls for supporting me throughout school and loving me along the way.

Thank you to the Southeastern Women's Studies Association for the 2019 Dissertation Fellowship that enabled me to compensate my participants, making it possible to complete my research in the time I did. Thank you to Georgia State University for the Provost Dissertation Fellowship that allowed me to survive while having the time to focus on my dissertation.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the lands on which this was written. The research for this paper was conducted on land stolen from the Mvskoke and Cherokee peoples in so-called Atlanta, GA, and written both there and on land stolen from the Susquehannock Nation in so-called Shippensburg, PA. My life, my existence, my education, and my career occur on the backs of Black and Indigenous peoples whose labor and bodies form the foundation of the United States Empire and the buildings and spaces that I inhabit today.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAB—assigned female at birth

AMAB—assigned male at birth

BIPOC—black, indigenous, and/or people of color

CIS—cisgender

CIS-HET—cisgender and heterosexual

GAS—gender affirmation surgery (formerly known as sex reassignment surgery)

HRT—hormone replacement therapy

LES/BI—lesbian and/or bisexual

LGBTQIA—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual/agender

QPOC—queer people of color

QTPOC—queer and/or trans people of color

TRANS—transgender

1 INTRODUCTION

A cisgender lesbian decries the “war against lesbians” in an article on *After Ellen*, a popular webpage for LBQ cisgender and transgender women. In describing how she “became the most hated lesbian in Baltimore,” Julia Beck notes having made a “‘Dykes Don’t Like Dick’ sign” while simultaneously misgendering trans women, conflating trans womanhood with pedophilia and rape, and conceptualizing queerness as a misogynistic attack on lesbians (Beck 2018).

Beck’s perspective on gender and sexuality is mirrored in the recent work of Women’s Studies professor Bonnie Morris (2016). Beck, an activist, and Morris, an activist scholar, both share a fear of a “post-lesbian” world in which the richness, depth, and radical potential of white, cisgender women’s bookstores, bars, music festivals, and magazines no longer exist (2018).

In describing her inability to see Caitlyn Jenner as a woman and her refusal to use the terminology cisgender (a mere adjective describing a difference in her lived experiences compared to a transgender woman’s), Beck continues on to wonder whether “it really was transphobic to decline a date with a transwoman [*sic*]” and “Why are all the lesbians transitioning?” Beck finds fault with a “new queer” world in which people of all genders and sexualities may find validation and community. The proliferation of queer and trans identities and possibilities somehow eradicates lesbian realities for Beck. Indeed, Beck and Miranda Yardley (another cisgender, feminist blogger on *AfterEllen*) rebuke what is referred to as the “cotton ceiling.” Yardley (2018) writes, “The Cotton Ceiling, coined by a male ‘lesbian’ [*sic*] pornographer, refers to the barrier trans women face when denied access to sex with lesbians.” The cotton ceiling, though, is not a demand for cisgender lesbians to sleep with trans women. Rather, it is the articulation of the manifestation of cissexism within lesbian spaces in which cisgender, lesbian women may refuse to see trans women as women and/or lesbian. In the heated

debate surrounding the “cotton ceiling,” cisgender lesbians reframe trans women as “[men] whose idea of ‘woman’ clearly is nothing other than a sexual object” (Yardley 2018).

A similar reframing of trans women’s existence is evident in cases surrounding the murders of Black, trans women by cisgender men. Take, for instance, the murder of Islan Nettles. James Dixon, a twenty-five-year-old, Black, cisgender man, met Nettles, a twenty-one-year-old, Black, trans woman while drinking and strolling through New York City with friends. As he talked with Nettles, his friends mocked him, taunting, “That’s a guy” (McKinley 2016). When he “discovered” she was a trans woman, he flew into “a blind fury.” Dixon ultimately turned himself into the police and pleaded a “trans panic defense”—an argument that the discovery that one has had sex with a trans woman and not a cisgender woman results in an overwhelming mental crisis that “causes” the murder of a trans woman. The *New York Times* quoted Dixon denying anti-trans prejudice to the police, stating, “I just didn’t want to be fooled” (McKinley 2016).

For Dixon, Beck, Yardley, and Morris, trans women are not women. We may claim to be women. We may “look” like cisgender women. We may exist as women, but fundamentally, for many cisgender, lesbian women and cisgender, heterosexual men, trans women are only ever mere simulacra of womanhood. Although one would think cis lesbians and cis-het men share little in common socio-politically, the discursive transphobia embedded within these separate politico-sexual identities collapses around a shared fear of the Black/Brown (and sometimes white) penis. Cisgender lesbians protests of trans women and cis-het men’s murders of trans women, seemingly different in nature, rely upon a similar transmisogynoir/ transmisogyny. Transmisogyny refers to the “policing of femininity on bodies it is understood not to belong to” (Vaid-Menon 2014; Krell 2017). It is the denial of womanhood, femininity, and the like to

anyone but cisgender women and the subsequent punishment (verbal, corporal, institutional) of non-cis women who exist as feminine/women. While transmisogyny recognizes the policing, punishment, and oppression of all trans women, transmisogynoir articulates that anti-Blackness and transmisogyny function differentially for Black trans women (Krell 2017; see Bailey and Trudy 2018 in regards to the conceptualization of misogynoir).

Black trans women and trans women of color are particularly positioned within a “matrix of domination” (Collins 1990) that results in differential vulnerabilities and differential structural and interpersonal violence. In 2012 alone, 53% of LGBT people murdered in the US were trans women, and 73% of LGBT people murdered were people of color, primarily Black people (Gabiell 2016). By November of 2018, 82% of the murdered trans women that year were women of color, primarily under thirty-five and living in the South (Human Rights Campaign 2018). In 2020, when I began my dissertation, eight trans people were killed in a period of seven days in the United States, including the colony of Puerto Rico (Busey 2020). One of those killed included 17-year-old, Black trans girl, Brayla Stone. Busey’s (2020) article regarding the murder included links to screenshots of a snapchat thread in which an anonymous man “boasted about killing her for \$5,000...saying it was ‘money well spent.’” Another, Selena Reyes Hernandez, a 37-year-old trans Latina, was murdered by a high school student after he arrived at her home and she disclosed she was a trans woman. At that point, he left her home, “but he ‘kept seeing her face, and it kept bothering him, and he was mad as hell” (Graves 2020). Haunted by his attraction to a woman of trans experience, he returned to shoot and murder her. He then left and returned again to shoot her several times more—as if to go beyond murdered her and punish her for not being the kind of woman he imagined her to be.

While trans women as a whole experience unemployment at a rate three times higher than the national rate and a poverty rate two times higher than the national rate, Black, Latinx, Middle Eastern, Indigenous and mixed race trans women experience two to three times higher poverty rates than white trans women (James et al. 2016). High rates of unemployment and poverty coincide with high rates of survival sex work. The 2015 U.S. trans survey found 77% of participants engaged in survival sex work have experienced intimate violence and 72% sexual assault (James et al. 2016). Police brutality, surveillance, and harassment increase the risk of violence if they are called in moments of danger, and increase the risk of violence because of the inability to seek help in moments of un-safety. Further, as Gabriell (2016) notes, cisgender people perceiving white trans people as cisgender may result in increased safety, while for trans people of color, being perceived as cisgender does not mitigate the risks of racialized violence. In order to analyze this vis-à-vis intimate violence, I find it important to understand the ways in which cis-het men's and cis lesbian women's narratives of desirability are informed by socio-cultural constellations of risk and violence that render the lives of Black trans women and trans women of color disposable in numerous, contingent, and contradictory ways.

Queer theorists remind scholars that the task of queer theory is not to formulate a theory about queers, but to analyze, critique, and rethink the “knowledges and social practices that organize ‘society’ as a whole” (Seidman 1996: 13) vis-à-vis the politics of sexuality. Trans Studies, too, takes its role as such—to analyze, critique, and rethink the epistemological, ontological, and material mechanisms through which gender shapes and is shaped by the social world. Trans Studies seeks not to construct a theory of trans/nonbinary people but to analyze the socio-political and historical “conditions that cause transgender phenomena to stand out in the first place, and that allow gender normativity to disappear into the unanalyzed, ambient

background” (Stryker 2006: 3). In other words, Trans Studies is (or should be) as much a study of cis-ness as it is a study of trans-ness. My focus within my dissertation, thus, is to understand the ways narratives of desirability are constructed by cisgender, heterosexual men (cis-het men hereafter) and cisgender, lesbian women. I seek to understand how sexual practices, sexual desires, bodies, and the conditions of life and death are performatively manifested through transphobic discourse, or in other words, how deeply entrenched racialized-gendered-sexual fears of penises provide the foundation for material murders of Black and Brown trans women.

I utilize semi-structured, in-depth interviews with cis-het men and cis lesbians, as well as focus groups comprised of a mix of both groups. Through these analyses, I ask what constitutes cis-ness vis-à-vis sexuality? What gendered and racialized patterns emerge in cis-het men’s and cis lesbian’s conceptualizations of desirable bodies? How do discourses of desirability and penises feed into gendered racial and racialized gender violence(s)? How do the desirability discourses of cis lesbians and cis-heterosexual men enact necropolitical boundaries around trans women’s subjectivity? I frame these questions around theoretical extensions of “doing gender”, queer and trans of color critique, critical trans studies, and theories of necropolitics and abjection.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Doing Cisgender

Gender is a relational project, occurring through discursive and material interactions between individuals. Sociologists and feminist theorists have long argued that gender is an action and not an inherent quality of an individual (Butler 1990; 2004). Social forces and cultural schemas shape an individual’s gender presentation(s) and organize gender around culturally legible ideas of manhood and womanhood. In doing gender, individuals hold themselves and

others accountable to “proper” ways of being and interacting (West and Zimmerman 1987). These particular modes of gender to which individuals are held accountable are not arbitrarily determined. Rather, ideas of “proper” manhood and “proper” womanhood form out of a white supremacist heteropatriarchy (Smith 2006). Notions of a gender binary evolve out of a patriarchal system “in which only two genders exist, one dominating the other” (5). Connell conceptualized hegemonic masculinities as contextualized practices that guarantee “the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (1995: 77). Further, Connell notes, current, Western notions of masculinity are a “fairly recent historical product” developing out of European colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, and (neo)liberalism¹ (68). Heterosexuality and homosexuality, co-invented and -invested with meaning through the scientific racist practices that sustained white supremacy and colonization in the US (Sommerville 2000), map themselves around the non-white body. This present, “natural” order of a two-gender system additionally relies upon men and women existing as different, complementary counterparts that are attracted to one another and reproduce the heteropatriarchal system through marriage and childrearing.

Colonization/genocide of Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of African peoples within the U.S. relied upon this binary, heteropatriarchal order to deem particular bodies (Indigenous and Black bodies) as primitive for their “lack” of a two-gender, heterosexist system of love, marriage, family, and gender expression (Driskill 2016; Gossett 2016; Lugones 2007; Mogul et al. 2011). The imposed “primitivity” of Black and Indigenous bodies, then, became the logic and justification for their forced assimilation, genocide, removal, and enslavement. White constructed notions of normalcy and deviancy continue into the present with Black bodies

¹ I place neoliberalism *and* liberalism here to problematize both in relation to gender. Neoliberalism is well discussed in academic literature regarding the ways it regulates bodies and functions ideologically. Classic liberalist theories, as well though, constitute citizenship vis-à-vis white manhood with hegemonic masculinities serving as the signifier of proper manhood (*see* Glenn 2002).

continually being stereotyped as deviant from normative genders and sexualities. Collins (2005) points out, “For racism, the point of deviance is created by a *normalized white heterosexuality* that depends on a *deviant Black heterosexuality* to give it meaning.” She states that this normalized white heterosexuality relies upon a “*deviant white homosexuality*” to maintain the system of heterosexism (97). Heterosexism and racism, though, as she points out rely upon one another and provide one another with meaning. Heterosexism relies upon not just a deviant white homosexuality but all sexualities deemed deviant. This is evident in the Moynihan Report’s (1965) pathologizing of the Black family and its placement of blame upon the “deviant” Black family for high rates of poverty in Black communities. Heteropatriarchy relies upon the pathologizing and deemed deviance of non-white bodies to give it meaning, and the pathologizing of white bodies that fail to prove white, heteropatriarchy’s “superiority” to and difference from bodies of color. Non-white bodies remain positioned outside the sexual and gender normative. White supremacist heteropatriarchy constructs Black women as not feminine enough, hypersexual, asexual, and other such contradictory categorizations (Collins 2000). White supremacist heteropatriarchy also regards Black men as so overly masculine and hypersexual that they pose a risk to white women (Collins 2005). These racialized, gendered, and sexualized schemas conceptualize the Black penis as a sexual threat to white women. Accountable conduct in “doing gender” is shaped by white schemas of gender normativity and legibility.

To do gender properly, then, is to do gender according to the strictures of white, heterosexual manhood and womanhood. Heterosexism and cissexism are analytically distinct categories, yet they remain mutually imbricated in actual practice (Jackson 2005: 18). As Schilt and Westbrook (2009) note, heterosexuality serves as the lynchpin of the gender binary, “yet the relationship between heterosexuality and gender oppression remains under-theorized in social

science research” (441). In addition to the role of heteronormativity in gender oppression, homonormativity² and the normalization of white gay/lesbian individuals/communities have relied upon attachments to normative ideologies of gender and a political and social distancing from trans-ness and gender nonconformity (Vitulli 2010). Cis lesbians, radical feminists or not, have long conceptualized trans women’s (potential)³ penises as physical threats to their identity and community. Janice Raymond, a transphobic Women’s Studies scholar and author, wrote “Because transsexuals have lost their physical ‘members, does not mean that they lost their ability to penetrate women—women’s mind, women’s space, women’s sexuality” (1979; Nataf 1996). The threat of patriarchy is coded onto the penis, but even when it is absent, a trans woman’s body and identity remain threats as a form of discursive rape and penetration.

At the 2018 London Pride Festival, a group of white (and/or white-passing), cis lesbians protested trans women’s inclusion in lesbian/women’s spaces and events. *Pink News* journalist asked one protestor, “Would you like trans people banned from women only spaces?” The protestor responded, “Definitely, we want women-only spaces for women only and a trans person cannot be a woman” (Voss 2018). A leaflet distributed by the group read:

With the recent development of trans politics an increasing number of lesbians are reporting pressure from their ‘LGBTQ’ community to change their sexual orientation...**Bullying, harassing, threatening or forcing lesbians into accepting penises into their sex lives is pure COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY AND RAPE CULTURE.** The situation is alarming: lesbians are back to a situation where we

² Homonormativity refers to the upholding and sustaining of heteronormativity LGBTQ individuals and/or organizations “while promising a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003: 179).

³ I use “potential” here and elsewhere to highlight that the presence of a penis is assumed, not a known fact.

have to spend our energy defending our own sexual boundaries from men... (Voss 2018.; emphases are original).

The declaration that trans women's call for acceptance of their bodies as female bodies, whether or not they have a penis, is received as rape culture propaganda. Accepting trans women is viewed as accepting the end of lesbianism and promoting the rape of cisgender women. In this way, homonormativity mirrors heteronormativity's attachment to binary gender ideologies fostered through white constructions of manhood and womanhood. Further, accountable conduct becomes haunted by specters of Black and Brown penises.

My interest in pulling together these theoretical frames into one conceptualization of "doing cisgender" is to analyze how the maintenance of a gender system relies upon the victimization and murder of Black and Brown trans women. Discursive and physical violence function to constitute cis-ness as gender. Gender is never "done" alone (Butler 2004). Rather, to be gendered is to be interpreted as a particular gender by others (West and Zimmerman 1987). Individuals attribute gendered meaning to acts, behaviors, body parts, and inanimate objects. We also gender ourselves. To say, "I am a woman," is to say I am not another gender. My gender is made legible through relationality and negation of the Other (Butler 2004). Cis-ness, too, is constituted through relationality. Cis-ness comes into being through separation from and devaluation of trans-ness, and, as Butler (2004) argues, the self is constituted by vulnerability, violence, and relationality. For cis-het men, violence often functions symbolically to assert one's masculinity and empower an individual above others (Connell 1993). For cis lesbian women, discursive regulation of womanhood also functions as a symbolic maneuver to empower one above another. To be with trans women, though, (be it sexually, romantically, platonically,

and/or in solidarity) is to allow oneself to be touched by trans-ness—to be “undone,” in Butler’s words, by the Other. Trans-ness destabilizes gender and sexual binaries, but violence against trans women can function to re-stabilize these binaries. Violence against trans women because they are trans women is a process of negation—it is an assertion that trans women “are not really” women—and self-constitution relies upon negation.

White supremacy, cissexism, and heterosexism, distinct in the ways they enact power, rely upon one another. In addition, they rely upon the death of trans women of color in order to maintain the white, cis-heteropatriarchal order. The violence used to absent trans women of color from the social world does not solely include physical violence. The consequences of doing gender outside of accountable conduct relies as much upon physical violence as it does upon discursive aggression, or the ways in which “communicative acts are used in a social interaction to hold people accountable to social and cultural-based expectations” (schuster 2017). To refuse to accept trans women as women is to claim the power to define womanhood. “Holding someone accountable to expectations is claiming power” (*Ibid.* 486) to decide what is accountable conduct. There is no physical violence enacted by merely stating that trans women rape and penetrate women’s spaces, bodies, and minds. However, to do so, as Raymond (1979) does in the introduction above is to discursively define who counts as a woman. Discursive aggression lies tangentially next to the physical aggression used by cis-het men to hold trans women accountable for “deceiving” them or “aggressing” against them by merely existing. The two forms of violence are different, yet the justifications and arguments used by both rely upon white, cis-heteropatriarchal notions of which bodies are allowed entrance into socio-political existence and which must be prevented from entrance and/or removed vis-à-vis individual doings of gender.

2.2 Critical Trans Studies

While my dissertation is produced within the field of Sociology, the theories, research, and lens I utilize are much more interdisciplinary, relying largely upon a critical trans studies. As Sandoval (2000) argues, the discrete delineation of knowledge production through academic disciplines bound off from one another disallows for the analysis of postmodern deployments and constitutions of oppression. I thus draw on queer of color critique, trans studies/trans of color critique, critical race theories, and theories of intersectionality.

In the introduction to the *Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker notes the role of transgender studies in understanding the social forces that “allow gender normativity to disappear into the unanalyzed, ambient background” and gender non-normativity to appear hypervisible, distinct, different, and potentially dangerous (2006: 3). While transgender studies has the capacity to do so, many trans of color theorists have simultaneously noted the whiteness perpetuated within white trans studies analyses, as well as the colonizing force of whiteness within readings of trans-ness “cross-culturally” (Towle and Morgan 2002; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Aizura 2014; Edelman 2014; Shakhsari 2014). The whiteness that haunts and invades white trans studies disallows for analyses of the ways “not all queer [and/or trans] bodies ‘matter’ the same way” (Shakhsari 2014: 104). I aim to understand the ways in which trans women of color’s bodies seemingly do not matter in terms of the lives lost, yet paradoxically do matter in terms of the ways in which “trans death opens up political and social life” for cisgender and white transgender individuals (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013: 66). I will flesh this out more thoroughly in the following section; however, I raise this point, here, as I frame my work within a critical trans politic that attends to the “contingent and contradictory mobilizations of race, class, disability, sexuality and other ideologies of morality and stock” (Haritaworn 2012: 12).

Dean Spade, critical trans legal theorist and activist, in *Normal Life* fleshes out a critical trans politic that focuses in on “the distribution of life chances” (2011: 32). In particular, Spade argues against a (neo)liberal notion of equality adherent to homonormative and transnormative⁴ politics. The critical trans politic that Spade fleshes out is informed by the work of Critical Race theorists and Critical Race feminists. I frame my analysis with these theories in order to attend to the systemic roots of social problems. My project focuses on the socio-cultural narratives of desirability that cis-het men and cis lesbian women construct vis-à-vis the gendering and sex-ing of bodies that normalize the disposability of trans women of color. While one could argue that all trans women are rendered disposable in this process, the murders of trans women, transfeminine people, and/or people assumed to be trans women disproportionately affect Black and Brown trans women/transfeminine people.

Choo and Ferree (2010) note, “While the theory [of intersectionality] calls for critical consideration of the normative cases as well as the excluded or marginalized, a methodological emphasis on inclusion sometimes fetishizes study of ‘difference’ without necessarily giving sufficient attention to its relation to unmarked categories” (133). My aim, thus, is to understand how cis-het men and cis lesbian women come to “mark” trans women of color and white trans women within their narratives of desirability in order to understand what role the disposability of Black trans women and trans women of color serves a white supremacist, cissexist society.

Pateman (1988) notes the existence of a sexual contract that gives credence and power to hegemonic masculinities, “establishing orderly access by men to women’s bodies” (2) both through legal means and through social custom. Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* fleshes out an argument that collapses sexism within an analogy to slavery/servant-hood and states that trans

⁴ Transnormativity refers to a “regulatory normative ideology that structures interactions in every arena of social life” (Johnson 2016: 466; Miller 2018).

women can only ever be mere “simulacra of women” (223) while continuing to always inherit and perpetuate “the law of male sex-right” (2). Pateman, in large, perpetuates the discursive conditions that give rise to white supremacist, cissexist violence and vulnerability. However, I find useful her argument that gender/sex binaries are core to individuals’ political existence within U.S. society. Within this argument, Pateman highlights the role of the gender binary in giving rise to gender/sex-based violence. I work to combine this part of her argument with Mills’ *The Racial Contract* to frame my analysis within an understanding of the ways in which race-gender/sex are central to social organization with punishments for those who “break” the non-consensual racial-gender social contract. Mills, corresponding with critical race theorists, argues that racism/white supremacy is not a mere aberration but is rather a fundamental, ordinary component of U.S. society (1997). As a corrective to traditional social contract theories, Mills argues that the racial contract brings into being a social, political, and economic state of psychic and material enrichment for whites through the psychic and material suffering of people of color. The racial contract involves the creation of a racial state, a racial society, the racialization of space, and the racialization of the body. In the process, all bodies become “enshrined” with whiteness at the same time as non-white bodies are rendered “sub-persons” (56). The body of color is denied personhood through its “lack” of whiteness, and the white body’s personhood is constituted by the denial of personhood to the body of color. While Mills does not entirely delineate as much, the racial contract is simultaneously a sexual contract. Krell notes, “Gender and sexuality operate as regulatory mechanisms for all people of color” (2017: 236). While Pateman delineated a social contract in which all women are denied full personhood, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002) and bell hooks (1981) highlight the role white women have historically played in perpetuating white supremacy vis-à-vis interracial relationships and antimiscegenation

laws. Whiteness is constituted through the denial of personhood to non-white people and the sexual regulation and exploitation of people of color. Additionally, Krell notes, “Whiteness is constitutive of binary gender...even when that binary includes transgender identifications” (2017: 234). Collectively, the works of the aforementioned scholars denote the existence of a racial-gender-sexual contract through which bodies are ascribed value differentially according to the perceived value of their race-gender-sexuality.

2.3 Centering Cis-ness

Few studies on trans people exist that are not framed within a pathological, medical, and/or public health approach. Further, very few researchers focus on cisgender subjects and how they understand their cis-ness. In this project, I do not view the data of the participants’ responses as representative of a particular cisgender subject or of a particular sample of cisgender subjects. Rather, my aim is to discursively analyze the constitution of “cis-ness.” Writing in response to Sandy Stone’s “Posttranssexual Manifesto,” Halberstam notes, “The *post* in posttranssexual demands...that we examine the strangeness of all gendered bodies” (1994: 226). The Sociology of Trans Studies has largely focused on the experiences of trans people and/or the experiences of cis people vis-à-vis trans people. But research rarely asks, “What constitutes *cis-ness*?” Influenced by Ingraham’s *Thinking Straight* (2003), I argue that cis-ness is about much more than the bodies it clings to or the bodies who cling to it. Rather, cis-ness is an ideological, political, and social manifestation that disburses beyond the individual body.

Cis-ness proliferates within bills filed in various states across the U.S., such as Utah’s Vital Statistics Act Amendment (HB 153), that would define male and female as biological realities that are “innate and immutable...[and] established at conception and...confirmed before or at birth” (“Utah Vital Statistics” 2019). Executive legislation, as well, further perpetuates cis-ness

through the Trump administration's defining of gender as biological, binary, objective, and pre-determined (Goodnough, Green, and Sanger-Katz 2019). Both forms of legislation function to make concrete a more abstract ideology. Cis-ness functions as a binary ideology that claims there exist "two—and only two—separate and distinct" genders and sexes (Wade and Ferree 2015: 10). A social order is constructed that results in consequences, pushbacks, and policing for those that challenge or refute cis-ness. Labeling cisgender feminists who perpetuate transphobic ideas as trans exclusionary (radical) feminists, for example, becomes viewed as a slur rather than a mere descriptor (*see* Morris 2016).

Cis-ness imbues social thought, interaction, and existence, framing trans women using the women's restroom as predatory men seeking entrance to women's spaces in order to sexually assault women. "Gender reveals" grow in number to celebrate the assigned sex of a fetus, despite the harm such assignments cause trans, nonbinary, and/or intersex individuals. Cis-ness goes beyond the assignation and/or self-determination of identity; it affects who gets jobs and who does not; who is protected by the government and who is not, and who is criminal and who is the victim.

Cis-ness operates in tandem with whiteness, producing a *mis*understanding of reality as inherently sexed and naturally and binarily gendered. This misunderstanding of reality relies upon the ability of cis-ness to remain closed off from other (a)gendered realities. Just as whiteness extends beyond white bodies and includes the perpetuations of whiteness and white ideologies by bodies of color, so too does cis-ness extend beyond cis bodies. Cis bodies, trans bodies, and all bodies otherwise can perpetuate cis-ness; however, only particular bodies benefit from cis-ness. Binary transgender individuals, for example, have reacted to nonbinary identities by stating, "'Pick a side' or 'Nonbinary is an insult to my experience'" (Bergner 2019). These

statements that one must be a man or a woman or that a nonbinary person's refusal and/or inability to exist as a man or a woman is an affront on others are rooted in cissexism. Core to cissexism is an ideology of gender essentialism: that biologically, psychologically, and emotionally, one is inherently a man or a woman. Witnessed within the aforementioned statements is a less biological form of gender essentialism espoused by trans individuals. However, trans individuals remain harmed by such essentialism. Cis-ness, thus, is an ideology, a politic, and a lens rather than the particular attributes of any cisgender population or individual.

Westbrook and Schilt note, "Shifting the object of analysis from the margins (women, homosexual) to the center (men, heterosexual) allowed for the theorization of heteronormativity" (2009: 440). By placing cisgender heterosexuality at the center of their work, Westbrook and Schilt were able to analyze the reasons that cis people, and in particular cis-het men, react so violently to trans/nonbinary bodies and trans/nonbinary inclusive policies. By placing cis-het men and cis lesbian women at the center of my analysis, I aim to better understand what cis-ness is, how it is produced vis-à-vis sexuality, and the fragility of cis-ness vis-à-vis trans women. In doing so, I build off the work of Schilt and Westbrook (2009) in order to better understand how to dismantle cissexism, for "any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses" (Frankenberg 1993: 1).

2.4 Whiteness and the White Racial Frame

In working to understand what constitutes cis-ness, it is critical to simultaneously understand the linkage of whiteness and cis-ness. Whiteness and cis-ness, as noted earlier, share early connections within the colonial logic of the West (Lugones 2006). Inherent within white supremacist and colonialist logic are binary oppositions and fixed categorizations/demarcations of bodies (Fanon 1961; hooks 1981; Collins 1990; Lugones 2006; Ferber 2010). The gender

binary evolves out of its origins within U.S./European white supremacy, for, as much as the Black/white binary is central to such logic, so too is the female/male binary. Indeed, Ferber argues, “White identity is most certainly a gendered identity,” (2010: 51) in analyzing white supremacist publications and the ways in which gender/racial difference become biologized and essentialized. Gender essentialism not only posits that men and women are biologically and fundamentally different but that varying races express fundamentally different manhoods and womanhoods (Frankenberg 2010).

Whiteness coalesces around and stems from the white body, but people of color, too, can perpetuate, reinforce, and/or internalize whiteness. Whiteness, similar to cis-ness, is an ideological, political, and social force that shapes how bodies navigate the social world, and, in turn, is shaped by the same bodies. While all people can perpetuate and/or internalize whiteness, it only benefits white people. Central to whiteness is the “white racial frame” (Feagin 2006; 2010). The white racial frame is an overarching worldview that includes stereotypes, narratives and interpretations of the racial order that function to downplay the role of whiteness/white supremacy, “controlling images” (Collins 1990), and racialized emotions (*e.g.* shock, bewilderment, or dismay at a colleague of color who voices experiences of microaggressions or overt racism in the workplace) (Feagin 2006; 2010). The white racial frame functions to rationalize white supremacy. Its origins stem from the enslavement of African peoples and the colonization of Indigenous peoples, but the white racial frame is “not limited to whites” (Wingfield and Feagin 2012: 144). People of color, too, can “consciously or unwittingly formulate their views on racial matters from the perspective of the white racial frame” (Feagin and Cobas 2008: 40). This occurs when Black people, Indigenous people, and/or other people of color (BIPOC) accept, enact, or internalize the white racial frame.

Research on Black-white interracial partnerships, for example, has detailed that Black individuals with white partners may downplay the role of race and racism within their relationship, as well as within society writ large (Chito Childs 2005a; 2005b). In Chito Childs' work in this area, they quote a Black woman participant noting, "Every Valentine's Day, there's a debate between the [Black] students, where the Black guys say they want a white wife, because they like light skin, good hair, and want light children with good hair" (2005a: 86). The Black men the participant is describing in this example buy into white views of beauty that frame European traits as superior and African, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or Asian traits as inferior. White womanhood is characterized as the epitome of femininity and Black womanhood as a less desirable form of femininity (Collins 2006). Black men remain harmed by such views, as Blackness remains characterized as less desirable, but that does not preclude Black men from buying into and/or enacting the views at the same time. Feagin and Cobas, additionally, have analyzed how Latinx people may perpetuate the white racial frame. They found many of their lighter skinned participants "internally buying into and/or acting on a white racial frame...[with] white Cubans [stereotyping] darker-skinned immigrants as lazy," as one particular example (2008: 43-50). White Cubans, in such instances, internalize Euro-American understandings of race, perpetuating the idea that Blackness and Brownness are associated with inferior qualities. E. J. R. David (2013), too, has described in detail the ways in which Filipinx people internalize Spanish and U.S. ideals of beauty so deeply as to purchase skin lightening creams and other products that will allow them to look "less Filipinx."

Writing about lying in bed with a former partner, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz analyzes a distinct memory in which he contemplated the nuances of being a white-passing person of color. In this particular moment, his partner turns to him and says, "Why do you think I like you so much?" I

am afraid to ask ... ‘Because ... you are very light-skinned, yet you are a person of color. I get my way both ways’” (2004: 184). Whiteness and the white racial frame do not benefit people of color. However, whiteness and the white racial frame are socialized deeply into all individuals within a white supremacist society, and people of color are not necessarily able to avoid internalizing them.

In my project, I center cis people in order to understand how cis people relate to their cis-ness. While my project aims to examine cis-ness as intersectionally imbricated with whiteness, my sample is predominantly Black. One of my aims in my analysis was to understand how cis-ness necessitates the deaths of Black and Brown trans women. These murders, though, do not have solely white perpetrators. For Black men and men of color in segregated, city centers, hypermasculinity is reinforced by their peers, their educators, and the criminal legal system (Rios 2011). Hypermasculinity is volatile (Connell 1993), and others, such as Black and Brown trans women, experience its ramifications. Further, the segregation of BIPOC and whites within education has resulted in BIPOC receiving an education of lower quality than white (often middle-class) students along with an educational system that pushes out kids of color and/or funnels them into the prison industrial complex before they are able to finish their education (Morris 2016). Differences in education and socioeconomic status result in different understandings of gender, including trans-ness. Thus, Black people, Indigenous people, Latinx people, Asian/Asian American people, and whites come to internalize cissexism differently, and the ways in which they perpetrate will be different depending on the gendered socialization they have received. Thus, I analyze the racialized and gendered patterns in constitutions of cis-ness rather than solely analyzing how whites internalize and externalize cis-ness.

2.5 The Necropolitics of Cis-ness

Utilizing the work of Mbembe (2003), Aizura (2014), Butler (2004), Haritaworn (2012), Ahmed (2000), Goffman (1963), and Foucault (1997), I pull together theories of biopolitics, necropolitics, homo-/heteronormativity, and abjection to center the ways in which life and death metaphorically “stick” to the Black/Brown trans woman. I argue that the Black/Brown transfeminine⁵ body is disposed of through a necropolitical framework that requires death and disposability in order to make livable queer and heterosexual subjects alike. The erasure and death of the Black/Brown transfeminine subject allows the cisgender subject to remain enclosed and impermeable to sexual/gender disintegration.

Foucault (1997) articulated the historical emergence of biopower as a new form of governmentality vis-à-vis the state and the self. Biopower refers, in part, to the power to control life, to manage populations, to discipline bodies and make docile bodies. Biopower is a form of “power...carried forward by technologies and discourses of security that take the life of populations as their object and play a central role in the emergence of modern racism and eugenics” (Lemm and Vatter 2017: 44), in addition to other forms of population management, control, and surveillance. Mbembe (2003) argues, however, that Foucault’s conceptualization of biopower is insufficient “to account for contemporary ways in which the political...makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective” (12). Scholars have largely used the concept of sovereignty to discuss the exercise of autonomous state power; however, Mbembe and Foucault highlight that sovereignty and power conceptually extend beyond the state. Power is organized diffusely through and by individuals, social groups, and institutions, in addition to the state writ large. Indeed, Lemm and Vatter (2017) argue that Foucault’s articulation of

⁵ Transfeminine refers to individuals who were assigned male at birth and identify as a gender other than or in addition to man. They may or may not be a trans woman, and they may or may not be perceived as trans women even if they are not.

biopower operates “through norms rather than laws,” through neoliberal processes of self and other regulation. Thus, biopower and necropower extend themselves as theoretical frameworks between state control to the diffuse networks of power that operate through individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic means.

I utilize Mbembe’s (2003) articulation of necropower/necropolitics to theorize the ways in which cis-ness and cisgender sexualities require the disposing of the Other. Mbembe notes that power “continuously refers and appeals to exceptions, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy” (16). The reference to emergency and a fictionalized enemy is evidenced in the numerous attempts to pass bathroom legislation to keep trans people, largely trans women, from accessing the bathroom that corresponds with their gender. In 2018, the Alliance For Defending Freedom (ADF), a conservative, Christian group, asked the U.S. Supreme Court to hear a case they lost in an appellate challenge to “Boyertown Area High School’s policy that allows transgender students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms matching their gender identity” (Hall 2018). The AFD argues that gender-affirming policies for transgender kids amount to “a novel—and dangerous—experiment,” highlighting the risk of sexual assault of girls and women as potential problems that would arise (Kramer 2019). Groups like the AFD view trans women using women’s restrooms as the impetus for a gendered and sexualized emergency. Such groups conceptualize trans women as deceptive for “pretending” to be women with penises between their legs. In response, cis-het men who feel “duped” by the trans women with whom they have (or attempt to) have sex, have reacted with physical violence, sometimes resulting in death for the trans woman of color. These men feel that “their masculinity is challenged as they feel ‘raped’ and feminized” by having sex with a trans woman (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Black and Indigenous trans women experience the vast majority of these murders (Human Rights

Campaign 2018). The result of each of these states of emergency is a vast and disproportionate murder rate for Black and Brown transgender women/transfeminine individuals. While Westbrook and Schilt (2013) note that transphobic feminists and cis-het men “give penises the power to destroy the sanctity of women’s spaces through their (presumed natural) propensity to rape,” (48) not all trans women become equally harmed by heightened fear of penises. Anti-Blackness and white supremacist ideologies of dangerous penises shape Black and Brown penises as especially dangerous and lethal.

In the words of Goffman (1963), Black trans women and trans women of color become stigmatized through “abominations of the body” and “blemishes of individual character.” The penis itself is conceptualized as a “physical deformity” upon trans women, and their trans-ness is perceived as denoting “unnatural passions, weak will...and dishonesty” (4). Elliot and Lyons highlight, “The function of a phobic object is to specify and contain a generalized threat” (2017, 364). The phobic object, in this case, becomes women of color’s bodies with or without a penis. In an edited selection of quotes and discussions of trans-ness by cis lesbians, a cis woman states, “S. told me what the operation involved. And I guess if she hadn’t told me that—that it is the penis and it’s been inverted—then maybe I wouldn’t have reacted the way I did. But my reaction was, ‘Oh my God, that is a cock.’ And I just didn’t want to be anywhere near it” (Nataf 1996: 37). Even post-gender affirmation surgery, trans women remain “tainted” by the presence/inversion of a once-penis. Irrational fears of emasculation, rape by trans women, gender/sexual confusion fold in around the object of the penis. However, the presence of the penis, as with any phobic object, “then evokes the anxiety thereby contained” within it (365). In situations where cisgender individuals are confronted with disruptions to gender/sex essentialist ideologies, they may work to “frantically reassert” the binary (Westbrook and Schilt 2013: 34).

Westbrook and Schilt term this reaction a “gender panic,” but through analysis of policy controversies regarding trans bodies, they note that “‘gender panics’ might more accurately be termed ‘penis panics,’” due to the perceived danger imposed upon the individual with a (potential) penis (48).

The reasons for these irrational gender panics can be understood if we consider the ways in which sexuality, gender, and sex are constituted relationally in processes in which we are “done” and “undone” by others (Butler 2004). Mbembe references the work of Bataille, pointing out that, for Bataille, “Sexuality is inextricably linked to violence and to the dissolution of the boundaries of the body” (2003: 15, Bataille 1985). The doing of gender is a relational process. To do gender means being held accountable by others, requiring an other to exist who may or may not reprimand your particular gender performance (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender, sexuality, and sex binaries are constructed through these relations, and they simultaneously require the abjection of those bodies that reveal the fiction of binary logic. Butler (2004) notes, “Neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession;” (24) we do not own or have genders/sexualities as property or possessions. Rather, gender and sexuality are often “a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being *for* another or *by virtue* of another” (24). Butler argues that individuals become socio-politically constituted by others, and this constitution requires vulnerability: a vulnerability to being held accountable, to being reprimanded, to being undone by another, and to being harmed. Cis-het men and cis lesbian women, in coming into sexual/romantic contact with trans women, make themselves vulnerable to ruptures in gender/sex/sexuality binaries. Trans-ness blurs what exactly constitutes men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Whiteness, too, requires a process of comparison and abjection. Ford (1970) notes, “In order for the concept of a white race to exist, there must be a Black race which is everything the white race is not” (quoted from Haney López 2006: 21). Thus, interracial relationships and mixed-race individuals call into question the white racial order. Deviations to social systems call into question those systems, and while some differences can be “incorporated into...the individual body, the body-at-home” (Ahmed 2000: 117), some differences require a disinfection of the body.

For Ahmed, difference comes to constitute the non-deviant while actively being rejected from the body of the non-deviant. In this way, trans bodies come to serve “as the border that determines the necessity and impossibility of the difference” between trans bodies and cis bodies. The very creation of the word cisgender occurred out of a need to better linguistically differentiate non-trans bodies from trans bodies after transgender itself was already established as a word. Trans-ness surrounds cis-ness, remaining inside it while simultaneously being pushed out of it. Ahmed elaborates, “The stranger is produced as a figure that is distinct from the...body only through a process of expulsion” (57). The stranger, the deviant, the “transsexual” must be expelled from a cissexist system in order to produce cis-ness as an ontological reality. For Goffman (1963) and Ahmed (2000; 2004), stigma, disgust, and difference are sticky objects. To touch the stigmatized is to become stigmatized. Stigma, disgust, and difference are “intimate and involve the feeling of recoiling from something threatening and close” (Aizura 2014). In this elaboration of abjection and the constitution of cis-ness/trans-ness, it remains critical to focus on the ways in which some trans bodies can be incorporated into the body (be that the body politic or the individual body). A particular nation-state’s guarantee of “trans rights,” in contemporary times, often comes to serve as evidence of its progressive human rights platform (Snorton and

Haritaworn 2013; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014), while, simultaneously, that same country may continue to enforce Islamophobic, anti-Black, and/or colonialist logic (e.g., U.S., Israel, and most European nations). Additionally, Gill-Peterson notes that, in the dispersal of trans-ness globally and the movement of trans bodies from the U.S. to Europe/Asia to receive gender confirmation surgery, “transsexuality became exportable...by activity its whiteness to racialize its others as less than human, making itself innocent of race and transforming itself into a universal category” (2018: 615).

While Snorton and Haritaworn, Haritaworn et al., and Gill-Peterson are speaking largely of national and global processes of necropolitics, necropower can be witnessed interpersonally and socially, as well. Tilleman (2010) writes of the murder of Angie Zapata, a Latina, trans woman. Tilleman highlights that Angie’s murder was motivated by “discovery” of a penis. Angie’s murderer’s legal defense relied upon a trans panic defense, in which they asserted “that the defendant had his heterosexuality or masculinity so existentially challenged by the victim that the defendant acted without reason” (1669). Angie’s murderer experienced such deep ruptures to hetero-masculinity that he required the literal expulsion of Angie from his body and the social body in order to reconstitute a proper hetero-masculinity. Humphrey (1999), similarly, identifies “bisexuals and transgendered [*sic*] people” as threats to the very identity categories of lesbians and gays. Thus, it is not only cis-het men who require the expulsion of trans women of color’s bodies from intimate and social proximity, but also cis lesbians and cis gay men.

To return to Mbembe, “The politics of race is ultimately linked to the politics of death” (17). I seek to interrogate the ways in which “trans [of color] death opens up [cis] political and social life” (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013: 66). The murders of Black and Brown trans women deserve more attention than Sociology has paid them so far. Thus, I attend to the socio-cultural narratives

that “justify” their murders and constitute the need for their disposability. Making Black and Brown trans lives matter requires interrogating the socio-cultural conditions that currently render their lives unimportant.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

While a larger selection of research exists regarding cis men who have sex with trans women, this area of research overwhelmingly focuses on risk for HIV infection among men who have sex with transgender women (Bockting, Miner, and Rosser 2007; Operario, et al. 2008; Sanchez, et al. 2010; Bowers, et al. 2011; Reisner, et al. 2012; Nemoto, et al. 2014; Bianchi, et al. 2014). Indeed, in searching for literature in journal databases, it became impossible for me to type any combination of the words trans/transgender, cis men/men, and sex without the results consisting solely of public health research in this vein. However, these studies contribute an analysis of how trans-ness complicates sexual, gender, and sex binaries. The aforementioned studies note the inability to pinpoint which cis men are having sex with trans women, as there is a lack of racial and sexual congruity amongst this population. Present within these studies, as well, is a categorical separation of “women” and “trans women,” discursively reproducing cisnormative ideologies of trans women as deviations upon womanhood and/or collapsing men who have sex with trans women with men who have sex with men.

In the following sections, I outline related work within the Sociology of Trans Studies, as well as Trans Studies writ large. I then attend to sociological, psychological, and interdisciplinary work on desirability and the ways in which ideas of desire and attractiveness are shaped by gender-race-sexuality. Next, I analyze prior studies that have attended to anti-trans/-queer violence vis-à-vis domestic violence, colonization, sexual violence, gentrification, sex work, and masculinities. Finally, I turn to work out of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

and two Sociological works that conduct qualitative research through a necropolitical/necronational framework.

3.1 Sociology of Trans Studies

Trans Studies, in recent years, has begun to expand within the field of Sociology. The Sociology of Trans Studies, however, remains quite limited in terms of breadth of empirical research and the scope of existing research. Schilt and Lagos (2017) note in the *Annual Review of Sociology* that the Sociology of Trans Studies currently falls into three main categories:

Research that explores the diversity of transgender peoples' identities and social locations, research that interrogates transgender peoples' experiences within institutional and organizational contexts, and research that presents quantitative approaches to transgender peoples' identities and experiences. (426)

Save for work such as that by Pfeffer (2012; 2017) and Ward (2016), much of the Sociology of Trans Studies focuses on understanding the lives of trans people. However, little work within the Sociology of Trans Studies actually examines the ways in which cis-ness is constituted, constructed, and maintained through interpersonal and/or institutional means. Schilt and Lagos further note the existence of “an orientation to transgender people as sociologically interesting only for what they can reveal about the ‘common [or] the usual’ (Feinbloom 1976: 7)” (2017: 429). This is evident in the work of West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, who utilize Garfinkel’s case study of a transsexual woman, named Agnes, to “prove” the incapacity for individuals to move beyond accountability to binary notions of manhood and womanhood. It is also evident in the works of Prieur (1998) on *travesti* in a small town in Mexico, and it is evident in Rupp and Taylor’s (2003) analysis of drag queens and what they “expose” about the fiction and ruptures of the gender binary. While such work contributes to analyses of the destabilization

of gender/sexual binaries, they do not necessarily tell us much about what exactly constitutes cis-ness. Trans-ness remains marked as the Other which speaks to the fiction of the binary; however, the gender binary and cissexism are not the sole problem of trans/nonbinary people.

The aforementioned omissions notwithstanding, there is an emerging literature on the sexual relationships of and gender negotiations by trans people with trans participants. Much of this, however, focuses on trans men/transmasculine people (Pfeffer 2012; Edelman and Zimman 2014; Schilt and Windsor 2014; Tompkins 2014; Latham 2016; Pfeffer 2016; Ward 2016). Both Pfeffer and Ward highlight the tensions that cisgender, queer women navigate and negotiate as they enter into relationships with trans men and/or continue in relationships with partners in the process of socially and/or medically transitioning. Their participants negotiated being misrecognized as heterosexual. However, Pfeffer's participants also utilized such misrecognition to access institutions, such as that of marriage.

Building on Ward's work, my thesis research (zamantakis 2020) analyzed the gender-race negotiations of trans/nonbinary individuals in intimate relationships, in which I discuss the ways my participants engaged in gender labor through educating their partners, altering body, voice, and dress in order to appear more desirable, and pre-emptively outing themselves out of safety concerns when dating cis people. While Pfeffer and Ward both focus on the ways cisgender women negotiate partnerships with trans men, Schleifer (2006) and I (2020) focus on the ways trans/nonbinary individuals negotiate partnerships with cisgender and/or transgender people.

Other research within the field of the Sociology of Trans Studies also examines the ways in which trans/nonbinary people navigate and/or negotiate gender expressions, sexual identification, and/or sexual acts (Dozier 2005; Doorduyn and Van Berlo 2014; Latham 2016).

Dozier (2005) for example, through interviews with trans men and trans women, highlights that gender expression is contingent on sex appearance, or the presumption by others that one was assigned male at birth. For trans men within Dozier's sample, when trans men were perceived as cis men, they were better able to express a fluid gender expression. Trans men perceived as cis men could, thus, express femininity without experiencing consequences, such as misgendering or harassment. Dozier utilizes these interviews to argue that, in "doing gender," others are not only assessing how one does gender but interpreting what one's gender expression purportedly says about one's genitalia and secondary sex characteristics.

In addition to the ways in which assigned sex and accountable conduct are linked, others highlight the ways in which the body can get "'in the way' of sexual pleasure" (Doorduyn and Van Berlo 2014) and/or the ways in which the body may be "co-produced with, or indeed hinge on, sex partner reciprocation" (Latham 2016: 353). Their participants were able to "achieve" male-ness through the ways their partner interacted with their body during sex. Both works highlight the ways in which trans-ness can be produced; however, once again, the production of cis-ness remains outside the scope of their analyses.

Some work within the Sociology of Trans Studies, however, does begin to look at the ways trans people are held accountable to gender norms and the potential reasons that cis men inflict violence upon trans women. This area of research highlights the ways in which "individuals give meaning to interactions by defining the situation and resolving contradictions and inconsistencies" (shuster 2017: 484). Thus, trans/nonbinary people within everyday life experience discursive regulation by cis individuals. The presence of trans/nonbinary individuals contradicts gender norms; by discursively regulating others, cis people may find ways to resolve the contradiction. Similarly, attraction to trans women by cis men creates a disruption of cis-

heteronormativity. In analyzing “controversies” in policy making around trans/nonbinary individuals and media narratives surrounding the murders of trans women, Westbrook and Schilt (2013) and Schilt and Westbrook (2009) find that the deaths of trans women arise from men’s feelings of emasculation, “rape,” and gender/sex contradiction/disruption. The presence of feminine bodies with penises (either presently or in the past) creates a “gender panic” (Westbrook and Schilt 2013) resulting in cis people “frantically reasserting” the binary (34).

Additionally, there are varying consequences for peoples’ doing of gender dependent upon their sex assigned at birth and gender identity. In one of the few studies examining nonbinary individuals doing gender, Darwin (2017) finds high rates of nonbinary individuals being held accountable to the gender binary. Darwin also notes, “Heterosexual and homosexual partners may no longer wish to be with the [nonbinary] person once they come out as nonbinary” (13). Intimacy and doing gender beyond the binary become, often, incompatible. Frank’s (2017) study of intersex people and intimacy finds, “Relationship discourse presumes there are known genders” (128). Additionally, relationship discourse further presumes that supposedly known genders correlate with supposedly known sexes. This discursive expectation causes an increased fear of rejection for intersex people seeking to date and establish intimate relationships. Further, the *Sociology of Trans Studies*, and *Trans Studies writ large*, lacks a complex analysis of whiteness, as well as intersectional studies of the differential experiences of trans people of color, disabled trans people, and/or undocumented trans people.

3.2 Gender, Race, and/or Sexuality and Desirability

In the last section, I focused on existing research documenting trans people’s experiences, the experiences of partners of trans people, and differential processes of doing gender and gender accountability. The differential processes of doing gender and the differential consequences for

trans women continue into this section in which I turn to literature on the ways in which gender/race/sexuality give meaning to meanings of desire and shape intimate practices. While I focused largely on trans research in the last section, here I pull from sociological and psychological work on trans people, as well as on desirability and (queer) people of color.

Work examining desirability and trans-ness largely analyzes the perceptions of cisgender heterosexual men and women and their attractions to trans people. Missing within this research are queer people and their attractions to trans people, as well as trans people's attractions to trans-ness. Cultural discourses and practices regarding desirability shape not only the dominant group(s) but also the marginalized group(s). For example, the historic 1933 Clark and Clark Doll Study found that Black children were more likely to attribute positive characteristics (including beauty) to white dolls than Black dolls. Again, in 2010, CNN conducted a pilot study repeating Clark and Clark's methods but also including white children in their sample. They once again found that all children attributed positive attributes to whites (including pretty-ness) and negative attributes to Black dolls (including ugliness). Thus, it would not be surprising to find similar results in analyzing trans people's perceptions of trans people compared to cis people as the following studies found.

A poll by public polling and data group, YouGov, in 2017 asked people to answer questions regarding their feelings toward trans people. The poll found 21% of people in the U.S. believe that being transgender is a mental illness; 76% were not open to dating a trans man; 77% were not open to dating a trans woman; and 75% were not open to dating nonbinary people. While a smaller, albeit still large, number of people believe trans-ness to be a mental illness, overwhelming YouGov found people to be closed off to intimacy with trans people (Bame 2017). Research within Psychology and Public Health have found similar results with cis people,

particularly cis-het men, not finding trans people (particularly trans women) desirable and being closed off to intimacy with them.

Studies in Psychology examining cis individuals' perceptions of trans people have found cis-het men to have more negative attitudes towards trans people, to be less likely to want to form friendships with trans people, and to also find trans people, in particular trans women, less attractive than cis people compared with the attitudes and propensities of cis-het women (Antoszewski, Kasierska, Jędrejczak, and Kruk-Serumin 2007; Gerhardstein and Anderson 2010; Carroll, Güss, Hutchinson, and Gauler 2012; Broussard and Warner 2018; Mao, Hauptert, and Smith 2018). Each of the just cited studies utilized convenience samples of psychology students, largely in the Midwest. While these studies were not representative, they all found that the cis-het men participants in their samples had more transphobic attitudes than cis-het women. Antoszewski et al.'s study (2007), the only one to include nonbinary-related questions, found as well that cis-het men preferred nonbinary people as friends over trans men and women, and preferred cis friends over nonbinary people. Antoszewski et al. also found cis-het men participants to be most attracted to cis women, then nonbinary people, and then trans people. Additionally, when asked to rate the perceived femininity and masculinity of the various photos to which the participants were responding, Asian and white photos were rated as more feminine than Black and Latinx subjects. Gerhardstein and Anderson (2010) had participants rate various photos of trans men and women that were altered to appear either gender-congruent (passing as cisgender) or gender-incongruent (visibly trans); they found that photos of individuals who were gender-incongruent in expression and physique were rated less positively than the gender-congruent ones.

What becomes evident here is what Weinberg and Williams (2010) find through ethnographic research; tiers of desirability are constructed with certain trans people being deemed more attractive and more “acceptably” feminine. Weinberg and Williams found that “those trans women who could produce the most successful femininity occupied the highest tier,” (377) and when participants were asked what gender they would choose as their first sexual preference, “no one chose trans women” (378). Similar results were found by Reback, Larkins, and Clarke (2018). Trans women’s perceived desirability, however, affects not only their chances at finding friendships and/or romantic/sexual partners. Broussard and Warner (2018) assess what they conceptualize as “distinctiveness threat,” or the perceived blurring of sex boundaries that threaten the assumed differences between people assigned male at birth (AMAB) and people assigned female at birth (AFAB). In asking participants to compare gender-nonconformity of hypothetical trans and cisgender people, Broussard and Warner found trans women to “elicit more distinctiveness threat than cisgender targets” (17).

Trans women’s existence not only elicits a lack of sexual desire but a perceived threat to the gender/sex binary. Thus, Bauer and Hammond, in interviewing trans women about their sexual health, found, “In sexual situations, 31% of trans women worried moderately or very much about their physical safety; another 39% worried slightly or somewhat” (2015: 7). Seventy percent of the trans women in their study worried, at least a small amount, that physical harm may come to them for seeking out sex. Cis-het men who seek out sex with trans women have been found to seek trans women because trans women were perceived of as “free of intimacy, attachment, and obligation...disposable” (Reback et al. 2018: 3). Trans women become conceptualized, ultimately, as dumping grounds for cis men’s sperm that they can discard after ejaculation. Indeed, Bianchi et al. (2014) found transgender sex workers in Colombia to occupy

“the lowest status in the hierarchy of sex workers...[to generate] the least amount of revenue...[and to report] more physical and sexual violence” (1639). Trans women, once again, were perceived as the least desirable and the cheapest, most disposable option. Not all trans women equally occupied this lowest tier of desirability, though. Indeed, trans women of color, trans sex workers, and poor trans women experience further marginalization and stigma. In an ethnography of a bar where men seek out trans women, Mauk, Miguel, Perry, and Muñoz-Laboy found Black trans women to be referred to as “‘straight-up ghetto hookers’ or ‘black guys with dresses and fuckin’ wigs on’” (2013: 799). Many of the staff at this particular bar were even seeking work elsewhere in order to not be associated with trans women of color.

Cis-het men’s perceptions of trans women of color highlight the particular vulnerability they experience every day. It is not surprising, then, to examine the rates of anti-trans murders in the US and find each year’s lists populated by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women. White supremacy and cissexism make trans women of color overwhelmingly vulnerable to harm, which may be part of the answer as to why they experience high rates of violence. However, we cannot discount the findings of the aforementioned studies in regard to the ways in which trans-ness is perceived as undesirable, disposable, and threatening to the gender/sex status quo. A necropolitical framework allows for an analysis of how the deaths of trans women of color become necessary to maintain white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchy.

Indeed, in turning to other work within the Sociology of Sexualities, the racialization of desirability affects the ways in which all people of color are perceived. Queer people of color in LGBT spaces, both physical and digital, navigate racism, Islamophobia, and classism (Ahlm 2017; Held 2017). Ahlm (2017) even goes so far as to argue, “The racial hierarchy on Grindr is not a separate phenomenon from...the construct of queer liberal subjects. Rather it is central”

(373). Queer liberal subjects presume the ability to carve out particular preferences for sexual partners, assuming that racism/classism/femmephobia/transphobia remain separate from their preferences. Their “individual choices” become conceptualized as sexual freedom, with sexual freedom often meaning the ability to choose whom to sleep with and whom is allowed into particular spaces. In Held’s (2017) ethnography of Manchester’s gay village, they found South Asian women to experience “exclusionary door policies,” as well as their sexuality questioned due to assumptions that they were not queer. In Europe, Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) too finds people of color to be assumed heterosexual and separate from queer spaces. The spatialization and racialization of queerness affects not only who is allowed in but how bodies are perceived when “permitted” entrance. One individual in Held’s study stated that “sexual intimacy with a Black woman caused disgust in her” (2017: 349). Reacting to bodies of color with disgust signals not only an aversion to bodies of color but a dehumanizing of them. Racialized cis-heterosexism produces, ultimately, two possibilities for queer and trans people of color (QTPOC): rejection or fetishization (*Ibid.*). The racial-gender-sex vulnerabilities of trans women of color function hand in hand with the racialization, gendering, and classing of desirability. Disposable bodies are not only tossed aside, but because of their disposability, are vulnerable to heightened rates of violence, which I turn to in the next section.

3.3 Gendered-Raced Violence and Vulnerabilities

White supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchy creates intersecting vulnerabilities for trans women of color. These intersecting vulnerabilities leave trans women of color in a precarious position as regards violence. However, there is a lack of intersectional studies on anti-LGBT violence (Meyer 2012). Meyer preliminarily conducted one, including six Black trans women; however, trans people and cis LGB people were separated out in the analysis, disregarding the

potential that the trans people include in the survey may also have been LGB. Additionally, Meyer did not include an analysis of racialized cissexism, precluding the capacity for cissexism and white supremacy to work in tandem. Nonetheless, Meyer did find that “lesbian and transgender women often perceived physical violence as indicating the possible onset of a sexual assault,” in comparison to cis gay men who did not share the same perception. Indeed, for cis lesbians and trans women, Meyer found a shared perception that name calling would lead to physical and/or sexual violence; whereas, cis gay men perceived the name calling itself as the violence. The perception of cis lesbians and trans women that violence leads to further violence highlights their positions of vulnerability. What is needed, though, is also an analysis of the ways in which trans women may experience violence from cis lesbians.

Much research focusing on trans women’s experiences of violence, though, are analyzed vis-à-vis particular forms of violence and/or situations of hyper-vulnerability, leaving everyday forms of violence unexamined. For example, Wilson et al. (2017) conducted qualitative interviews with trans women in men’s prisons in Australia, including two Aboriginal women out of the seven participants. The participants experienced heightened gendered violence and sexual/physical assault in the prisons. Wilson et al. noted, “Prisoners’ bodies with more overt and traditional feminine gender expressions are likely to be interpreted by some to afford the body with [an expected] sexualized functionality” (395). While such expressions of femininity made trans women more desirable to cis-het men mentioned in the prior section, such expressions rendered them further vulnerable when incarcerated.

Trans women of color sex workers, too, experience heightened rates of physical and sexual assault (Ristock, Zoccole, Passante, and Potskin 2017). Indigenous Two-Spirit and/or trans women participants in Ristock et al.’s ethnographic research in Canada experienced exacerbated

precarity and isolation due to gentrification and white supremacy, resulting in increased vulnerability to sexual/physical assault. The conflation of trans womanhood with sex work has led to “relentless harassment” for trans women regardless of their form of employment (Rev and Geist 2017). Rev and Geist point out the historical visualization and depiction of transfeminine people in sex work has perpetuated a discourse of trans women as hypersexual. This “controlling image” (Collins 1990), along with “multiple layers of violence intersect to affect the lives” of many trans women/Two-Spirit AMABs (Ristock et al. 2017). Even when sheltered from strangers within their own homes, trans people, and particularly trans women, have reported the “highest rates of victimization with regards to all forms of dating violence” (Dank, Lachman, Zweig, and Yahner 2014: 855). Further, Rogers (2017) highlights that many practitioners in the domestic violence and abuse sector have little to no understanding of trans experiences of domestic violence, resulting in an invisibility of trans people’s needs and experiences. A lack of social support and the structural and discursive intersections of white supremacy, cis(sexism), and classism combined with the aforementioned characterization of trans women as disposable leaves many trans women of color in a situation of constant duress.

3.4 (Trans) Necropolitics and Trans Critique of Color

The experiences of violence, including high rates of physical/sexual assault and murder, for trans women of color are not arbitrary accidents. Rather, I argue the violence that trans women of color experience is a result of a necropolitical order of sex/gender/race. In this section, I discuss Sociological, Women’s Studies, and Trans of Color Studies that utilize necropolitics as a theoretical framework in order to better situate my work.

Contemporarily, Haritaworn (2012) analyzes how the “formation of gayborhoods often goes along with the displacement of queer and trans people of color” in late 2000s Berlin (18).

The protection of white queers, within Haritaworn's research, often goes hand-in-hand with anti-Muslim/anti-Black prejudice and racism. In order to "protect" white queers, Muslim and Black migrants and citizens become removed and/or kept from gayborhoods. Haritaworn highlights that, in the process, "the racialized become toxic remnants" to be disposed of (20). In another study of trans women and vulnerability vis-à-vis death, Gündüz quotes one participant stating, "For trans people, to die timely is almost a luxury," (2017: 25); the vulnerability and early life deaths ascribed to many trans women make a long life a privilege for many trans women of color and not a right.

In recent work on trans children and their parents, Ann Travers (2018) highlights the role of necropower in regard to trans children's experiences. In many ways, Travers elucidates how trans children are abandoned by the educational system and other institutions, as well as how they are precluded from protective efforts. For example, one student, Frank, "was regularly bullied" by students and teachers (59). In response, "The school seemed to be more concerned about protecting Frank's assailants than it was about protecting him" (60). Frank later attempted suicide, and Travers argues that Frank's story, and the stories of trans kids like him, evidence the ways society renders trans people disposable and unworthy of protection.

In the case of the murders of trans women of color, their deaths and disposability give life to cis-ness. The majority of the murders of trans women of color are perpetrated by cis-het men. In a case study of Australian men, Connell (1995) argues that violence expressed by cis men is "mainly symbolic" (107). Violence functions relationally for these men in order to signify something to others, as well as collectively, forming a sense of comradery between some men.

4 METHODS

Utilizing in-depth interviews and focus groups, I analyze the gendered and racialized patterns emerge in cis-het men's and cis lesbian's conceptualizations of desirable bodies; how discourses of desirability and penises feed into gendered racial and racialized gender violence(s); and how the desirability discourses of cis lesbians and cis-heterosexual men enact necropolitical boundaries around trans women's subjectivity (see Appendix B for interview guide).

Eligibility was limited to women who were assigned female at birth and experience solely or primarily attraction to other women, as well as men who were assigned male at birth and experience solely or primarily attraction to women. I limit the analysis to cis-het men and cis lesbian/bisexual women as a way of studying the constitution of desirability narratives centered on women and the results of ruptures in these narratives. I interviewed a total of 32 participants.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location of the participant's choosing. Sixteen interviews took place at coffee shops across Atlanta, with about one-third occurring in downtown Atlanta, one-third in nearby Decatur, and another third outside the perimeter of the city. Eight interviews occurred at a college or university, including at Georgia State University, in a private room or office. Two participants I interviewed in my car. The first, Iceberg, was unable to get transportation to the coffee shop at which we originally planned to do the interview. I debated whether or not to continue the interview due to safety risks on my part as a trans woman. However, I ultimately decided to drive to him and interview him from my car, as I felt it necessary to engage participants where they were and to not erect class barriers through transportation. Iceberg then offered to help me with another participant and asked me to pick him up and drive him to where another participant was. This second participant was interviewed in my car as well. Finally, six interviews were recruited through the Atlanta Pre-Arrest Diversion

Program and took place in their center. Interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes, with a range of 30 minutes (with one interview being cut short for safety reasons) and 100 minutes. Because of the time duration of the interviews, I compensated participants fifteen dollars each at the end of the interview. I received approval from Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board to conduct this study in May 2019. In January 2020, I received approval for an amendment allowing me to recruit additional participants through the Atlanta Pre-Arrest Diversion Program (PAD). PAD works with the Atlanta Police Department to "divert people subject to arrest" in parts of the city to their organization, which "provides case management, linkage to care, and participant advocacy" in order to challenge the racist, capitalist, and ableist foundations of the criminal legal system (Fulton County Government). After a dangerous experience in the field, I was connected to the director care navigation supervisor at PAD as an additional method to recruit that would further help mitigate the experiences that I later detail. Many of PAD's clients are homeless and/or unemployed; thus, the interview was mutually beneficial for the organization through which their clients were compensated a small amount of money while providing me with additional data.

In terms of participant demographics, the sample was predominantly of color with only 19% non-Latinx white (see Table 1). Twenty-two (69%) of participants were Black, including one individual who was Black and Portuguese, one who was Haitian, one who was Moor, and 19 African American. One participant (3%) was Middle Eastern/Iraqi American. Two (6%) were Latina, including one white Latina and one non-white Latina. One participant was Indian/Asian American (3%). Six (19%) were non-Latinx white. Just slightly over half (17 out of 32) participants were cisgender women, and the remainder cisgender men. I additionally self-coded participant gender expression in order to assess how varying intensities of masculinities,

femininities, and other expressions potentially related to their discussions of transgender women (see Appendix Table 2). Fourteen of the fifteen cisgender men participants were heterosexual, with one heteroflexible—this participant, however, had only ever had relationships with women. Seven of the 17 (41.2%) cisgender women participants were bisexual/queer with primary attractions to women, one (6%) was homoflexible (however she had only had relationships with women), and the other 9 (52.8%) were lesbian. Fourteen participants (44%) were between the ages of 18-24, 12 (37%) were 25-35, 5 (16%) were 36-46, and one (3%) was over 47. 16 some college Half (16) had either completed some college or were currently in the process of working on a Bachelor’s degree. Nine (29%) had a Bachelor’s degree, 2 (6%) had a Master’s degree, 3 (9%) had a high school diploma, and 2 (6%) had never completed high school. Table one additionally lists participants’ varied religious identities, and I explore this and participant religiosity later (see Appendix Table 3).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name ¹	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Income	Race & Ethnicity	Religion	Education
Adam	Man	Heterosexual	25-35	Low ²	Middle Eastern	Muslim	Some College
Alyshah	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	Black	SBNR ³	Some College
Alyx	Woman	Bi ⁴	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	white	N/A	Some College
Amanda	Woman	Bi	25-35	Below/Near Poverty	Black	Christian	Less Than High School
Amy	Woman	Lesbian	36-46	Low	white Latina	N/A	Some College
Chris	Man	Bi ⁵	36-46	Below/Near Poverty	Black	N/A	Less Than High School
Cookie	Woman	Homoflexible ⁶	25-35	Middle Class	Black	SBNR	Master’s
D	Man	Heterosexual	25-35	Below/Near Poverty	Black	N/A	Some College
Gee	Man	Heterosexual	36-46	Low	Black	Christian	Bachelor’s
Henry	Man	Heterosexual	25-35	Below/Near Poverty	Black	Christian	Some College
Iceberg	Man	Heterosexual	47+	Below/Near Poverty	Black	Christian	Some College
Jake	Man	Heterosexual	18-24	Low	Black	N/A	Bachelor’s
Janelle	Woman	Queer	18-24	Middle Class	Black	Christian	Some College
Jessica	Woman	Lesbian	25-35	Middle Class	Black	Christian	High School Diploma

Josh	Man	Heterosexual	25-35	Middle Class	Black	Christian	Bachelor's
Ky	Man	Heterosexual	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	Black	N/A	Master's
Kylee	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	Black	N/A	Some College
LaLa	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	Black	N/A	Some College
Liz	Woman	Lesbian	25-35	Low	Latina	SBNR	Bachelor's
Mack	Man	Heterosexual	25-35	Middle Class	Black	Christian	Some College
Mike	Man	Heterosexual	18-24	Low	white	N/A	Bachelor's
Musiteli	Man	Heterosexual	18-24	Low	Black	Atheist	Bachelor's
Peaches	Woman	Bi/Queer	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	Mixed—Black/white	SBNR	Some College
Rachel	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Low	white	N/A	Bachelor's
Randall	Man	Heteroflexible ⁷	25-35	Low	white	N/A	High School Diploma
Renee	Woman	Lesbian	36-46	Low	Black	SBNR	Bachelor's
Ryan	Man	Heterosexual	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	Asian American	Hindu	Some College
Sabrina	Woman	Lesbian	25-35	Middle Class	Black	SBNR	Bachelor's
Shantelle	Woman	Gay	18-24	Highest Tax Brackets	white	N/A	Some College
Sheila	Woman	Bisexual	25-35	Low	Black	Christian	Some College
Spiderman	Man	Heterosexual	36-46	Below/Near Poverty	Black	Christian	High School Diploma
Vincent	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Middle Class	white	N/A	Some College

¹Names used are pseudonyms chosen by participants at time of interview.

² Below/Near Poverty (Less than \$20,000); Low Income (\$20-44,999); Middle Class (\$45-139,999); Upper Middle Class (\$140-149,999); High Income (\$150-199,999); Highest Tax Brackets (\$200,000+)

³Spiritual But Not Religious

⁴Bisexual, primarily attracted to women and does not date cisgender men

⁵Only attracted to transgender women

⁶Mostly attracted to women, occasionally attracted to men

⁷Mostly attracted to women, occasionally attracted to men

4.1 Photo Elicitation

To understand how cis-het men and cis lesbians conceptualize desirability, I also utilize photo elicitation. Using publicly available photos from *Shutterstock*, an open-source stock photo library, I provided interview participants with photos of trans women—including those who visually “pass” as cisgender, those who do not, and those categorized on the site as white, Black, Latina, and Asian (*see Appendix F* for photos). Using these photos, I asked participants to rate their levels of desire to each of the women in the photos, asking for reasons as to their rating process. As participants rated each of the women, they did not know that the women are transgender. I utilize photo elicitation in the interviews as a way of entering into questions of

desirability, race, gender, sexual attraction. In addition, the photos served as a way to ask participants to reflect on hypothetical reactions to the women they are most interested in revealing that they are transgender.

4.2 Focus Groups

At the end of each interview, I also asked participants if they would be interested in participating in a focus group at a later point in time. If they were, I then asked for their email address to send out an email with the date and time of the focus groups.

I planned to hold three focus groups (*see* Appendix C for the focus group guide), each consisting of three cis-het men and three cis lesbians, as a way of better analyzing the patterns that emerge between their discourse of desirability, as the focus groups would allow their conversations to play off one another and would also give a chance for them to disagree and/or agree with others' sentiments. In order to elicit focus group participation, I compensated participants twenty dollars for their time. During the duration of the study, only one focus group took place. The focus group lasted 80 minutes and occurred at a private room in a public library. I originally planned one focus group of white/white-passing participants (due to the small sample size of white participants), one of Black participants under 35, and one of Black participants over 35. The distinction in age for Black participants was to assess whether age shaped differences in discourse, understanding, and anti-trans sentiments. While I was able to organize and execute the white focus group, the other failed to occur. I attempted to hold the other two focus groups twice each, but each time participants cancelled last minute, did not respond to emails or texts about the focus group, or simply did not show up. Each time only two participants showed up, who I compensated for arriving, but I was unable to hold a focus group with only two people.

I am not sure if my failure to execute the focus groups was due to an inability to develop the connections necessary to recruit interview participants to continue in the study due to my whiteness or if it was for other reasons. Black participants were more likely to tell me they had more than one job, were in school and working, or had parental responsibilities in addition to work and/or school compared to white/white-passing participants who had more resources even when living on a lower-income. Thus, it was also difficult to find a time that worked for multiple Black individuals compared to finding a time that worked for others. Ultimately, while I cannot compare focus group data comparatively, having a focus group of white/white-passing participants aided in fleshing out their interviews since whites comprised only a small percentage of my sample.

Seven participants were invited to participate in the focus group; only five arrived. These included one white-passing, Middle Eastern, cisgender man, one white, bisexual, cisgender woman, and three white, cisgender, lesbian women. One woman was a white Brazilian woman who ethnically identified as Latina but whom experienced white privilege and lived in the world as a white woman (see Table 2 for full demographics).

Table 2. Focus Group Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Income	Race & Ethnicity	Religion	Education
Adam	Man	Heterosexual	25-35	Low ²	Middle Eastern	Muslim	Some College
Alyx	Woman	Bi	18-24	Below/Near Poverty	white	N/A	Some College
Amy	Woman	Lesbian	36-46	Low	white Latina	N/A	Some College
Rachel	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Low	white	N/A	Bachelor's
Vincent	Woman	Lesbian	18-24	Middle Class	white	N/A	Some College

4.3 Recruitment

The 32 participants were recruited from the Metro Atlanta area due to my physical proximity. I posted flyers in coffee shops, libraries, and universities, on social media, and placed flyers randomly on cars at the Memorial Street Kroger in Stone Mountain, the Moreland Avenue Kroger in Atlanta, and the Buford Highway Kroger in North Atlanta, the College Park Walmart, the Riverside Walmart, the West End Kroger, and the Midtown Whole Foods as a way of ensuring wide reach and the ability to recruit from a diverse pool of potential participants. I also utilized snowball sampling and passed out flyers at community events. Interview participants were also provided with miniature flyers and asked to share information regarding the study with friends.

Moore emphasizes that “frequenting a range of physical spaces where members of the group are thought to spend time” helps in building samples of marginalized groups (2018: 171). As such, in addition to spaces like coffee shops, and libraries, I utilized cars at grocery stores as a method of reaching a larger span of people. The Memorial Street Kroger, College Park Walmart, Riverside Walmart and West End Kroger are in largely African American/Black and/or working-class customer neighborhoods and surrounding suburbs; whereas, the Moreland Avenue Kroger in the gentrified Atlanta “Edgewood” neighborhood and Midtown Whole Foods are in largely white, middle-class customer neighborhoods. The Buford Highway Kroger is within the Buford Highway Corridor with the ability to recruit Latinx and Asian/Asian American individuals into the study as well. While my sample is primarily of color, only one Latinx participant and one Asian American participant participated.

4.4 Researcher Positionality & Reflexivity

I conducted this research as a white trans woman, and I find it necessary to situate myself within the work regarding my varying positionalities within society. While I experience violence, vulnerability, and harm due to (cis)sexism, my whiteness and cis-passing privilege function, in many ways, to protect me from violence and to grant me entryway to spaces, such as academia, that are often closed to trans people of color due to barriers within academia as well as economic, social, and political barriers outside academia. I center trans women of color within my work, thus, to ensure that, as better understandings of cis-ness are gained, pathways to liberation can be mapped from these knowledge productions that include all of us and not just some of us (*i.e.* white people).

Additionally, I believe that my trans womanhood shaped the interviews and subsequent focus groups differently than were a cis person to conduct this research. Throughout the interview process, only one cis-het man visibly acknowledged that I am a woman of trans experience. One other cis-het man knew me through a graduate school colleague and thus knew I was a trans woman. Two asked if I was transgender, but only after having voiced their attraction to me and then seeing the pictures I showed them. The pictures of trans women made me “suspect” to them momentarily, but once I told them I was not trans to protect my safety, they returned to flirting and wanting to have sex. As I will document later in chapter 5, many cis-het men openly spoke to me of their disgust, discomfort, and/or confusion regarding trans women. Men told me that they understood the murders of Black trans women, the feelings of being overwhelmed, “raped,” and/or “feminized” by sexually and/or romantically interacting with trans women, and indeed, some told me they, themselves, would kill trans women. While doing so, their body language remained open and comfortable with their legs spread wide, their backs

leaned back against their chairs, and their eyes meeting mine. Several, while describing the type of women they liked, would use my body as a reference or would eye parts of my body as they mentioned what types of breasts, butts, and thighs they liked. Several also openly flirted with me, touched my body without my consent, told me I was their dream woman, and asked to have sex while also voicing their disgust of trans women. I tease out these contradictions and experiences in chapter 5. With Black, cis-het men, participants became uncomfortable at points discussing whiteness, and I had to coax them into feeling comfortable speaking to me as a white woman. I did not have to do this with any of them regarding trans-ness.

With cis, les/bi women, I am unsure who knew and did not know I was trans. One participant afterward asked me, “I don’t know if I can ask, but are you trans?” When I asked how she knew, she said it was about my “energy.” This happened as well with one other woman participant. One cis, queer woman participant knew me through a former coworker and thus knew I was of trans experience. Amy, a white, Brazilian, cis lesbian woman, spoke repeatedly of a “gay energy” she felt from queer, and sometimes trans women, and it is possible that my trans-ness was more visibly readable by queer women who saw me as “one of them.” My body stood in stark contrast with some cis women participants. I am a six feet tall, “slim thick” woman and about half were between five feet and five feet, five inches tall. My body, thus, may have appeared more “trans” to some cisgender women than others.

My dissertation advisor pointed out that it would be important for me to keep field notes about the ways in which individuals respond to me, vis-à-vis body language, as such notes would provide rich data for analysis. In Chapter Three, I discuss these data. I did not share that I am a trans woman with any cis-het man participant. I did with two cis women participants who asked.

I chose not to share with the two cis-het men participants who asked due to risks to my safety that I speak about later.

My final sample of participants was predominantly Black. This is an uncommon result for white researchers. With two Latina participants, I shared my mixed, Latinx/Greek ancestry, as a way of connecting and opening myself up to them, as I was asking them to open themselves up to me. However, if I had not noted this, they would not have known. Participants often acknowledged that I am white, and this was most emphasized with cis-het men participants. As I share in Chapter Three, participants like Josh, a cis-het, Black man, and Adam, a cis-het, Middle Eastern man, openly acknowledged their attraction to me and their idealization of whiteness. The majority of cis-het men participants were recruited through flyers I passed out at grocery stores and placed on cars.

As I did so, it was not uncommon for cis-het, Black men to stop and ask me for a flyer, to call me to their car for a flyer, or in the case of one man, to ask why I skipped past his car—I had done so because I did not feel comfortable putting flyers on the windows of cars with people sitting in them. This excitement to know what I was doing was uncommon to me as a researcher. In previous projects, I did not have the same ease in recruitment, nor did I have this same ease in recruitment with cis-lesbian women. I believe my whiteness attracted many of the cis-het men participants I interviewed. This, undeniably, shaped what participants were willing to share with me, how they discussed whiteness, and the internalized racism within their interview discourse. Scholars note the idealization of white women among many cis-het, African American men and the misogynoir and internalized racism that shape this idealization (Chito Childs 2005a). My whiteness most likely shaped the greater willingness of Black men to participate in my interviews than men of other races. Had I been a white man or a woman of color, the participants

I recruited and the conversations I had with participants would have been different. Thus, the whiteness embedded within the discourse of my interviews with participants is also a reflection of my own whiteness and the inescapable nature of one's whiteness. One can seek and work to be antiracist, but one can never step away from their whiteness and the ways in which others respond to and interpret one's whiteness.

As I analyzed participant discourse vis-à-vis racialized cissexism and the murders of Black trans women, I actively reflected on how my identities, body, and recruitment shaped my data. Participants who shared overtly cissexist responses, including open acknowledgement of their disposition to killing trans women, were primarily Black. However, this does not mean that Black people, and Black, cis-het men in particular, are more cissexist and more murderous than whites or non-Black people of color. If my sample of participants would have been more racially mixed, my results would have been different. It is possible that my results would have included more racially representative proportions of participants who would and would not kill trans women. Further, many men who openly stated their attraction to me may have displayed overt transphobia as a way of signaling their masculinity, bravado, and power to me as a mechanism of heterosexual attraction. This is not to deny that Blackness and whiteness differentially shape racial groups' transphobic discourse and behaviors. Legacies of emasculation, lynching, and castration of Black men place cis-het, Black men in a different position in response to trans-ness than cis-het, white men (Yanagino 2020). I attend to these differences without making a monolith of cis-het, Black men, essentializing Blackness, or conflating Blackness and transphobia. The legacies of cissexism woven through all racial communities are products of whiteness and must be tackled through the abolition of whiteness in all spaces.

4.5 Methodologies

I frame my project within feminist and queer methodologies that emphasize reflexivity, the partiality of all knowledge, and researcher accountability to our participants. My aim is not to conduct a study generalizable to all cisgender people. Rather, my aim is to theoretically expand academic discourse on cis-ness in order to have more in-depth understandings and analyses of how cis-ness functions. All perspectives are partial; however, the aim of research should be to enable “the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible” (Haraway 2004: 93). I seek to begin weaving some of the webs of connection between cis-ness, whiteness, male-ness, and lesbian-ness in order to foster further research in this area. I work, additionally, to foster dialogue between my participants and I, as well as between my participants during the focus group, to allow the “ruling relations” (Smith 1987; Naples 2003) of cis-ness to emerge without force or assumption.

Further, I interrogate gender-race-sexuality as interconnected, co-constructed, and co-maintained systems of oppression (Smith 2006; Lugones 2007; Crenshaw 2012). This does not mean that the distinctness of white supremacy, patriarchy, cissexism, and heterosexism are lost. Instead, an intersectional analysis highlights the heterogeneity of lived experiences, as individuals and social groups are differentially positioned within the interpersonal, structural, and cultural domains of power (Collins 2016). While intersectionality has been critiqued for a focus on the interpersonal/interactional level of thought vis-à-vis identity (Hancock 2016), intersectional thought has also worked to understand production of intersectional vulnerabilities through the interworking of institutions (Collins 2005; Henry 2016; Gurusami 2017; Lyons et al. 2017; Ristock et al. 2017) and systems. In analyzing interview and focus group data through an intersectional lens, I seek to interrogate the ways in which the participants’ construct discourse

that is simultaneously racialized, sexed, gendered, and sexualized. In doing so, I aim to understand the ways in which such discourse works to maintain systems of oppression that render trans women of color vulnerable. Crenshaw highlights that discourse is utilized by systems and individuals of power to justify the status quo (2012).

Additionally, I explicitly mark when I am referencing trans women of color (and more explicitly if I am referencing Black, Latina, Asian/Asian American, and/or Indigenous trans women), as well as when I am referencing white trans women. A lack of specificity otherwise would collapse all of (trans) womanhood into a singular, universal ontology, denying differences of race, class, ability, and so forth (Gill-Peterson 2018). Further, the lack of explicit specificity allows white (trans) womanhood to stand as the reference point for all of (trans) womanhood, contributing not only limitations to my analysis, but perpetuating white supremacy within my analysis (hooks 1981; hooks 1984).

4.5.1 *Photo Elicitation*

Dona Schwartz (1998) explains that photos are able to elicit response and interpretation from the respondent and are able to be analyzed by the researcher in understanding the geography of a particular area. Photos, Schwartz explains, are a “receptacle from which individual viewers withdraw meaning” (120). I utilized photos in my study in order to ask my participants to detail the meaning that becomes ascribed to particular bodies. Photos of particular bodies allowed me to make more concrete what may otherwise seem and feel very abstract to participants. Participants could verbally detail an open preference for all bodies, but in asking them to rate photos in order of least desirability to most desirability, the option to state complete neutrality was removed and required, instead, deeper introspection and reflection of the participant.

Several scholars have utilized photo ranking in analyzing perceptions of desirability vis-à-vis trans people (Gerhardstein and Anderson 2010; Broussard and Warner 2018; Mao, Hauptert, and Smith 2018). Most of these, though, analyzed gender in isolation from other intersecting identities/axes of power. Gerhardstein and Anderson (2010) and Broussard and Warner (2018) both had majority white samples of young, college students analyze vignettes/photos. Broussard and Warner (2018) presented students with events that depicted how the gender-nonconforming person physically looked (I include this because the vignette functions as a photo proxy). The vignettes, though, were racially unmarked, and thus, most likely assumed white by the majority of participants. Gerhardstein and Anderson (2010) utilized photos of a (presumed cisgender) white man and (presumed cisgender) white woman and manipulated facial appearance to make them look “more transgender/gender-nonconforming.” Mao et al. (2018), though, included photos of Asian, Black, Latinx, and white men and women and asked for similar rankings as the other three. All were focused merely on differences in desirability. Collectively, though, all three detailed similar rankings of trans women as undesirable and cisgender women as more open to friendships/partnerships with transgender men. The similar patterns highlight the potential of photos to elicit meaning from participants regarding transgender people.

4.5.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups have been utilized by many qualitative researchers within and outside of Sociology as a way to foster “substantial, critical, and reflective dialogue among people” (Freeman 2006: 83). Some, such as Freeman, have used focus groups in addition to other methods. Freeman’s use of focus groups was part of a larger “ethnographic case study...in schools...looking at the impact of standardized testing in New York State” (84). Freeman, like others (*see* Madriz 1998; Warr 2005; Aubert, Melgar, and Valls 2011), used focus groups to

analyze how meaning becomes “co-constructed” within interactions between participants who either share similar positionalities or differ in identity and life circumstance. Within the interactions of a focus group, patterns of consensus and divergence can be analyzed by the researcher. Individuals also potentially can find others who support their opinions and, thus, make it easier to discuss difficult or controversial topics.

Aubert et al. (2011) moved beyond traditionally organized focus groups in which the researcher is merely a moderator to focus groups in which researchers are coordinating co-participants. Aubert et al.’s study sought to understand “how young people use language to talk about people that attract them or do not attract them” (296). Within the focus group, participants were provided with guidelines to foster dialogue and prevent potential pitfalls. At points in the focus group, the researcher would provide participants with information from prior research regarding attraction, gender, and dating violence in order to foster “dialogue between science and society” (297). Often science remains self-isolated from society, but Aubert et al.’s “critical communicative methodology” sought to challenge that isolation of self from society. In addition to having guidelines within focus groups, Aubert et al. highlight the importance of conducting focus groups “in familiar surroundings, in an atmosphere that is relaxed and comfortable” (301). Madriz (1998) further highlights that, with low-income participants of color, providing transportation will increase recruitment and attendance. My original plan was to conduct the focus groups at the Phillip Rush Center; however, upon reflection and further reading, I found it important to find spaces close to my participants that they frequent or feel comfortable meeting in. Finally, Madriz also encourages over-recruiting for low socioeconomic status Latina women, or in my case low SES people of color, due to socioeconomic barriers of work and childcare.

4.6 Coding

In analyzing data, I conducted an initial, qualitative coding, coding over segments of a single transcript numerous times in order to assess what the data were presenting to me. After initial coding, I sorted through the hundreds of codes to collapse codes into similar, overarching categories and assessed patterns in the codes. Through this, I arrived at thirty higher level codes that I then either connected, such as “hair as filthy” and “racialized preferences,” or left as is. Each higher level code then had subsequent “child” codes. In what follows, I focus on specific themes that fill gaps in the current literature, that felt particularly necessary to attend to, such as the symbolic violence of trans murders, and which spanned the interviews of numerous, if not all, participants. My higher level codes included “desiring natural women,” “appeals to commonsense logic,” “cis discourse,” “desiring trans women,” “preferring sameness,” “preferring difference,” “trans-ness as an assault,” “trans women are women,” “critical cis-ness,” and “tainted by the penis.” After higher level coding and during writing, I conducted axial coding on higher level codes like “ending the murders of trans women” in order analyze racialized, gendered, and classed patterns in participant discourse.

5 CHAPTER 1 -- “A NATURAL WOMAN”: HOW CISSEXISM, CLASSISM, AND WHITE SUPREMACY PERMEATE THE DESIRE FOR A “NATURAL” LOOK IN A WOMAN

Since at least the writing of West and Zimmerman’s (1987) “Doing Gender,” sociologists have understood gender to be both a politically constructed axis of power and a socially constructed identity. Gender is not something one is born; rather, it is something one does at the risk of being held accountable for “improper” doings of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). Prior to the emergence of gender as a sociological subfield, women’s studies scholars and

women's liberationist activists have long also critiqued the idea that gender and sex are something one is born. French feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir argued that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949: 301). A few decades after de Beauvoir, Women's Studies scholar Monique Wittig argued that the idea of womanhood is a heterosexual construction. She explained, "It would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women" (1978: 32).

For Wittig, to be a lesbian meant to exist outside the bounds of heteronormativity, resulting in no longer living according to a sex-gender binary. The idea of "woman," she argued, was something constructed by men in order to legitimize and institutionalize hegemonic masculinities and hegemonic femininities—the subordination of women to men. Butler later took up Wittig's postulation, arguing that gender and sex are not natural, innate components of a body or mind. Instead, Butler conceptualizes gender and sex as performative constitutions that are produced through repetition and interpretation. Further, she writes, "Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived" (1990: 193). Oyěwùmí (1997) later elucidated how the conceptualization of gender was not simply born of hetero-patriarchy but also of white, Western ideologies. Further, Oyěwùmí contrasted Western ontologies of gender to pre-colonial Yorùbá societies in which gender did not exist. In doing so, she deepened sociological and historical analyses of gender as something other than biological and/or innate.

Despite the work of Women's Studies and Sociology scholars, gender and sex continue, in the U.S., to be culturally connected to an essentialist idea of nature and naturality. This became evident in the interviews I conduct with cis-het men and cis-les/bi women. Repeatedly, participants noted a desire for a "natural" woman or a "natural" look in a woman. This varied

from a desire for “natural” genitals as opposed to “surgically constructed” genitals to a desire for “natural” makeup, “natural” hair, or a “natural” body (*i.e.* thin and abled). It additionally included a desire for a “natural” feminine aesthetic as compared to a hyperfemininity. In participants’ discussions of their desire for naturalness and a mute aesthetic, there arose, simultaneously, a disdain or disliking of the “artificial” and “excess.”

In this chapter, I flesh out participant discourse about what attracts them to a woman and analyze how the desire for a “natural” woman is embedded within racist, (cis)sexist, ableist, fatphobic logic. In the desire for “naturalness,” trans-ness, queerness, disabled-ness, fatness, and certain Black aesthetics are constructed as excess. Here, excess is that which goes beyond what is wanted. It is too much. It is the superfluity of what is otherwise human and desirable. Thus, I connect to Black Queer/Trans Studies, Black Feminist Theory, Crip Theory, and Fat Studies to elucidate how cis-het men and cis-les/bi women’s desires for particular women are shaped by white, cissexist, ableist, and fatphobic ideologies of what constitutes the natural, proper, desirable woman. I first analyze participant discourse vis-à-vis “naturalness” and makeup, hair, and aesthetics. I then discuss participant discourse regarding genitalia. Finally, I explicate the relationship between genitalia, hair, fat, ability, and race throughout my interviews.

5.1 “When a Black woman makes their hair straight, it makes me more attracted to a white woman”: Race, Gender, and Stylizations of the Body

Hair, makeup, and aesthetics have historically and presently been framed within racialized logics. How one styles the body is, even if not intentional, racialized and sexualized. It shapes how one is perceived and treated in the workplace (Byrd and Tharps 2014; Oyedemi 2016), intimate relationships (Fahs 2011), education (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2018; Lyons 2020), and in everyday life (Bettie 2003; Oyedemi 2016; Sims, Pirtle, and Johnson-

Arnold 2020). In my interviews with cis-het men and cis-les/bi women, nearly all participants (28/32) emphasized a desire for a natural look in a woman as regards hair and makeup and a desire for a muted or toned-down expression. It is important to ask, though, what constitutes a natural look? Does a natural look include wearing minimal, skin tone makeup? Does it include using only moisturizers, exfoliators, and cleansers but not wearing makeup? Or does a “natural look” refer to a completely unadulterated face—hair, pimples, and all? This list of question continues to grow when shifted to “natural hair.”

I include within this category of natural hair and natural makeup a discussion of a desire for a muted or toned-down expression, as participants expressed a desire to see women in their “natural” element without bold aesthetics, makeup, or hair. The desire among participants for a muted aesthetic and natural hair/makeup connects around racialized and gendered ideologies of how the body is stylized and expressed. As regards aesthetic, hair, and makeup, participants detailed a disdain for that which is deemed “excessive.” What does it mean, though, to have a distaste for excess when excess is core to many queer, trans, and BIPOC aesthetics (Ellison 2017; Musser 2018; Bey 2019)? Further, I attend to these natural-unnatural, muted-excessive binaries by interrogating and critiquing notions of the “natural.” In doing so, I think together queer and trans of color critique scholarship regarding excess, surplus, and queer/trans of color aesthetic and Black studies scholarship that analyzes the politicization of Black (natural) hair.

At the start of each interview, I asked participants, “What do you like in a woman?” They would begin to share two or three things they look for in a woman. I, then, asked further questions about whether hair, makeup, gender expression, genital appearance, and so forth. At this point, participants often stated what they desired and then concluded with a comparison of

what was unattractive. This was the case with Sheila, a 27-year-old, cis-bisexual, Black woman, as she discussed the appearance of nails on a woman. Sheila told me:

I love nails done, sometimes. I don't...um...I feel like I like them when they're simple, because it says a lot about, it kinda says who you are, what you do. Even though I'm an entrepreneur, we can do whatever we want. I know a lot of people are, when you're in certain industries, you can't have ghetto nails. Like it's, it's uh...I can't do ghetto nails.

Sheila preferred shorter nails with more subtle coloring, as compared to longer, flashier, “ghetto” nails. Sheila, and other participants who shared her sentiment, highlighted how capitalism shapes and is shaped by desire. Sheila's desire for a woman whose nails appear professional was not only shaped by capitalist logic, though, but also racialized logic. Nails are embedded with racial meanings, with “clean,” pastel, French manicures attaching themselves to white, middle-class womanhood, and professionalism. In comparison, expressive art, acrylics, bright colors, and long nails symbolically attach to Blackness, working-class identity, lack of professionalism, and excess (Kang 2010).

In addition to a lack of desire for “excessively” styled nails, participants often highlighted a desire for a more muted aesthetic in terms of clothing, makeup, and hair. During interviews, I asked participants to rate various photos of women, all of whom, unbeknownst to participants, were trans. Participants rated these photos from one to ten, with one being highly undesirable and ten being highly desirable and explained their reasoning. In my focus group with four white/white-passing participants, I asked participants why they felt many participants saw certain photos as trans and others as not trans. I also asked them why photos of women who appeared more “visibly trans” to participants were rated as less desirable. I asked, “Why do you think ones

that look more trans like numbers 2ⁱ, 6, and 7 are not rated highly but the ones that don't look trans are?" Participants responded:

Adam: They did a pretty good job there [on number 8].

alithia: Okay, what do you mean?

Adam: With the makeup and the way that trans. Not, I mean, that was just typical, you know, um look.

Amy: So what you were saying is natural hair, [Adam]? Was that what it was? That their hair, I missed... 'Cuz I thought, which hadn't occurred to me until that's what I thought you said, but maybe that plays a part is the hair.

Vincent: Maybe like, so...with woman one and 3, um, they're not like...dressed like very feminine. Um...hmm...

Amy: But it's less flashy than the top, the Snow White [woman 4].

Vincent: Not like muted, just like toned down a bit.

Rachel: Yeah, and I think despite maybe like woman 2 and woman 7 not like passing well, they are dressed in like very high femme, what like makeup, jewelry, colorful clothing, and that might like kind of turn away like some people.

Adam, a 35-year-old, white-passing, Middle Eastern, cis-het man, highlighted, here, the ways in which trans-ness is conceptualized as a covering up of the "natural" body. Woman 8, to whom he was referring, is a white, "cis-passing," trans woman. Nearly all participants were shocked to discover that she, like the others in the photos, is also a trans woman. Adam's statement that "they did a good job" was a reference to the assumed work of gender affirmation surgeons and hormone replacement therapy clinicians who he, and other participants, believed artificially created her present beauty.

In comparison, woman 2, a more “visibly trans,” Latina woman, woman 4, a more “visibly trans,” Asian American woman, woman 6, a more “visibly trans,” Black woman, and woman 7, a “more visibly trans,” white woman were frequently rated as the least desirable women among the eight photos. Woman 2 wore a white dress with variegated, neon, abstract shapes over the white. Her dress was more tightly fitting, and she wore bright red lipstick with a long blonde wig. Woman 4 donned a Snow White-esque dress, wore heavy makeup, and had long, black hair. Finally, woman 7 wore a silver dress made out of metal squares with a metallic, silver studded choker. She had on bright pink lipstick, with heavy black, eye liner, and visibly contoured cheeks and had long brown hair with dark brown roots. Rachel, a 22-year-old, white, cis-lesbian woman, Vincent, an 18-year-old, white, cis-lesbian woman, Amy, a 37-year-old, white, cis-lesbian Latina, and Adam contrasted these four participants’ aesthetic with those of women 1, 3, and 8, each of whom had softer facial features and bone structure and were wearing more business-casual and business-professional dress. Their highlighting of difference in aesthetic was not to simply compare the different styles of dress within the photos of women. Instead, what they pointed to was the connection between a more muted, professional aesthetic, “natural” looking makeup and hair, and the “passability” of transgender women.

“Passing,” as a term has varying historical meanings. C. Riley Snorton notes, “Passing is conventionally understood as the practice of moving from an oppressed group to a dominant group, that is, from black to white, female to male, transgender to cisgender” (2009). In this way, passing is something one acquires—it is an achievement of privilege that allows one to experience the world without the otherwise gendered/racialized barriers that exist for those sharing one’s particular positionality. Simultaneously, this conceptualization of “passing” elucidates the connections in the focus group discourse around “passing,” the “natural” body,

and trans-ness as a sort of artificial “covering up” of the body. “Passing” becomes, here, a process in which the transgender subject becomes interpreted as a cisgender subject through various means, including surgery, aesthetic, and makeup. In regard to the women in the photos that focus group participants discussed, those who appeared “hyper”-feminine were more readily recognized as transgender, while those who donned “natural” makeup that appeared to match their skin tone and clothing in muted, earth tone colors were misrecognized as cisgender.

The role of makeup, “passing,” and the “natural” body was evidenced later in the focus group as Adam discussed woman 7, a white, “more visibly” trans woman and why he believed she was transgender. Adam explained: “She is very masculine and um...I don’t know like if you...block the hair, it could be a man, you know, if she wipe off her makeup, you know?” Woman 7’s hair—often referred to as a wig by participants—and her heavy makeup were interpreted by Adam as a potential covering up of her “innate male-ness.” While “passing” as cisgender is discursively conceptualized as an artificial “covering up” of the “natural” body in Adam’s discourse above (*e.g.* the doctor “did a pretty good job here;” “if you block the hair, it could be a man”), Snorton (2009) notes that “social understandings of race [and gender] always contain some form of ‘misrecognition of biology.’” In my participants’ discourse, trans stylizations of the body were interpreted as artificial alterations to that which is already misrecognized as natural. Simultaneously, Adam’s response elucidates what Marquis Bey (2019) terms traniflesh, or “flesh that throws shade on gender” (56). Adam was uncertain of whether woman seven was a (cisgender) woman or not. He was left with no definitive answer from the picture, and prior to the focus group, I did not tell participants that each of the photos were of transgender women. Her hair, makeup, and clothing mixed with her more muscular arms, broad shoulders, and strong jaw rendered her unintelligible to Adam.

Participants' discourse around "natural" makeup and the "natural" body went beyond the trans body; however, with participants desiring a "natural" look on all women. Cookie, a 27-year-old, cis-homoflexible, Black woman told me:

I prefer no makeup. I prefer like natural like period um, makeup is cool; nails are cool, it's not necessary. Like, I can appreciate, I think it's a time and a place, but like, if I'm wearing a white shirt like I don't always want like makeup on my shirt if we hug, or you know what I'm saying? Like, it's just yeah, or you, we're trying to go somewhere, like spending two hours in the bathroom to put on makeup. Like I don't have time for that.

Makeup, for Cookie, was excess physically and temporally. Her "preference" for a natural look, though, was not an individualized desire for a particular look. Instead, this pull to the natural is shaped by social and cultural norms of gender. Peiss' historical analysis of U.S. beauty culture highlights that "the ideal of pure, natural beauty" has existed since at least the 19th century. Peiss notes, though, that this beauty ideal has "disguised the way women's appearances were in fact dictated by middle-class cultural requirements" (1998: 30). This ideal faded away in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, replaced by large-scale marketing of makeup. However, during the 60's, 70's, and 80's, a return to the "natural" arose amongst white, cisgender, feminist activists (Brooks 2022: 127). Thus, participants' "preference" for a "natural" look can be located within a particular constellation of sociocultural forces that shape what is (in)appropriate and (un)desirable vis-à-vis feminine aesthetics.

Mack, a 28-year-old, cis-het, Black man, went further than Cookie. Whereas Cookie felt there is a time and place for makeup, Mack held a complete distaste for it. Mack explained to me:

I like their [women's] natural skin color. I don't like the makeup. I hate the...I hate the 50 shades of brown. You even seen that like girls, they have different, especially when they have dark skin, it's like, yo, your skin is already beautiful, and they cake up, they try to get lighter, and they cake they face up with lighter colors of brown, and I'm like that's a major turn off. Period. To like...makeup is like a no for me.

Makeup, for Mack and other participants, became an unnecessary decoration of the face that concealed what “should” otherwise be shown. Makeup is conceptualized as a disguise rather than a form of self-expression. Musser, writing about Brown *jouissance* and surface-becoming discusses Anne Anlin Cheng's work on modernist aesthetic, noting, “Cheng writes that the problem of the modern surface is ‘distinguishing decoration as surplus from what is ‘proper’ to the ‘thing’ (2010: 29)” (2018). Makeup, for Mack and other participants, was viewed as improper to the “thing” that is desirable womanhood. Makeup was viewed as covering up the “natural” beauty of a woman and disguising what is “truly” underneath—be that a different skin color or a “different” gender.

Participants' discourse around makeup and a “natural” look not only hinged on misogyny and cissexism, but classism and socioeconomic status, as well. Much as nails bear racialized and classed aesthetics (Kang 2010), so too does makeup. Bettie exemplifies this in her (2003) analysis of gender-race-class among white, middle-class girls (or, in her work, the “preps”) and working-class, Chicana girls (or, “las chicas”) in a California high school. She highlights that “las chicas” tended to wear makeup in an obvious manner that did not attempt to appear as a “natural face,” and often spent class time applying eyeliner, foundation, mascara, and so forth. In contrast, the “preps,” or middle-class white girls, attempted to reapply powder in secret, hidden moments; they wore makeup in a way so as to appear that they were not wearing any—otherwise

known as a “natural” look. Bettie notes that part of having a natural look is hiding the work one does to bear “natural” beauty within social logics of desire. Further, a “natural” look does not elide the consumption of beauty products. Amidst the rise in desire for a “natural” look came a simultaneous increase in the marketing, selling, and purchasing of self-care and organic products (Peiss 1998). Thus, the desire for a “natural” look among my participants, vis-à-vis makeup and aesthetic, was shaped not by individual preference but by racialized, gendered, and classed logics of desire.

This was evidenced, as well, in participants’ discourse on hair. Within this discourse, participants conceptualized of “natural” hair as more “real” than “synthetic” hair. Oyedemi notes, “The ideology of beauty that has dominated much of cultural history sees feminine beauty in Western perspectives, with dominant idea of beautiful hair constructed as long, soft and silky, typical of the Eurocentric texture of hair, and Indian/Asian hair for its close proximity to the dominant ideology” (2016: 542). While cis-les/bi women participants overwhelmingly agreed with the dominant ideology surrounding hair, participants, themselves, (both men and women) largely desired “natural” hair and did not desire weaves, wigs, or relaxed hair.

This was evident in my interview with Spiderman, a 45-year-old, cis-het, Black man. During the part of the interview in which participants were asked to rate photos of women, Spiderman stated that he felt woman 8, a white, “cis-passing” woman and woman 4, an Asian American, “more visibly trans” woman were two of the most desirable women in the photos. When I asked him why, he responded:

I don’t know. Uh...for me, what I take away, I’m not, I’m not big on...I’m not big on women that take the afro out of their hair. You know what I’m saying? I’m not, I’m prejudice when it comes to women taking their permanent hair, getting it straight like that,

it makes me more attracted to white women. When a Black woman makes their hair straight, it makes me more attracted to a white woman. There's a hair, original straight hair, it makes me like damn, she's more, it makes Black women more attractive to the culture of white women, so it automatically make me more attracted, because I'm a man. If she had a afro, that'd be different, I'da been like okay this is my sister right here. Yeah.

Spiderman elucidated Musser's analysis of discourse surrounding Black hair. Musser notes, "Conversations around Black hair work to produce an ideology of Black female difference... This texture, or feeling, of Black female difference is located in a set of overlapping imaginaries—that unstraightened hair offers political resistance and the insistence that Black naturalness is a source of power" (2016: 2). Spiderman emphasized that his desire for Black women is situated upon the styling of their hair, with straightened hair eliding the distinction between Black-ness and non-Blackness. Straightened hair became a synecdoche for whiteness, and, thus, shifted Spiderman's attraction away from the constructed "artificiality" of a Black woman's straightened hair and toward the constructed "originality" of a white woman and her hair.

Mack, too, desired a woman with "natural" hair. However, Mack recognized the difficulty of maintaining "natural" hair and explained that he was okay with his current partner getting weave or relaxing her hair if it made it easier to get ready in the morning. However, with both "natural" hair and weave/relaxed hair, the quality of the hair and how it appeared mattered. Mack explained:

I'm a more natural guy....but also, I'm older now and the life that I've been through, I understand that weave is way easier for a bitch....But crazy weaves, like you Black, you got red, if you can pull that shit off, you bad as hell. I like a professional hair cut. If it's

natural, I fuck with the perms. I fuck with all that, you feel me? You wanna support your natural side but keep it above, all y'all natural bitches ain't here. You know, it's not for you, go ahead and put some, what you need, some \$50 weave? Here, go ahead, go get you somethin' girl, you know what I'm sayin'?

Mack's response elucidated the connections of race, gender, and class in participants' attraction to women. Quality wigs and weave signify a sort of feminine social capital. This feminine social capital signifies what kind of woman the bearer of the hair is, and it also signifies what kind of man Mack is by association. Mack bragging about his ability to give his partner the money to pay for a quality weave was a way of displaying his masculinity. By providing for her, he positioned himself as dominant to her and embodied a hegemonic masculinity and ensured his partner embodied a hegemonic femininity that was complementary but different from his masculinity.

Hair maintenance and weave/wigs are not cheap expenditures, though. A Huffpost article based on interviews with various Black women who wear their hair natural asked them how much they spent on hair products per year, and the amounts ranged from one hundred dollars to well over one-thousand (Lambert 2020). In 2018, companies selling products targeted at Black women's hair earned over two billion dollars (Holmes 2019), highlighting not only the profitability of such companies but the high cost of hair maintenance and styling for Black women. Class, then, as well as the influence of white, capitalist ideologies of professionalism shaped the appearance of Black women's hair for Mack and other participants.

Politics and ideas of Black consciousness also surrounded cis-het, Black men's responses regarding Black women's hair. Ky, a 24-year-old, cis-het, Black man, explained to me that he preferred "natural" hair on Black women. When I asked him why, he told me:

I mean, it's just, aw jeez. It's just, it's, it's like a kind of a weirdo reason, it's uh. Gosh, how do you say it? I'm trying to think of a mainstream way of saying this. It's kind of like a Black conscious, conscious thing. So it's like that type of hair [straight] is like copying, you know, white. That's not your natural roots. I'm not like one of those haters about it. It looks great. I see why. I even like it. And I don't know if I'd completely write off a girl if she does buy in at that level. Like that's just culturally where we are in America. So I'm not like one of those who super have a problem with it. I just prefer you know...

Ky highlighted the tension between a socialized attraction to straightened hair and his desire for a woman who has worked to uninternalized whiteness and white norms. Musser notes that “straightened hair is read as a symptom of submission [and] unstraightened hair is viewed as an active rebuke against [white] norms” (2016: 4). Black women’s hair becomes emblematic of their political orientations, and how Black women do their hair signified, for many of my participants, their difference from or similarity to white women, with straightened, Black women’s hair being viewed as a copy of a white “original.” Black women, though, end up in a double bind with this view of their hair. The politicization of Black women’s hair shaped participants’ desire for “natural” Black hair, yet many participants, like Ky, highlighted a larger societal pressure for Black women to straighten their hair. Black women become pulled in two directions, with their agency to determine which style they prefer elided.

I asked Sabrina, a 25-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman, whether how Black women do their hair shapes their desirability. She responded:

Yep, um, natural hair is not desirable to a lot of people. Um, so I've been wearing my hair like this [natural] since I started working at [business]. Um, and I recently for my birthday, [date], I went and got 20 inches of hair [laughs]. So I walked in a whole new person, and

everybody just saw me differently. Like people actually came up to me and started introducing themselves like they, I haven't been here for eight months. So, um, the fact that my natural hair did not find that, that was not a desirable to that person with natural hair, but I was with this long, straight, more stereo--more acceptable--hairstyle made me more attractive to that person, and to me, that frustrates me.

Sabrina highlighted that, despite most participants preferring “natural,” unadulterated hair, there remain societal consequences for Black women with said hair. Desire for Sabrina referred not only to sexual or romantic desire but to desire as an orienting force. Ahmed notes on the phenomenology of orientation, “Bodies tend toward some objects more than others, given their tendencies. These tendencies are not originary; they are effects of the repetition of “tending toward” (2006: 553). Bodies orient themselves toward objects in part through the historical conceptualization of such objects. Sabrina’s co-workers oriented themselves toward long, straight hair and away from natural, Black hair due the legacy and continuation of white supremacy and misogynoir.

Hair, whether “natural” or “unnatural,” is not merely protein filaments growing out of follicles within the skin. Hair is also the images, words, and ideas that come to encompass how it is conceptualized and understood in a given society at a given time. Participants’ desire for “natural” hair was shaped by race, class, and gender, and the desire for “real” hair or “real-looking” hair rather than a “synthetic-looking” wig was also shaped by race, class, and gender. Participant discourse around what is natural and what is not shaped their desire for particular types of hair, styles of hair, and clothing/makeup aesthetics. However, their desire for “natural” hair on a woman’s head was in tension with their desire for hairless women’s faces and bodies, even if that required hair removal or other alterations to the body. In the next section I highlight

how a hairless body was viewed as “natural” even if that is not how a woman’s body would look without any alteration. Thus, ideas of what is natural and what is unnatural is less about biology and more so about social and cultural ideologies of the body.

5.2 “It Should Not Be Like a Werewolf”: Cis-Het Men & Cis-Les/Bi Women’s Discourse Surrounding Body Hair

In my interviews with participants, I asked them what they desired in a woman. No participant noted body hair as shaping their desire without further probing. However, upon my asking whether body hair shaped their desire for a woman, many participants shared that it did. When discussing their lack of desire for body hair, participants conflated hair with animality, masculinity, and filth. While these connotations were not overtly classed, raced, and gendered (with the exception of masculinity), the conceptualization of body hair as such is linked to white, cis-heteropatriarchal understandings of the body (Herzig 2015).

Understandings of body hair have changed across time within the U.S., but, in each period, these changes occurred based on prevailing ideologies of race, gender, class, and ability. Early European colonizers of what is now the United States were obsessed with “the Indian’s ‘beardless countenance’” (2015: 25). Seeing less visible hair on some Indigenous men’s faces and potential depilatory practices of removing facial hair among some Indigenous men, white colonizers viewed this as evidence of Indigenous peoples’ “anachronistic” evolutionary state. However, later in the 1800’s, “‘body hair became disgusting’ to middle-class American women, [with] its removal [viewed as] a way to ‘separate oneself from cruder people, lower class and immigrant[s]’” (Herzig 2015: 79; Stearns 1999). These ideologies continue into the present, along with the medicalization and pathologizing of “too much” hair on women’s bodies (*i.e.*

hirsutism). In what follows, I elucidate the connection of these ideologies to my participants' conceptualizations of body hair.

In my interview with Henry, a 26-year-old, cis-het, Black man, I asked him whether body hair matters in terms of his attractions to women. Henry shared:

Uh yeah, I met a girl and she didn't shave her armpits, and I was like oh, no, like that's not, like I don't even, I guess because I don't have much armpit hair, and she was, I was like, "You're, I mean, the bear out here. Like you're doing it." And I think it made a difference only because like just, look, like what was ingrained into me. I don't think I want to come home to a hairy pit all the time, you know?

Henry not only conflated body hair with animality but also worked to differentiate between men's and women's bodies. As I discuss further below, the linking of body hair to animality is produced, in part, through ideologies of sexual dimorphism. What I want to highlight here, though, is the conceptualization of human body hair as excess—as improper to the “thing” that is womanhood, yet simultaneously “proper” to the “thing” that is manhood. Henry's linkage of women's body hair with animality and conceptualization of it as “improper” to womanhood builds upon white, cis-heteropatriarchal understandings of body hair. Herzig's work on hair removal includes discussion of the influence of Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) on gendered and racial ideologies of hair and the body. They note, “When nature was functioning properly, experts after *Descent* presumed, men had body hair, and women did not” (2015: 67).

Sheila, a 27-year-old, cis-bi, Black woman, also linked body hair to animality. In speaking with her about what she desires in a woman, I asked her if she cares whether a woman shaves her armpits, legs, and other parts of her body. She responded:

Shave your armpits. Your legs. I don't know....I can't say because I'm not, it's not even a complete hairless, but it should not be like...werewolf.

Sheila looked straight at me while responding, stating, “Shave your armpits,” and “Your legs” in a calm, matter-of-fact manner. She relied upon a taken-for-granted assumption that it is only “natural” that a woman would shave her armpits and legs. Her linkage of women's body hair to seeming like a werewolf was meant not only to compare women's body hair to animality but to excessively hairy animality. Again, women's body hair is viewed as “unnatural,” as something akin to the beastly, intermediate nature of the werewolf—which is both human and not, both animal and not. Further, while Sheila did not detail this, it is important to analyze the connection between women's body and the werewolf and the stories of werewolves. Stories of werewolves are, often, not simply stories of individuals who are both human and wolf but of individuals cursed with the fate of lycanthropy. While one could argue that Sheila was not attempting or did not mean to link body hair to ideas and myths of curses, it is important to home in on the meaning in the words individuals use. It is in Sheila's choice of words that women's body hair becomes conceptualized as excess, unnatural, and undesirable to oneself and those around them.

Participants' conflation of women's body hair with ideas of excess and un-naturality were also core to ideologies of sexual dimorphism, as I mentioned briefly when discussing my interview with Henry. In each interview, I asked participants whether they can tell if someone is trans or not. When I asked Musiteli, a 24-year-old, cis-het, Black man, he responded that he could sometimes but that it depends. I asked, “What are the sorts of features that would be like, ‘Okay, maybe she's trans?’” Musiteli responded:

Um I remember one situation at my last job I was training a new coworker, I didn't know she was trans at the time. I just thought she was a guy, because she dressed, she dressed up

like a guy um and had, had, had like a full on like beard, so I was, I was just assuming, just saying, “Hey bro,” and so it’s like, here let me help you out and then she, because it was just like the facial features and the hair was just uh and then the fact that they were dressed up like a man in jeans and just a regular shirt I guess isn’t strictly masculine, because you know women wear shirts and jeans.

While Musiteli noted that part of the reason he misrecognized his coworker as a man was because of her clothing, the woman’s facial hair and structure largely shaped, in his reflection on this moment, his misrecognition of her. Body hair and facial hair, for most participants, were interpreted within social ideas of biological sexual dimorphism. Indeed, Ferriman and Gallwey (1961) assessed the density of terminal hairs on cisgender women’s faces and bodies and constructed the Ferriman-Gallwey scale of hirsutism, which prevails in use today. More than the slight presence of hairs on the chest, arms, belly, face, back/buttocks, genitals, and legs comes to signal mild hirsutism, with hirsutism pathologized as “the presence of excess body or facial terminal...hair growth in females in a male-like pattern [and] affects 5-15% of [cisgender] women” (Yildiz et al. 2010). The presence of facial hair and body hair on women is deemed unnatural, in need of treatment, and masculinizing. Thus, in 2021, the hair removal industry is project to reap revenues over 1.6 billion dollars (IBIS World 2021).

In my focus group with white/white-passing participants, I re-asked them some of the questions from the interview. These included question regarding what they desire in a woman so that I could gauge how their responses differed when answering alone with me and with others who (dis)agreed. When I asked focus group participants again about body hair and their desires for women, Adam responded:

That's what makes the woman different, her body, I don't mind uh having hair in certain specific parts on her body um...in general I...like woman to be clean. Just in certain area.

But like I said, down in the genital, like it's okay for me, like yeah.

Hair, for Adam, Musiteli, and other participants, served as the visual representation of the differentiation between “men” and “women.” Further, Adam referred to a woman being hairless not only as “proper” but “cleanly,” as well. Often, when I asked participants about genital hair, the response was that they did not prefer hair due to cleanliness, hygiene, and other such myths surrounding body hair. The idea that hairlessness is cleanly is reflected in colloquial discourse (*e.g.* “clean shaven”).

Ryan, a 20-year-old, Indian American, cis-het man explained to me his distaste for a “bush” or a large amount of hair genitally:

I just think like it's better to sometimes maybe fully shave it, like coordinate with your partner if you're going to do that, because then it could help but like, yeah, if like two people both have bushes then like you don't know what's going on. And, also, it's just like, cleaner. Like in terms of like keeping it clean. It's easier when you have less hair in those areas.

When I asked Liz, a 32-year-old, cis-lesbian, Latina woman, whether she cares if a woman shaves her armpits and genitals or not, she similarly responded, “Yes (laughs). Yes definitely. It's just...um...how should I call it? Hygiene. Hygiene.” In Ryan, Liz, and Adam's discourse, hair on pubic areas is conceptualized as unclean, non-hygienic, and obtrusive. Such ideas, again, are not mere individual preference but are instead shaped by cultural and generational understandings of hair. Herzig highlights that “the normalization of smooth skin in dominant U.S. culture is not even a century old,” with such ideas arising during the same years as the

Cold War with individuals in the U.S. describing “visible body hair on women as evidence of a filth, ‘foreign’ lack of hygiene” (2015: 12). Porn and the framing of sexually explicit material have also shaped cultural ideologies around pubic hair. While pubic hair removal for women went out of vogue after the 19th century, it became popular once again in the 1980s, in part, due to pornographic depictions largely including hairless vulvas (Fahs 2014), and more recently, hairless bodies for men, as well. Cultural discourse surrounding pubic and body hair is, thus, shaped by racialized, gendered, and xenophobic ideologies of the body and hair. The fact that these ideologies are shared by immigrant participants/participants of color does not deny the racialized and xenophobic roots of such discourse, so much as it highlights the internalization of racism, sexism, and xenophobia by immigrants and/or people of color.

As participants conceptualized hair as animal-like, masculine, and/or filthy, they also conceptualized of it as excess or surplus to the human (woman’s) body. Pubic hair shaped their idea of what it means to do womanhood and to be a woman. As such, participant discourse not only was shaped by racist, sexist, and xenophobic ideologies around hair that have proliferated in the U.S. but also cissexist ideologies of manhood and womanhood as opposite, different, and biologically-based. That which is “improper” to manhood/womanhood within white schemas of a gender binary are unnatural, unclean, and undesirable.

I focused, in this section, on participant discourse surrounding terminal body hair, facial hair, and pubic hair in order to elucidate the ways in which gender and sex remain attached to ideas of the natural/unnatural and the biological within cultural discourse. My focus, thus, is not meant to critique or deny individuals’ ability to choose what sexually and/or romantically arouses them in a partner. Instead, my analysis here explicates how individual preferences are not, or not only, individual desires that are either innate or uniquely chosen. Instead, individual

preferences are shaped, consciously or not, by racialized and gendered ideologies, and this cannot be separated from what cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants desired in a woman.

5.3 Trans, Fat, and/or Disabled Bodies as Unnatural

In the last two sections, I elucidated the covert ways in which race, class, and gender shaped participants' desires for women and their ideas of what is or is not "natural." While I have focused largely on how participants made sense of particular parts of the body, I now turn to analyzing how participants made sense of individuals as "natural" or "unnatural." In particular, I focus in this section on how participants made sense of fat-ness, trans-ness, and disabled-ness as "unnatural" and as "excess." In fleshing out participant discourse, I connect their responses to works on the sociology of the body, queer/trans studies, queer/trans of color critique, and disability studies and analyzing "what gets to count as a...normal, healthy, functioning body," (Moore and Kosut 2010: 5) and what counts as a "naturally" undesirable body? Often, when participants spoke of trans-/fat-/disabled-ness they stated that such bodies are unnatural, excess, and undesirable while simultaneously highlighting that it only "naturally" makes sense that they would not be attracted to such bodies due either to psychology or evolution.

At the end of each interview, I asked participants questions about what they thought was socially viewed as desirable vis-à-vis race, skin color, body size, and ability. When I asked Mike, a 24-year-old, cis-het, white man, "Do you think disability shapes attraction," he responded:

Mike: Um I mean I suppose it would depend on what type of disability....you certainly never see a disabled sex symbol.

alithia: Okay, if you had to guess, why don't we see disabled sex symbols or disabled people as sexy?

Mike: Um...I mean...the best answer I can give is more of a...a biological, just...we have sex to reproduce and so usually any sort of physical um...abnormality is considered malattractive and usually it's symmetrical facial features and just a certain level of normativity for sexual attractiveness.

In his response, Mike relied upon evolution, biology, and social Darwinism to make sense of what he perceived as a societal lack of desire for disabled people. Heteronormative notions of what sex is for and why humans engage in sexual intercourse become the cover for ableism and eugenicist ideologies of sexual fitness and the breeding of “healthy” babies. Whereas some participants would state what they felt were social ideas surrounding desire vis-à-vis race, body size, and disability, others, like Mike did not attempt to do so, instead sharing this information with me nonchalantly as though it were taken-for-granted information that did not require caveats or critique. He was not alone in doing so. Several other participants relied on similar bases to couch their ideas of desire. Ky, a 24-year-old, cis-het, Black man, for example, couched many of his answers within pseudopsychological ideas of a science of attraction. Ky explained to me at the beginning of our interview, “I used to study pickup....it's like, there's this literally—this is gonna sound crazy—there's literally a science to attracting a woman.” While, indeed, social scientists can analyze the patterns in practices of attraction and assess what is deemed desirable at any given time on a societal level, Ky and Mike relied upon pseudoscientific notions of what is or is not universally attractive to explain their responses.

Other participants like Spiderman did not rely on “science” to explain their answers but did rely upon assumptions of universality regarding their statements and individual sentiments.

When I asked Spiderman if disability shapes how one is viewed in terms of sexual/romantic attraction, he responded:

Spiderman: Yeah, yeah, yeah, they're viewed different. Man, who would want, I'm not sayin', not meⁱⁱ, but who would want someone who don't have a leg, who can't perform like, like really perform. Like I wouldn't want no woman without, without two legs.

Eventually I'd be like no.

alithia: Okay how come?

Spiderman: Because I like, I like to touch on legs, thighs, I like the way it move, I want, I prefer, I want a see on pants, dresses, panties, and all that, pantyhoses, stuff like that, high heeled shoes, flip flaps, stuff like that. Pssh all that kinda stuff. Finger nail polish, toe nail polish. Stuff like that..... They in a wheelchair and have all their legs, then it's good. Yeah, I'll take a Blind one [laughs] I was just playin'. I'm not desperate, I'm not desperate.

Spiderman, here, was appealing to a “commonsense” logic that it only makes sense that an individual would not want to be with someone disabled. It is important, though, to recognize that what is considered “commonsense” here is “commonsense” only to able-bodied/-minded people who do not actively work to undo ableist ideologies of what counts as a “proper” and desirable body. Further, Spiderman’s response highlighted his desire for a woman who is productive vis-à-vis eliciting his attraction, providing him pleasure, and performing able-bodied, heterosexual sex. Hegemonic masculinities are shaped by ableism and ideologies of productive and complementary bodies (Saczkowski 2011). Spiderman’s ability to enact masculinity relies upon a woman who is complementary to his manhood, both in terms of personality and physicality. Cultural scripts of heterosexuality and heterosexual sex rely upon ideologies of compulsory abledness that presume individuals are able bodied unless otherwise specified. As such, disabled

women do not fit into the cultural schemas of an ideal and complementary partner for men like Spiderman.

Ideas of what it is “naturally” desirable extended, as well, to social regulations of body size. I asked D, a 26-year-old, cis-het, Black man, what kind of body he is attracted to, he responded:

D: Um thick. Thick women. Um not specifically about color but like, you know, they have a good body.

alithia: Is there a point that someone can become like too thick for you?

D: Talkin’ like overweight or something? Um...I can, not too much overweight. Just like thick. Not too much. Thick and fat is two different things. They um...thick, thick is like when you got extra but it’s well maintained. Fat is just something that’s just left there but not taken care of. So with your skin and your body you gotta know how to take care of it to make it, like from thick to fat.

The majority of participants, like D, desired “thick” women (*i.e.* women with slightly larger hips, breasts, and buttocks, wider hips, thin arms, and a flat stomach). However, participants repeatedly differentiated between being “thick” and being “fat,” with thickness as preferable, desirable, and “natural” and fat-ness as undesirable and excess to the body. While fat-ness as excess built through a supposed “lack of control” or “lack of know-how” to “maintain” the body, thickness required, for D and other participants, discipline.

This was exemplified in my interview with Ryan. When I asked Ryan whether body size shapes his desire for women, he responded:

Like not too in shape but not fat, like it’s, like there’s a right thing and that varies for everybody, but I think in general, it’s just more attractive to have somebody that’s in

shape, because that shows, like for me, that they have enough discipline to do that, and discipline's attractive to me, so that's a main thing.

Moore and Kosut highlight, "The 'lived body' is explicitly connected to larger aspects of culture, where it is transformed through carrying out sets of tasks, routines, habits, and performances" (2015: 142). For D, Ryan, and other participants who shared their sentiments, the body overtly functioned as a medium to communicate neoliberal ideologies of discipline, self-regulation, and self-maintenance. By having a body with "a little extra" that is also not too muscular or too thin or too fat, women are able to demonstrate to these men that they have self-control. Thick bodies were seen as productive bodies—bodies productive of joy through food and exercise without losing control, productive of sexual attraction and enticement, and ultimately productive at work and in the house through their learned discipline. While many cis-les/bi women participants desired "thick" bodies and not "fat" bodies, they did not utilize this shared language of discipline and maintenance as cis-het men participants did. In Bartky's (1988) analysis of Foucault, discipline, and femininity, she highlights the role of exercise, diet, and gendered regulation in producing disciplined, docile women. She notes that, while people of all genders exercise and, indeed, diet, that "there are classes of exercises meant for women alone, these designed not to firm or to reduce the body's size overall, but to resculpture its various parts on the current model" (134).

A "thick" body with a small waist, wide hips, large butt, breasts, and thighs, and flat stomach not only requires "discipline" through exercise and diet, but also through cosmetic means. The International Center for Transgender Care describes body feminization procedures to potential clients:

To most people, the ideal female form is the shapely “hourglass”—think of the tiny waist and curvy hips of women like Marilyn Monroe, Scarlett Johansson, and Kim Kardashian. Body feminization surgery is an option for transwomen who would like to obtain this feminine ideal, and for those who would simply like to appear more traditionally feminine. Typically, body feminization surgery includes trunk liposuction combined with buttocks augmentation.

The center’s website assumes a universal desire for a “thick,” hourglass shape, exemplifying the cultural desire for such a body through white, cis women icons, Marilyn Monroe, Scarlett Johansson, and Kim Kardashian. In addition to surgery, women—both cis and trans—are increasingly spending exorbitantⁱⁱⁱ amounts of money on “waist trainers,” which appear similar to corsets but with a more “modern” look that allows them to be worn casually and for exercise. “Waist trainers” train the stomach, waist, and hips to redistribute and reshape fat, muscle, and even bone in order to obtain the same look as body feminization surgery provides, as well. Waist trainers, in particular, highlight the emphasis by D and Ryan on self-maintenance, self-discipline, and self-regulation.

My point, here, is not to criticize or denigrate those who choose to alter their bodies. Feminist activists encourage the creation of a society in which women, cis and trans, are able to choose how they wish their bodies to look and be looked upon by others (Snyder 2008), and the desire to alter one’s body is not inherently an act or wish born out of internalized misogyny. Instead, my point is to highlight the tensions that exist in participants’ desires for a “natural” woman. What is seemingly “natural” often requires work, “discipline,” and other forms of control and alteration. Participants’ desires for “natural” women were shaped by socially

constructed ideas of what is or is not “natural” that have become institutionalized, resulting in individuals taking for granted the idea that some bodies are more “natural” than others.

This was particularly evident in the case of participants’ lack of desire for trans women and their emphasis on a desire for “natural” women as I will show momentarily. In addition, participants often explained their lack of desire for trans women as “natural” due to psychological or evolutionary reasons, as participants did with disabled women above. After showing participants the eight photos of different women, I asked them to select the woman they found most desirable of the eight. Once they had selected the photo and explained their decision, I asked, “So, sticking with her for a second, if you were to meet her, and then she told you she’s transgender, would that change how desirable she is to you?” When I asked Adam this question, he responded:

Yes, it’s, do you know why? It’s, it’s because psychology. You know when you think about how will you be attracted to them? Imagining that person that you see, you know, like I’m imagining that lady being with me in the bed. Will she be a woman of my kids in the future?

Adam, rather than stating that he simply did not want to be with a trans woman relied upon a sociobiological explanation to naturalize and universalize his lack of attraction to them. In doing so, he displaced his non-desire for trans women off himself and upon “nature.” As such, it becomes “only natural” that a cis-het man would not want a trans woman. After all, it is supposedly engrained in him to want biological children with a partner who is capable of providing the egg that would be fertilized by his sperm.

In addition to using sociobiological justification to state that it was “only natural” to desire cis women and not trans women, other participants utilized religious justification. When I

asked Iceberg, a 59-year-old, cis-het, Black man if finding out a woman was trans would change how desirable she was to him, he responded:

Iceberg: Uh...you talk about, she done transed into this [points to image of the woman he found most desirable out of the eight photos]?

alithia: Uh-huh.

Iceberg: No, if she told me, oh no, I couldn't do that. I couldn't do that. Because man made, man made for a woman. You know, everybody have they whatever, but like I said now, I got to believe in the word a little bit. I don't have nothing against it.

Here, Iceberg's reference to "the word" was meant to signify the *Bible* and its descriptions in *Genesis* that "woman" was made from the rib of "man" so that "man" shall not be alone. Thus, the two are believed to be the celestial helpmates of one another. Iceberg did not view trans women as women; thus, his reference that man is made for woman did not ignore that trans women are women so much as it highlighted his interpretation of trans women as men.

The reliance upon the "natural," though, extended beyond participants relying upon "science" to justify their attractions. Others, instead, felt a lack of attraction to trans women because of their conceptualization of trans women's bodies as artifice. When I asked Sheila the same question I asked Adam and Iceberg above, she responded:

Sheila: Um...I know, I know I wouldn't date her, being as she's transgender.

alithia: How come?

Sheila: 'Cuz I don't like that mix. Um it's a little awkward to me. Um...because I know like, you don't have boobs, I'm sorry. And then if you did, because I'm an overthinker, my mind is always gonna be like "these are not your boobs!" Um...yeah. But I mean it's like I would still wanna get to know her.

Sheila assumed trans women could only have breasts if they had undergone breast augmentation. In reality, many trans women are able to develop breasts through hormone replacement therapy. However, what I want to focus on here is Sheila's statement that "these are not your boobs." Sheila conceptualized a trans woman's breasts as separate from her "real" body. The "real" body, for Sheila and many participants like her, was that which is unadulterated and unmodified. The body, in reality, is always altered and modified by its environment on a molecular level, yet that adulteration is not necessarily visible to the eye in the same way that a breast augmentation or other cosmetic alteration is. Trans women's bodies, thus, became, to Sheila, a mix of the "natural" and the "artificial," and that cyborgian enmeshment was unattractive.

Participants' conceptualization of "naturalness" as it applied to women shaped which women they viewed as natural women and which they did not. Many participants, in responding to my question about whether finding out a woman is trans would change how desirable she is to them utilized the language of desiring a "natural woman." Mack, for example, responded to this question by saying:

It would. It would. I mean I'm not even goin, I don't judge nobody, you know what I mean? But um...yeah I really, that's just not my preference. Um I just like natural women.

Ryan similarly responded:

Um yes that would. Uh I would like to like be in a relationship with a natural woman.

For both Mack and Ryan, cis women were "natural" women and trans women were men who appeared as women. In this way, they relied upon a Cartesian dichotomy of the body and the self, with the trans woman's self being woman but her body being that of a man. While they both highlight their desire for a "natural" woman as a preference, it is important to question how much of their preference for cis women is an innate predisposition and how much of their

preference is shaped by a society and culture in which over 75% of US adults have been found to not be attracted to trans men, women, and/or nonbinary people (Bame 2017).

Further, cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants' discourse surrounding trans-ness, fat-ness, and disability were shaped by white, cis-heteropatriarchal, ableist ideologies of what makes a partner desirable. Their reliance upon "commonsense," sociobiology, and ideas of the "natural" were enmeshed in a cultural logic that cannot be neatly teased apart from their desire for "thick," able-bodied, cis women. In each of these cases, they desired women whose bodies were complementary to their own. Disabled women, fat women, and trans women had bodies that exceed that which comprises a desirable woman. Their bodies were either unnatural and abnormal or were "naturally" undesirable due to psychology, heteronormative conceptions of sex as solely reproductive, and/or religion.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elucidated the ways in which womanhood and qualities defined as womanly remain culturally defined in an essentialist manner. Cis-ness, as an ideological and political manifestation, relies upon ideas of the "natural" in conceptualizing what it means to be a "proper" and desirable man, woman, and person. Participants' desires for "natural" women existed in tension with desires for things (*e.g.* well-styled and well-maintained "natural" hair, "natural" makeup, hairless bodies, faces, and/or genitals, thin bodies, "thick" bodies) that require work to appear "natural." Further, their desire for a woman in her "natural" element did not necessarily extend to a desire for disabled women or trans women, both of whom were undesirable due to the seemingly "unnatural" makeup of their bodies.

Musser (2018) highlights that, culturally, individuals wish to be able to see "objectively" all there is to know of a person on their surface. Weaves, wigs, makeup, queer/trans aesthetics,

perhaps, hide parts of the body, yet it is important to ask whether these items cover the body or become extensions of the body. Further, trans-ness comes to be seen as a mystery or a factor that elicits questions upon being seen. Trans-ness blurs others' ability to discern what genitals and secondary sex characteristics lie beneath one's clothes. Trans-ness, thus, destabilizes neat, fixed, and tidy notions of attraction and desire, but the obfuscation of being able to "objectively" know whether one is or is not attracted to an individual simply based on appearance was largely unattractive to participants as discussed in this chapter. As Bey notes, Black-ness and trans-ness "reference the process by which gender is unmoored and unmade as an otherwise way to become a subject in excess of gender" (2019: 55). Black-ness, trans-ness, fat-ness, and disabled-ness all exceed that which was a desirable body for cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants I interviewed. In detailing this to me, they sought to base their answers in sociobiology, religion, and "commonsense," all of which are fixed in racialized, gendered, and ableist logics that have become so institutionalized as to be taken for granted as universal, "objective" truths. Participants were not attracted to that which obfuscates the ability to see all there is to know about a person when looking at them, yet cis-ness, itself, relies upon an obfuscation of the reality that that which appears "natural" and that which appears "unnatural" are both socially constructed and agreed upon notions. In the next chapter, I delve further into the ways cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants discussed attraction to trans women by fleshing out their responses to the eight different photos of women I asked them to rate.

6 CHAPTER 2 – "THAT'S A GUY": CISSEXISM AND ANTI-BLACKNESS IN THE VIEWING OF TRANS WOMEN'S PHOTOS

During interviews with my participants, I would give participants eight photos of women (see *Figure 1*). I would ask them to rate these women on a scale of one to ten as to how desirable they

find them to be with a one being entirely undesirable and a ten being entirely desirable. I would then ask participants to elaborate on their ratings and to select which women they found most desirable out of the eight. Using the woman they found most desirable, I transitioned to explicit questions about trans women. I asked, “If you met this woman and then found out she was trans, would that change how desirable she is?” Continuing from here, we spoke at length about dating, having sex, or forming relationships with trans women and what it would mean to date a trans woman, along with further questions. While several psychology studies have utilized photo ranking in analyzing cisgender people’s desire, or lack thereof, for trans women, the majority of these have utilized predominantly white samples, white vignettes/photos, and/or not engaged in a racial analysis of their data (Gerhardstein and Anderson 2010; Broussard and Warner 2018; Mao, Hauptert, and Smith 2018). In this chapter, I focus on data I collected utilizing photo elicitation and photo ranking. I highlight how each of the women were rated, and I elucidate how race-gender-sexual orientation, education, and class shaped the rankings of women. I illuminate the ciscentricity of Eurocentric beauty standards and the interconnections of cissexism and anti-Blackness vis-à-vis “passability.” Finally, I explicate how participants expressed a lack of desire for “visibly” trans women through coded language.

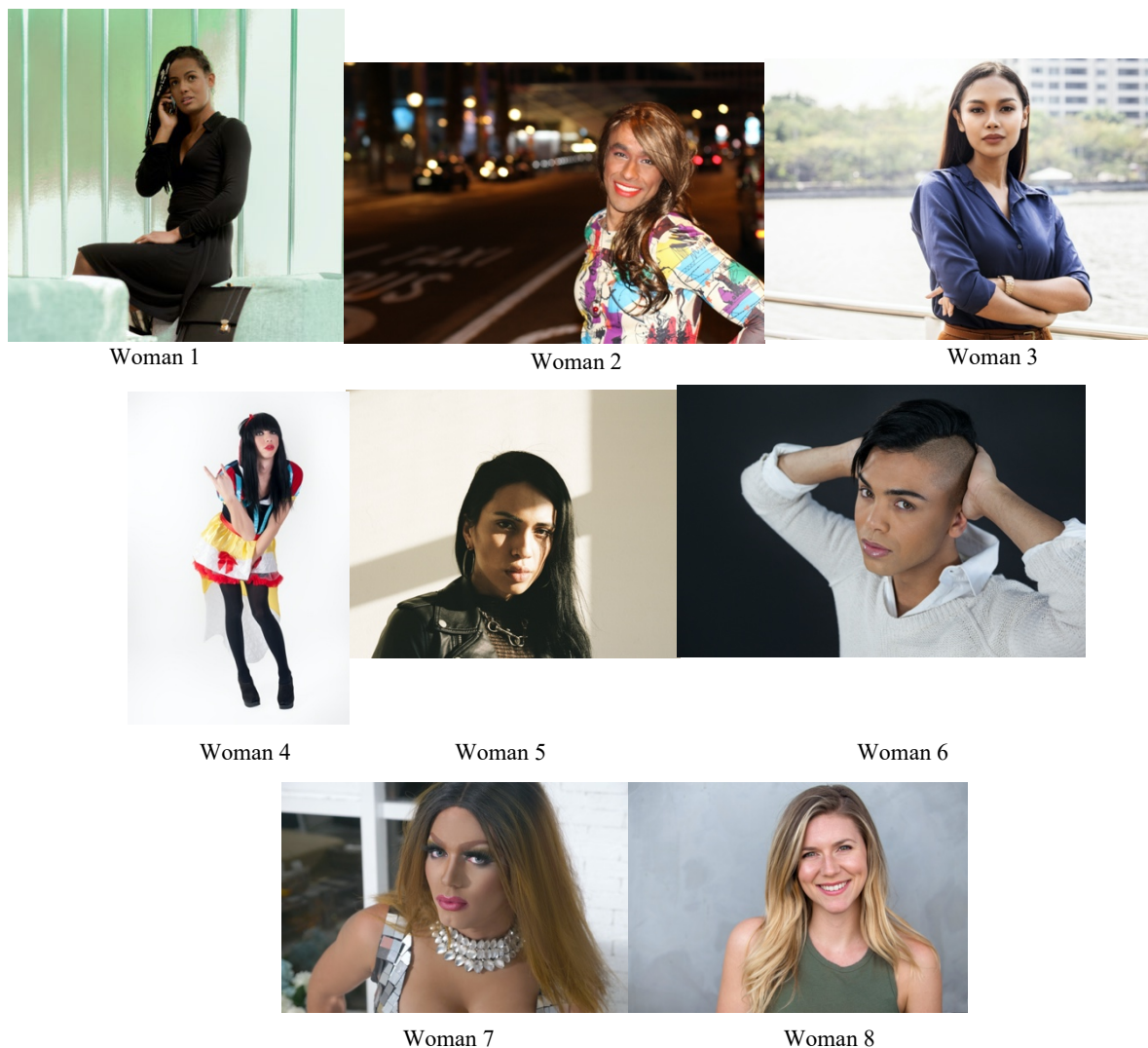


Figure 1. The Eight Photos of Women Used During Interviews

*For reference, woman 1 is a “cis passing,” Black woman. Woman 2 is a “more visibly trans” Latina. Woman 3 is a “cis-passing,” Asian American woman. Woman 4 is a “more visibly trans” Asian American woman. Woman 5 is a “cis-passing” Latina. Woman 6 is a “more visibly trans” Black woman. Woman 7 is a “more visibly trans” white woman. Woman 8 is a “cis-passing” white woman.

6.1 “I’m Gonna Give it a Eight”: Rating Women

The photos of women I utilized in interviews do not represent all trans women. No single photo or collection of photos could represent all trans women or even sub-communities of trans women. In collecting photos, I aimed to find photos of trans women rather than use photos of models who could be cisgender or transgender. At the end of interviews, several participants asked which women were “really” trans. I explained that they all were, and repeatedly, they were

shocked by, in particular, woman 1 (a “cis-passing” Black woman^{iv}) and woman 8 (a “cis-passing” white woman). I felt it important that, when participants found out all photos were of trans women, that they learned to see the diversity of what “trans” looks like. In the process of finding photos of trans women, I sought out photos of women who were not celebrities, activists, or well-known figures. I wanted participants to see photos of random women and any discussion of trans-ness regarding the women to arise naturally from the participants. For example, I could have utilized a photo of producer, director, writer, activist, and actress, Janet Mock, as a representation of a “cis-passing,” Black and/or Asian American/Pacific Islander woman. However, numerous participants, les/bi women in particular, may have known that she is trans.

Throughout, I utilize the term “more visibly trans” to describe those women who did not necessarily “pass” as cisgender, both to myself and to participants. In describing these women as “more visibly trans,” I am simply comparing them to those who were “cis-passing” and not to other trans women outside of these photos. I use the phrasing “more visibly trans,” because, in reality, there is no particular look that is “visibly” trans nor “visibly” cisgender. Instead, in doing gender, individuals are often recognized and/or misrecognized (Pfeffer 2016) as a particular gender/sex. Women described throughout as “more visibly trans” were recognized as trans, while those described as “cis-passing” were misrecognized as cisgender. As I highlighted in Chapter One and as I detail below, “passing” is not necessarily about whether one is truly cisgender or transgender, nor is it about whether one is “really” a woman. Instead, a woman’s “passability” says more about the individual(s) looking at her than it does about her, as “passing” relies upon the interpellation of an individual by another and shifts according to racial, gendered, cultural, and social schemas (Connell 2009). Still, it is necessary to highlight the differentiation in terms

of how various women were interpreted by myself and my participants in order to make sense of participant discourse within a cisnormative society.

Further, photos of random trans women that are available for public use, though, are not aplenty. Even if there were an abundance of photos of trans women available for public use, the photos selected or crafted for any study would not be representative. The data I write about in this chapter are but a glimpse of how cis-het men and cis-les/bi women desire (or do not desire), view, respond to, and make meaning of trans women vis-à-vis these particular photos, but this does not make these data insignificant. Roland Barthes, in his reflections on and theorizations of photography, noted, “It seems that in Latin ‘photograph’ would be said ‘*imago lucis opera expressa*’; which is to say: image revealed, ‘extracted,’ ‘mounted,’ ‘expressed’ (like the juice of a lemon) by the action of light” (1980: 81). Images—as well as data—reveal and express moments in time of particular people and allow the viewer/researcher to extract meaning from—or analyze—what is presented. In what follows, I discuss the rankings of the photos I used in the interviews and analyze participant discourse surrounding each of the women.

While cis-het men participants rated woman one, on average, more highly than other photos, they repeatedly selected woman 8 as the most desirable woman of the eight. Woman 1’s photo was of a “cis-passing,” Black woman, while woman 8 was of a “cis-passing,” white woman. Seven of fifteen cis-het men participants selected woman 8 as the most desirable, another three selected woman 3 (a “cis-passing” Asian American woman) as the most desirable, three chose woman 1, and one selected woman 7 (a “more visibly trans” white woman). The participant who selected woman 7 was the only cis-het man to select a “more visibly trans” woman as the most desirable. This participant, though, was solely attracted to trans women. One additional participant refused to pick any woman as the most desirable. He found them all

undesirable, as he felt all of them were trans women. I write more about this participant in Chapter Three.

In comparison, seven out of seventeen of cis-les/bi women selected woman 1 as the most desirable photo. An additional two selected woman 3, two others selected woman 6, two selected woman 5 (a “cis-passing” Latina), two chose woman 8, one chose woman two (a “visibly trans” Latina), and one chose woman 7. The participant who chose woman 7 was extremely shy and had a difficult time rating the photos and selected a random woman. She did not find woman 7 more desirable than other photos. She was attracted to women “who are more on the femme side,” thus the predominance of feminine women did not make it difficult for her to rate them. She simply did not want to rank photos of women. Rachel, a low income, cis-lesbian, white woman with a college degree, was one of the two women who chose woman 6. She as well explained, “She just looks really cool, and I don’t know, I like her style...I like her sweater, shirt combo and her lipstick.” Rachel was particularly immersed in queer and trans settings and felt a deep kinship to spaces that celebrated gender identities and expressions of all kinds.

Across cis-het men and cis-les/bi women, photos of “cis-passing” women were rated more highly than those that were “more visibly trans,” excepting for woman 6 (see *Table 1*). Woman 6 is a “more visibly trans,” Black woman. She has a short haircut with the side shaved. She wears no makeup other than lip gloss and wears a shirt that could be either a men’s or women’s style sweatshirt. While this was unappealing to most cis-het men participants, many cis-les/bi participants interpreted her to be a stud or butch^v, and rated her, on average, much higher (2.7 and 6.6 respectively). Cis-les/bi women ranked “more visibly trans” women higher than cis-het men participants, but they still ranked them as less desirable than “cis-passing” women. The one exception was woman 4, who was the highest ranked “more visibly trans”

woman by cis-het men (4.5) but lowest ranked “more visibly trans” woman by cis-les/bi women (3.7). While many participants sought to describe “more visibly trans” women as still beautiful, they simultaneously did not view them as the kind of woman they saw themselves with. Further below, I elucidate how participants utilized “polite” but coded language to disregard “visibly trans” women without sounding overtly cissexist.

Table 3. Average Rankings by Sub-Sample

Sub-Sample	Woman 1	Woman 2	Woman 3	Woman 4	Woman 5	Woman 6	Woman 7	Woman 8
Cis-Het Men	7.3	3.2	6.9	4.5	5.0	2.7	2.9	6.5
Cis-Les/Bi Women	6.9	4.8	7.7	3.7	7.6	6.6	4.9	5.3

*For reference, woman 1 is a “cis passing,” Black woman. Woman 2 is a “more visibly trans” Latina. Woman 3 is a “cis-passing,” Asian American woman. Woman 4 is a “more visibly trans” Asian American woman. Woman 5 is a “cis-passing” Latina. Woman 6 is a “more visibly trans” Black woman. Woman 7 is a “more visibly trans” white woman. Woman 8 is a “cis-passing” white woman.

6.1.1 Education and Income

While I was not able to adequately assess how participants ranked photos by race due to my smaller samples of whites, Asian American participants, and Latinx participants, I did assess how education and income shaped participants’ rankings. There were not drastic differences in participant ranking of photos between those with some college and those with a bachelor’s degree or higher. However, differences arose between those with a high school diploma or less and those with some college or a bachelor’s degree. Those with a high school degree or less rated “more visibly trans” higher than those with some college or higher (see *Table 2*). Those with a high school diploma or less still rated “more visibly trans” women lower than “cis-passing” ones, but they found them more desirable than those with higher levels of education did. Participants with a high school diploma or less rated woman 2 a 5.1, woman 4 a 7.2, woman 6 a 5.0, and woman 7 a 5.3 (compared to 4.1, 3.7, 4.6, and 3.9 respectively for those with higher levels of education). While those with a high school diploma or less were not less cissexist in their

discussion of the photos and trans women than those with higher levels of education, they did rank “more visibly trans” women as more desirable than “cis-passing” trans women.

Liz, a 32-year-old, cis-lesbian Latina earned a low income^{vi}; however, she lived with her wife from whom she was separated, but continued to contribute to her livelihood. Liz also was close to finishing her bachelor’s degree at the time we spoke. When I asked Liz to rate the photo of woman 2, a “more visibly trans” Latina, she described the photo in this way:

Liz: Uh...this is a wig [on woman 2]? [pause] um (laughs) [pause] I don’t know. It’s going to be a [pause] 5 [for woman 2]....Because is [pause] she has, I mean she’s a woman. I know she’s a woman, because if she’s dressed up like that and she is, you know, she’s posing like that for the picture, she looks like a woman. So is, she should be considered a woman, but uh in terms of how attracted I am, I’m not because [pause] I see the masculine um [pause; gestures at face]

Alithia: Facial structure?

Liz: Yes, facial structure, so I’m not attracted and I also see that it’s obviously a wig. So yeah, but I’m gonna give it a 5, because it’s, I always appreciate and I always uh admire that, you know, they feel like a woman and regardless of what they are, I, I really, I call it bravery. And I love that, but the question is how attracted I am right? Yeah, so I’m gonna give it a 5.

Liz’s response highlights a disapproval of the wig’s visibility as synthetic hair, rather than real human hair. Such a statement points to her desire for naturality in a woman. Liz’s lack of attraction to a woman due to her wearing a synthetic wig, though, as detailed in Chapter One, is attached to classed and racialized notions of hair and “real” hair. Human hair wigs that use hair grown and harvested from people (mostly women often in the Global South) cost hundreds of

dollars, with some even costing up to two-thousand dollars^{vii}. Transgender women, though, do not always have the financial resources available to afford higher quality wigs that also require higher upkeep than a synthetic wig. Liz additionally highlighted earlier in the interview a desire for a white woman, in particular. While cisgender, white women wear wigs, wigs remain more associated with Black and/or trans women than they do others. Earlier in the interview, Liz explained to me that education mattered to her in terms of her attractions to women. She preferred “women who have some kind of education...They don’t necessarily need to have a Bachelor’s degree...but at least the intention of pursuing one.” Liz’s lack of attraction to this women was not simply out of dislike for a particular hairstyle or a particular wig. Instead, Liz’s description of woman 2 was shaped by raced and classed femininities and notions of desire. Woman 2’s wig and aesthetic, in many ways, exemplified what Schippers terms “pariah femininities,” or the embodiment of those characteristics and behaviors that “are simultaneously stigmatized and feminized” (2007: 96). Woman 2 was hyperfeminine but did not embody hegemonic femininity.

Table 4. Average Photo Rankings by Education

Sub-Sample	Woman 1	Woman 2	Woman 3	Woman 4	Woman 5	Woman 6	Woman 7	Woman 8
High School Diploma or Less	7.8	5.1	7.0	7.2	5.7	5.0	5.3	6.1
Some College, Vocational School, or Bachelor’s Degree	7.3	4.1	7.5	3.7	6.3	4.6	3.9	5.6

In comparison to Liz, Amanda was a 34-year-old, Christian, cis-bi, Black woman who lived in poverty, did not have stable housing, and had not completed high school. Amanda was then only cis woman participant to intentionally choose a “more visibly trans” participant. Amanda desired a woman who looks like she parties and goes out to clubs and bars often. She

did not find woman 2 to be more beautiful than the others, but she liked the way woman 2 dressed. Amanda chose woman 2 “only because it looks like I’ll have more fun with that person, and then just by the background, it looks like they have that street life like that.” Amanda, then, both chose “visibly trans” women not because of their physical features but more so based off dress in comparison to others who found these women unappealing because of their physical features and clothing. Amanda herself wore clothing similar to woman two and had brightly colored box braids, and she desired a woman that was a “hustler...because you know how to get money.” Amanda’s attraction to woman two because she “looks like [she has] that street life” highlighted her particular affiliation for pariah femininities. Amanda did not desire a woman who embodied hegemonic femininities nor white, middle-class femininity. “More visibly trans” women like woman two displayed a pariah femininity that, for Amanda, was desirable not because of how it looked but for what it represented.

Table 5. Average Photo Rankings by Income

Sub-Sample	Woman 1	Woman 2	Woman 3	Woman 4	Woman 5	Woman 6	Woman 7	Woman 8
Below/Near Poverty ¹	7.4	4.4	7.6	5.2	6.4	3.9	4.6	6.5
Low Income	7.6	4.2	7.3	4	6.2	5.7	3.8	6
Middle Class	6.7	2.7	6.5	1.6	6.4	4.6	2.2	4.2

¹ Below/Near Poverty (Less than \$20,000); Low Income (\$20-44,999); Middle Class (\$45-139,999); Upper Middle Class (\$140-149,999); High Income (\$150-199,999); Highest Tax Brackets (\$200,000+).

In comparison to Amanda, Cookie, a 27-year-old, middle-class, cis-homoflexible, Master’s degree-holding, Black woman desired a woman who was, in her words, “equally yoked” vis-à-vis education and income. She was currently going through a separation with her wife, and Cookie had been financially supporting them both while her wife was in law school. Cookie found woman 1 to be the most desirable of the eight photos. I asked Cookie to explain why, and she responded:

I mean, she's cute. I can't say she's necessarily chocolate, but I could tell she's, you know, she's of, of the descent. Um I will say she looks professional which I find attractive.

Something about, um I don't know something about like a, a, a woman in power that I like.

So like leadership type swag like, you know, you know how to dress well you know how to handle your business, whatever, like I love that. Um, so yeah, she would she would be the highest.

Prior to this moment in the interview, Cookie had explained to me that she was most attracted to other dark-skinned, Black women. Woman one had a lighter complexion, but Cookie still desired her because she was of African descent. For Cookie and other Black, cis-les/bi women, race mattered vis-à-vis desirability; in that, they particularly desired other Black women. Further, Cookie, similar to Amanda did not necessarily find this woman to be the most desirable of the eight based on her physical looks. Instead, she desired this woman, as well, for what she represented. Cookie desired a woman who embodied a middle-class, respectable femininity different from the “street look” or pariah femininity embodied by “more visibly trans” women.

Mignon Moore (2006) notes the disdain for transgressive, Black lesbian women who embody a racialized and non-middle-class masculinity. Similarly, many of my participants did not find the hyperfemininity of the “more visibly trans” women to be attractive, in part, due to how they dressed. Woman 2's dress and cheap wig and woman seven's dress, cheap wig, and caked on makeup were often the first things participants mentioned upon seeing these two photos. The differences between Amanda, Liz, and Cookie were emblematic of differences between numerous participants of differing social classes. The embodiment of pariah femininities rather than a respectable, professional femininity by photos of “more visibly trans” women was less

desirable to middle-class participants and/or participants with a college education. Further, their expression of said femininity also correlated with participants perceiving them to be trans.

This was particularly exemplified in my interview with Mack a 28-year-old, middle-class, cis-het, Black man who was in the process of finishing his Bachelor's degree. Mack described woman 2 in this way:

Mack: Um, her face is too bold for me. A one [for woman 2]. Her face is too bold.

Alithia: Too bold, what do you mean?

Mack: Um like strong, manly picture. But [clears throat] I think it probably be a man, but [pause] that's who she wanna be you know? But that's not my type. Yeah, so probably be a one. Yeah, her weave is all fucked up too see? Her weave is fucked up son. You know what I'm sayin? And he didn't even do his eyebrows right. He looks like, he's confused, not confused about being transgender, but he's not doin' it right? You know like he's, he's not, he doesn't take care of his hair. You know what I'm sayin'? And then them eyebrows are fuckin' hideous. If you're gonna do it son, get your eyebrows done. The red makeup, like it looks you just did it just to do it. Like I don't get it. This is a cheap, very cheap, yeah it's, that would be, if it was still my type, that's still not my type. It's cheap. That's ratchet. Too ratchet son. Ratchet, ratchet, ratchet.

Woman 2's more "visibly trans" appearance rendered her "masculine" and "manly" for Mack, Liz, and other participants. Mack, too, criticized the woman for not passing as cisgender. Her "failure" to do so rendered her "performance" as woman a poor performance. If she is "going to decide" to be a woman, then she must be the ideal of middle-class, white womanhood. Her wig/weave must be high quality and well groomed, her eyebrows must be thin and arched, and her makeup must be more "natural". Mack's perception of this woman as trans was, in large part,

shaped by classed understandings of femininities. Her aesthetic represented a lower class look that rendered her Other than woman. Cis-het men and cis-les/bi women's discourse regarding photos of trans women explicated the role class plays in terms of "passability." Class not only shapes the opportunities trans women have to pass (*i.e.* through attaining hormone replacement therapy, gender affirmation surgery, or other gender affirming needs). Class also shaped, for my participants, the ways in which women's bodies were viewed, with professionally dressed women wearing minimal makeup viewed as more desirable than other women. Indeed, middle-class participants rated photos 1, 3, and 8 most highly, all of which are women who appear more professional, in business clothing, and/or with a muted aesthetic.

6.2 "That's a Question Mark": Race, Passing, and the Discourse of Desire

In the previous section, I focused on the numeric ranking of photos by education and income, and I discussed the ways in which class shaped notions of "passability" and "proper" femininity. Now, I flesh out the ways in which "passability" and race shaped participant attraction to the photos I provided during interviews. As part of my analysis, I include word clouds that capture the most frequent words used by participants when discussing each photo (see *Figures 2-9*). I use the word clouds to aid in elucidating how participants conceptualized hyperfemininity as masculine and the different ways Blackness, whiteness, and mixed-ness/racial ambiguity were viewed and referenced by participants.

As I described in the previous section, participants, on average, did not find more "visibly trans" women as desirable as they did "cis passing" women. This finding was not surprising. What did surprise me was how participants often conceptualized woman 2 and woman 7 as masculine. These two women both wore dresses in bright and flashy styles, wore long hair with makeup, and visible cleavage. Despite their hyperfeminine appearance, participants repeatedly

felt a lack of desire to these two women for “strong” and/or “masculine” features. Among the most common words used to describe woman two were “masculine,” “woman,” “man,” “ratchet,” and “sharp” in regards to her facial features—in particular her jaw bone. While some participants did still refer to her as a woman, just as many referred to her as a man, because they did not feel she was “really” a woman. The word “ratchet,” here, comes from African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Black YouTube performer, Philip Hudson, explains, “Ratchet is basically a lack of home training—being out in public and acting like you don’t have any sense. Putting a weave in the microwave jut to curl it, that’s ratchet.^{viii}” As I show momentarily, woman 2 repeatedly was referred to as ratchet in regard to her wig and her clothing. She was simultaneously described as both over the top and not “doing well enough” at “trying” to be a woman. Woman 7, as well, was repeatedly referred to as “masculine.” While some participants did note her femininity, they did so to highlight that she was “too” feminine, as if her femininity were an over the top performance or an ill curated performance. Her “too caked on” makeup, wig, and strong arms were invoked to refer to her as a “man” by numerous participants.

For example, when I asked Adam, a 35-year-old, low-income, cis-het, Middle Eastern man who was in the process of finishing his Bachelor’s degree, about woman 7, he described the photo as such:

Alithia: Okay, what about [number 7]?

Adam: Uhh, you mean this man? [pause] No. No....I think it’s fake. Everything is fake....I’m being generous giving her a one.

Alithia: Okay [both laugh]. Is it because everything is fake or?



Figure 2. Woman 1

Figure 3. Woman 2

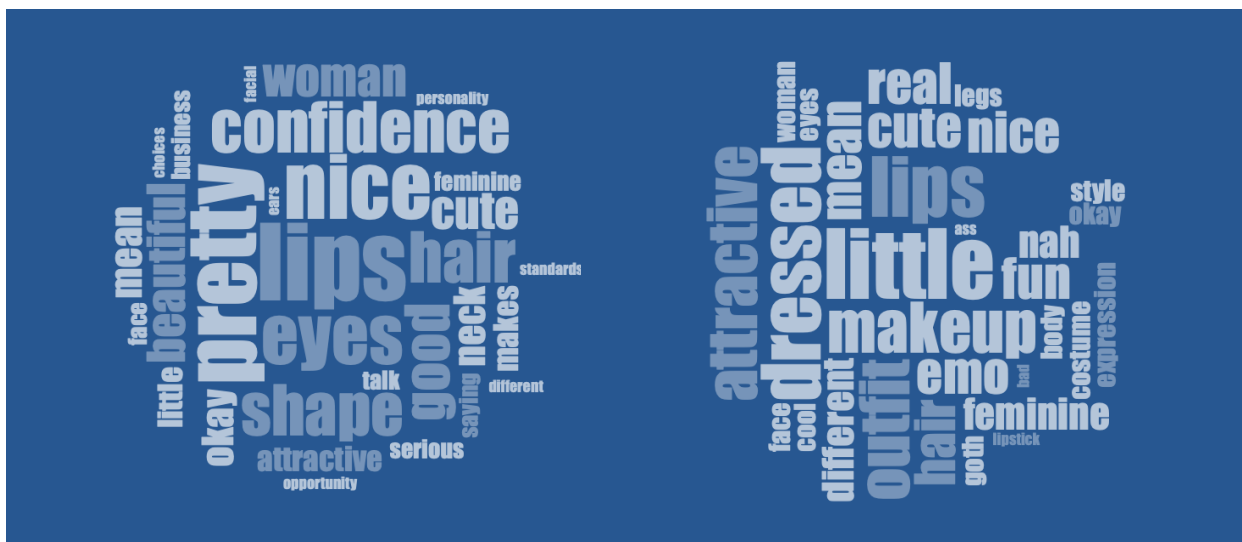


Figure 4. Woman 3

Figure 5. Woman 4

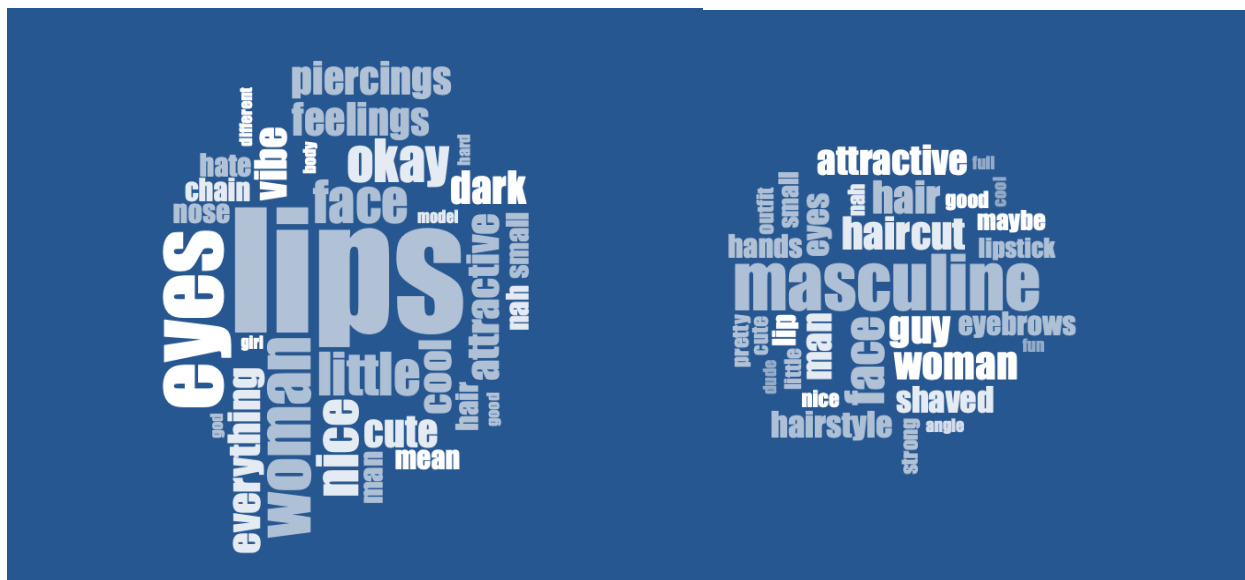


Figure 6. Woman 5

Figure 7. Woman 6

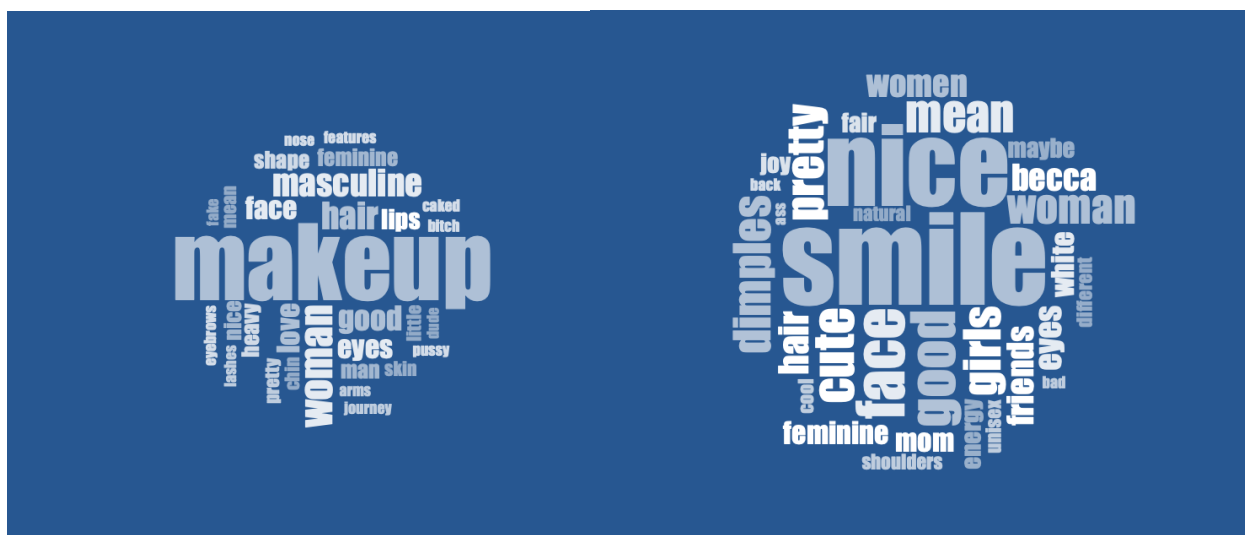


Figure 8. Woman 7

Figure 9. Woman 8

Adam: Yes and it's masculine, it's like [pause] it's like having [pause] why [pause] woman has, woman should not have, good shape, you know, it's okay like you know...being in good shape and but not masculine. Because she's a woman. Masculine is mostly for men.

If she playing a sport, understandable. Like, she is doing a challenging thing but [pause] yes. Uh that's why I don't like her, to me, is like a guy.

Adam's description of masculinity as something for men denies the lived experience of studs, butches, masculine straight women, and intersex women who have physical traits often deemed "masculine." For Adam, a strong figure with muscular arms and shoulders corresponds to a man's body. Adam, much like other men, conceptualized women as individuals meant to complement a man. Norms of hegemonic masculinities and femininities, in which hegemonic masculinities are those masculinities that are different, "opposite", and complementary to hegemonic femininities, shaped participants' responses to these photos (Connell 1995; Schippers 2007). A man "is supposed" to have muscles, a large body, a strong figure, a broad jaw. A woman "is supposed" to be dainty, small, and narrow. The woman must be able to fit into the physical and metaphorical crevices of a man. She is nurturing while he is protecting. She is weak while he is strong. She is soft while he is rough. A woman's masculinity rids her, for Adam, of her womanhood. She becomes not only no longer woman but no longer desirable. Further, despite woman eight wearing an enormous amount of makeup, a flashy, camisole-cut dress, long blonde hair, and bright lipstick, she remains conceptualized as masculine.

While sociologists and scholars of women's, gender, and sexuality studies distinguish between gender expression, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth, that simply is not the case for the majority of cis-het men participants I interviewed. Cis-les/bi women accepted that women can be masculine or feminine, as many of them either were studs/butches, dated studs/butches, or felt they were neither masculine nor feminine. Even they, though, conceptualized more "visibly trans" women's bodies as masculine. Others, such as Kylee who, herself, was a stud, desired masculine features on "cis-passing" women but not on more "visibly trans" women.

Hyperfemininity, instead of deeming a body feminine, remains separated from the “visibly trans” woman’s “masculine” body. Any semblance of an assignment of male at birth relegates her body to the realm of masculinity for participants like Adam. While participants conceptualized masculinity and femininity more flexibly for other cis people and photos of “cis passing” women, masculinity and femininity were conceptualized as rigid categories that did not overlap. “Masculine” features of a body overpowered, in a sense, the hyperfemininity of dress that trans women in these photos may indeed have been utilizing as a way to pass. Paechter (2018) notes that the differences between hegemonic femininities and masculinities are actually not that great in extent. Instead, the difference is in the mobilization of power. Similarly, cis and “cis-passing” women are able to mobilize and utilize power through hegemonic femininities and hyperfemininities, while “visibly trans” women are unable to do so.

These notions of what is a feminine body and what is a masculine body are not only sexist and cissexist, but they are also dyadist; that is, they are endemic to the discursive and material oppression of intersex people. Intersex people assigned female at birth with what is medically termed congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) may develop clitorises that are larger in size—and may indeed even resemble a penis—“or labia that look like a scrotum,” as well as “dense body hair, a receding hairline, deep voice, prominent muscles,” and other “masculine” traits. If they are “untreated” before going through puberty, intersex people assigned male at birth with CAH may, on average, be much shorter as adults than others (ISNA 2020). Cis women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) may develop facial and body hair in “a male pattern” (Bode, Seehusen, and Baird 2012). What is masculine and what is feminine when the human body does not naturally fit into dyadic categories of sex and gender?

Indeed, even participants felt confused about bodies as they discussed them. Spiderman, a 45-year-old, cis-het, Black man high school graduate living below/near poverty, felt that woman 7 was a man, and I asked him to explain why. He responded:

Spiderman: I can tell by the um [pause] the, the, the, the chin. And right here, the chin and the shape, and right here [points to the chin dimple].

Alithia: What about women who have the dimple? So women can't have a dimple?

Spiderman: I've never ever seen a woman like that.

Alithia: No? My mom as a dimple.

Spiderman: Really? Oh! I've never seen that.

The physical features participants discussed were often contradictory, arbitrary, or entirely nonsensical, such as Spiderman's here. I did not bring attention to it for fear of outing myself, but I too have a chin dimple. During the interview, though, Spiderman did not question my chin dimple. On the contrary, he commented on his physical attraction to me and suggested we date after the interview. A chin dimple on woman 7 who is "more visibly trans" made her a man. However, a chin dimple on a "cis-passing" woman, such as myself, is not even recognized as there. Cis women and "cis-passing" women's bodies are given greater latitude to do masculinities and/or to have "masculine" features, while more "visibly trans" women are punished for these qualities even when doing hyperfemininity.

Kylee, a 19-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman living below/near poverty who was in the process of finishing her Bachelor's degree, for example found "masculine" facial features appealing on "cis-passing" women but not on those who were more "visibly trans." Kylee found woman 1, a "cis-passing," Black woman, to be very desirable. When I asked her to explain why, she told me:

Kylee: Um she has a nice nose, nice jawline. She has nice bone structure, yeah.

Alithia: What about her bone structure and her nose is nice to you?

Kylee: Um [pause] it's just like sharp. I like sharp features yeah. Um, symmetrical I guess.

I like her hair too. It's long. Yeah.

Shortly after, though, Kylee explained that she did not find woman very desirable. She rated her a four on a scale of one to ten, and I asked Kylee to explain her reasoning. Kylee explained:

Kylee: Um...maybe uh too sharp. Too sharp yeah.

Alithia: Of facial features?

Kylee: Yeah sharper facial features.

I was unable to get Kylee to explain further. She, in general, was not a particularly talkative participant but was even more reticent when discussing the photos. However, in these small exchanges during the interview, Kylee highlighted a desire for sharp features with woman one before, and, soon after, Kylee did not find a woman desirable because of her sharp facial features. Both woman 1 and woman 2 have flatter, broader jaws, often attributed to individuals assigned male at birth. Woman 2's face, though, is longer, with a longer jaw, longer forehead, and a more prominent nose than woman one. Woman 2 is also more "visibly trans" because of these features. "Masculine" facial features made woman 1 a ten out of ten for Kylee, but on a "visibly trans" woman, those features functioned to make her less desirable.

It is important, as well, to highlight the raced desire for a smaller jaw in a woman. While, in the U.S. and other parts of the West, a more narrow, v-shaped, soft jaw is characterized as a desirable, "feminine" jaw, such a jaw is more likely to adorn the faces of white women. Zhuang et al. (2010) highlight that "Hispanics^{ix}," African Americans, and Asian Americans have a greater bigonial breadth than whites. Bigonial breadth is associated with the breadth of the jaw, meaning

white women have more narrow jaws, on average, than women of color. Indeed, “during slavery...Black women with darker-skin hues, kinky hair, *and broader facial features* tended to be field slaves” rather than enslaved within the household, around enslaved masters, their families, and their guests (Patton 2006: 26; my emphasis added). The desire for a narrow jaw reflects cissexist and racist desires for particular women. One common facial “feminization” procedure for trans women is a mandible and chin contour, which involves the shaving down of jaw and chin bone, smoothing out the area, and creating a narrow, soft jaw. Richie (2018) notes, “Attempts at medical feminization [for cis and trans women] are constitutive of a white, youthful, exaggerated ideal.” Whiteness and cissexism function in tandem in the conceptualization of a desirable, “feminine” face.

This same process occurred across participants. “Masculine” features repeatedly were praised on “cis-passing” women and disparaged on “visibly trans” women. Peaches, a 24-year-old, cis-bi/queer, mixed Black woman with a Bachelor’s degree and living below/near poverty, found woman 3, a “cis-passing,” Asian American woman to be “really cute.” Peaches rated her an eight out of ten, and explained, “She gives me like um [pause] I like, she has a smaller neck, I like her neck too, and I like that like her shoulder blades are out and like really prominent.” In comparison, Jake, a 23-year-old, low-income, cis-het, Black man with a Bachelor’s degree, found woman 7 to be entirely undesirable. He referred to her as a “dude....pretending to be a woman.” I asked Jake repeatedly to explain to me why he found her unattractive and believed her to be a man. Each time, he would tell me, “You can just tell.” Finally, I asked, “Let’s say I’m an alien coming from outer space. I don’t understand human genders. Explain it to me.” At this point, Jake was able to shift out of his belief that it is merely “commonsense” that everyone can tell who is a woman and who is a man and the qualities that make up each category. Jake said:

Okay, look at this, you see this arm right here? That shit is too muscular. Now you got women who work out, alright? But that shit is too muscular, and let me tell you why. It's because, if you look right here [points to shoulders], like bruh you can see this shit.

On “cis-passing” women, participants, like Peaches, found more prominent features like strong shoulder blades to be attractive. At the same time, participants also found muscular arms, prominent shoulders, and other “large” bodily features to be unattractive on more “visibly trans” women. On “cis-passing” women, such features result in them being viewed as more attractive than they otherwise would be seen to be. On more “visibly trans” women, these features come to distinguish them from “real” women and to be used as “evidence” that they are not cisgender.

While it could be argued that these characterizations of bodies as desirable or undesirable are merely relegated to the level of preference or individual taste, these characterizations come to form part of a larger structure cissexism within the U.S. These same sorts of contradictory, arbitrary, and nonsensical ways of conceptualizing, gendering, and sexing bodies proliferate on blogs across the web “warning” cis-het men about what to look for in a woman to spot a “tranny.” One blogger encourages cis-het men to ask girls to do an “elbow” test, for example. Amante (2015) explains that when a cisgender women stretches out her arms and her elbows are facing the floor, the arm will bend and arc at a 195 degree angle, while a cisgender man’s elbow will not entirely unbend, only unbending to a 158 degree angle. Others, like Pattaya Nightlife, explain to cis-het men traveling to Thailand how to take care not to take a “ladyboy” home. Much as participants conceptualized hyperfemininity as masculine, this tourist blog explains that excess marks a person a Khatoey and not a “woman.” They explain, “Ladyboys do not just exaggerate their femininity; they exaggerate everything! Every word and action is excessively flamboyant.” This exaggeration marks a woman as not only “unnaturally” feminine but

“unnaturally” a woman. While these characterizations may seem strange, wild, or confusing to some, they come to form the logic of others.

What influenced my participants’ notions of a desirable woman also influenced the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s proposed regulation under 24 CFR Part 5 to allow homeless shelters to refuse service to transgender people. In these regulations, HUD offered ways to know if a woman is transgender or not. To identify who is trans and who is cis, Hud offered “reasonable considerations,” which “may include, but are not limited to a combination of factors such as height, the presence (but not the absence) of facial hair, the presence of an Adam’s apple, and other physical characteristics which, when considered together, are indicative of a person’s biological sex” (2020: 20). Who, for the Trump administration, counted as a woman and who did not? Must cisgender women with facial hair also sleep on the streets if homeless? Must cisgender women with higher levels of testosterone resulting in more prominent Adam’s apples be excluded from women’s shelters? Ideas of who is desirable, what constitutes a woman, and what constitutes a desirable woman are part of the same discourse used to qualify some for rights and others for marginalization.

Standards applied as to what counts as a “real” woman versus a “tranny,” as well, are not only cis-centric but also Eurocentric. Amante’s (2015) blog, for example, highlights that readers must look at a woman’s hands and feet to determine if she is a woman or a “tranny.” People categorized as Black, though, tend to have larger hands and feet than those categorized as white^x. Garn (1990) finds, “Hand lengths and foot lengths (or metacarpal lengths and tarsal lengths) are approximately 1 standard deviation (SD) longer in American Blacks” than in whites. Amante too, warns of a “man” nose, or in other words, a large nose on a woman, while others warn of large foreheads, for example. The depiction of certain noses as not womanly or less than

womanly also proliferates within anti-Semitic and anti-Black discourse. The desire for small, narrow noses is a Eurocentric desire. White noses have been found to be longer and more narrow than Black women's (Ohki, Naito, and Cole 1991). White foreheads, too, have been found to be smaller than Black women's (*Ibid.*). What comes to qualify a woman as a woman is not merely gendered but raced^{xi}. Cis-centricity and Eurocentricity are bound together in what constitutes a woman and what, in particular, constitutes a desirable woman.

Further, those who fit cis-Eurocentric standards of beauty and are white come to shape the ideal of womanhood. Hegemonic femininities that shaped participants' discourse above regarding the photos of women used during interviews are not only cissexist but also anti-Black (Collins 2004). Participants repeatedly described woman one and woman eight in varying, racialized ways. Among the most common words stated by participants about the two were Black and white, respectively, which is not surprising, given that woman one is Black and woman eight is white. It is surprising, though, that this is the case given other women's races were not as invoked as these two. The two, as "cis-passing," Black and white women were also ranked among the most desirable women, with cis-het men on average rating woman eight as the most desirable and cis-les/bi women rating woman one as the most desirable. Participants across race-gender, though, differed in how they responded to the races of these two women.

Musiteli, a 24-year-old, cis-het, low income, Black man attending a technical school, was particularly attracted to Black women. However, he desired light-skinned women more than dark-skinned women. He acknowledged during the interview how colorism influenced his attractions, but he did not have any sense of urgency or desire to undo this influence. In regards to woman 1, Musiteli told me that he would rate her a nine. When I asked him to explain why, he responded:

Um I guess the symmetry in the face um, jawline um.... has like attractive, I don't know how to describe it, it's like um [pause]I guess it's well-defined. Um, um I like her hair, I like her hair, that's uh, that's really attractive, Black so she gets a, she gets a bonus in my head automatically [both laugh]. Or she could not be, but the shading of the background throws it off. But if she is, she gets one, an extra point, but if she's not, she gets an 8, which is still good.

While non-Black participants did not often desire Black women over white women or other women of color, Black cis-les/bi women and some Black cis-het men participants, like Musiteli, specifically became more attracted to a woman if she were Black. Musiteli could see himself talking to, getting to know, and dating. Black participants were more likely than others to prefer monoracial partnerships.

In comparison to Cookie and Musiteli, Ryan, a 20-year-old, cis-het, Asian/Indian American man living below/near poverty and in the process of attaining his Bachelor's degree, was uncertain regarding woman 1 specifically because of her Blackness. Talking to me about woman one, Ryan stated:

Ryan: She seems to have a fit body but uh just her hairstyle is like not really speaking to me personally.

Alithia: How come?

Ryan: Um I don't know, I've never dated who, who's Black and I've never like had any experiences with like somebody with that kind of hair, like I've never even yeah, like yeah my friend's Black, I've like touched his hair before but like never in like any other situation, so I'm just not familiar with it really and same with just dating a Black person in

general. I'm not against it but I just have no experience with it so that's why I'm just like kind of like on the fence, but she seems attractive yeah.

Rather than explicitly saying he is or is not attracted to Black women, Ryan tried to center the conversation on his uncertainty with and lack of proximity to Blackness. Ryan did not make similar comments about other women, though. Woman 1's hair, though, is in long braids, draped to one side. From the picture, one cannot decipher woman one's hair texture. His discourse, here, was also choppy than in other parts of the interview. When I asked him why he did not like woman 1's hair, his thoughts became scattered and his words turn into a ramble with no clear direction. Hair, in essence, became an easier object to fix his attention on in saying that he is unsure if he could find a Black woman attractive or develop a relationship with a Black woman. Hair is something that is styled in numerous ways, is easily changed with weave/extensions, wigs, and hats. It is something that people have preferences in and speak openly of their preferences in hair. For example, it would not be uncommon to hear a straight man say he would not want his girlfriend to shave her head bald. To say that one does not want to date a Black woman or is unsure if they want to becomes more explicitly racist. The four non-Black, cis-het men I interviewed all chose women who were not Black as the most desirable of those photographed. Two of 11 of Black, cis-het men and 9 out of 17 of cis-les/bi women (six of whom were Black women) found woman 1 or woman 6 to be the most desirable.

Two cis-het, Black men and one cis-het, white man found woman 3 (a "cis-passing," Asian American woman) to be the most desirable, with no cis-het man finding either Latina photo to be the most desirable. Two cis-les/bi, Black women, found woman 3 to be the most desirable, two found woman 5 (a "cis-passing," Latina) to be the most desirable, and one selected woman 2 (a more "visibly trans" Latina).

Those who chose these women were more likely to fetishize “foreign,” racially ambiguous, and/or mixed-race women. Gee, a 38-year-old, low income, cis-het, Black man with a Bachelor’s degree, for example, found “exotic and foreign women” to be the most desirable women, with a particular desire for Dominican, Colombian, “Hispanic,” and immigrant Black women. Vincent, as well, an 18-year-old, middle-class, cis-lesbian, white woman in the process of attaining her Bachelor’s degree, was particularly attracted to “ethnically ambiguous” women. When I asked Vincent whether race shapes her attraction to women, she explained:

Vincent: They’re normally either pretty uh ethnically ambiguous or uh Hispanic.

Alithia: What do you think maybe attracts you more to ethnically ambiguous and Hispanic women than other women?

Vincent: Um I mean they tend to have like black (color) hair, curlier hair, stuff like that.

Uh I’m just gonna sound super weird but it’s the eyebrows. You know? Like it’s a certain shape in em....Like thicker? More, like not unibrow thick but like... [trails off and digresses]

Alithia: Do you have any hesitancy dating other women?

Vincent: I have never really been attracted to like the blond haired, blue eyed, kind of white women. I think I, yeah, I dated a couple Black women. But that's not like...when I think of my type I don't normally think of a Black woman.

Vincent and other white, cis-les/bi women repeatedly attempted to distance themselves from whiteness throughout interviews. Vincent’s lack of desire is not for a “blond haired, blue eyed,” white woman but, instead, for what she represents. Vincent is not attracted to that *kind of white woman*.

Vincent and other cis-les/bi, white women repeatedly attempted to distance themselves from whiteness. In this process, white womanhood was conceptualized as bland, heterosexual, ignorant, and unexciting. Vincent's desire ignores the fact that Latinx and/or ethnically ambiguous women may in fact be Black and/or multiracial. Still, the "ethnically ambiguous" woman is far enough away from, yet similar enough to, whiteness in comparison to the "obviously" Black woman. In interviews with multiracial and multiethnic individuals, Waring highlights how "racial ambiguity, gender and sexuality intersect to generate intimate opportunities that...are unavailable to non-racially ambiguous women" (2013: 308). Waring's participants even pointed to the gendered-racialized work white women and Black women do to appear ambiguous by tanning and/or straightening their hair respectively. Stepanova and Strube's research (2017), as well, found "mixed-race faces [to be] perceived as more attractive than single-race faces." The women Vincent is attracted to have dark, curly (but not tightly coiled) hair, thick eyebrows, and, although she does not say it, light skin. Gee, for example, desired "exotic and foreign women," because they were a mystery, a "question mark" in his words, that he could learn and grow from.

Ryan, too, desired particularly racialized women. Toward the end of interviews, I asked all participants whether everyone is entitled to their own preferences and/or whether individuals should problematize their preferences. Ryan felt that everyone should be able to desire whatever qualities they desire in a woman without critique. He felt that individuals' preferences would change on their own if they were meant to. To explicate this, he told me:

I've had phases before like where I like, liked certain like, I can just talk about it, I had a phase where I really liked Asian girls in like, it was like for one year in high school, and like and my friends would all make fun of me for that, cuz like it was like a really apparent

thing. Like Oriental Asian girls, like not like Asian or Middle Eastern, like none of that, it was just like Oriental Asian girls.... Chinese, Korean, Japanese, it was just that, but it only lasted for like a year.

Ryan believed his preference was merely a fleeting occurrence that happened out of nowhere. Yet his desire for East Asian women reflects a colorist, Indian hierarchy of desire in which “the lighter you are, the higher on the hierarchy you stand” (Koh and Thanapal 2015). Ryan continued to have a lack of desire for Black women at the time of our interview. Southeast Asian women are more likely than East Asian women to also have darker skin, and it is here that the connection between a lack of desire for Blackness and a preference for “Oriental” Asian-ness connect. The white woman and the East Asian woman both form the ideal of Western, hegemonic femininities.

Mack, too, fetishized Asian women, as well as Latina women. Mack’s fetish, though, was for particular Asian women, much like Ryan’s. Mack had told me he prefers to date Black women and that he would not date a white woman. I asked him whether he had any hesitancy dating Indigenous, Latina, and/or Asian American women, to which he responded:

I love em. I love em. Latinas, Asians, Indian. I don’t like the hairy Indians though. I don’t like hair, nah you should’ve asked hair on the arms, do that count? Yes, like oooh, I’m sorry! I understand that it comes naturally, it’s just something, I don’t want a hairy girl or facial hair....Um [pause] Indians, I don’t really like Indians as much as I like everybody else. Cuz the smell on Indians like...the other side a Guyanese, so my girl’s Black Guyanese, the other side of Guyanese is like y’all n****s stink. Like y’all smell like curry all the time, son.

Both Mack and Ryan desired Asian women, and in Mack's case Latinas, who hold greater proximity to whiteness. Mack's fiancée at the time of the interview was Afro-Guyanese, and while he preferred Black women at this time in his life, he had previously preferred Latinas and Asian American women. As highlighted in Chapter one, Mack's aversion to hairy women is both cissexist and racist. The desire for hairless, smooth-skinned women arose in the U.S. through Darwinian logic that posited women were supposedly less hairy than men because of men's natural selection of "superior," hairless women as mates historically, which "bred out" the possibility of hairy women (Herzig 2015). Odor, too, is not mere, individual preference. Odor historically and contemporarily figures into typologies of race. The racialized disgust with particular smells can be traced, for example, to the 1700s, with novels and works of nonfiction characterizing Black people as having "bestial or fetid smell" (Tullett 2016).

Woman 8, a "cis-passing," white woman, for example was repeatedly referred to as "nice," "mom," "Becca/Becky," and other similar words. Becca/Becky, here, was a reference by participants to a particular representation of white women who are racially ignorant, prone to harming Black people by calling the police, for example, and hypersensitive to being critiqued or called out for their racism. Non-Black participants and Black cis-het men participants repeatedly viewed woman eight as someone who "looks like their mom" or a woman who could be a soccer mom in a suburban neighborhood. Viewing someone as a mom is not, generally, a particularly sexy conceptualization in U.S. society. Despite this, seven cis-het men participants found woman 8 to be the most desirable. Five of these seven were Black men, one was Middle Eastern and white-passing, and one was Indian/Asian American. Only two cis-les/bi women selected woman 8 as the most desirable. One was Black, and the other was a Brown, Latina woman who desired white and/or light-skinned Brown women only. Interestingly, no white participant selected

woman 8 as the most desirable. Black, cis-les/bi women, in contrast, were more likely to express a discomfort with dating white women or a lack of desire for white women. Cookie, for example, found woman 8 to be the least attractive of the photos presented. When I asked her why, she explained:

Cookie: The challenge I foresee with her is, you know, like the cultural thing, the racial cultural thing, um [sigh] it's, I don't know it's hard. Because like I said, I mean I could be friends with someone all day. But my thing is like when I'm dating or when I'm, cuz I also don't do a lot of dating like it's all about connection to me and building [pause] it's I don't have like flings or like late night stands or whatever. So it's like, you're in my life if I've shared things with you, you know, we're building something, whether it's a friendship or whatever of some sort.

Alithia: And her whiteness might make that hard?

Cookie: I mean, we could, like I said we could have, like my best friend is a white guy, his, well I don't know if I could say his name, my best friend is a white guy and like, we've been friends since seventh grade. And I love him to death. I mean, he's a guy. So it's a little different, you know, but it's like, as far as intimacy and telling you my deepest, darkest secrets and fears and, you know, going to your family's house and expecting to be looked at the same as if you brought some white guy or white girl there, it's gonna be completely different. And that's scary. And it's kind of uncomfortable. Because I've gotten so much, you know, kind of hatred or looks or whatever, because of my Blackness, because of my hair, because of my you know, orientation or whatever.

Cookie, here, highlighted the amount of vulnerability present within a relationship. As a Black woman, she remained vulnerable everywhere in society (*e.g.* at work, at school, when driving,

and even when at the movies). She sought a relationship where she did not have to face anti-Black violence, and she could not trust a white woman to wholly embrace and love her Blackness. Cookie also pointed to what Steinbugler (2012) terms “race-work,” or the labor that individuals in interracial relationship do to negotiate differences in racialized lived experiences and racialized power dynamics. Whiteness, for Cookie, presented an unknown that was not enticing as the unknown of “ethnic ambiguity” or “exotic women” was for Vincent and Gee. The unknown of whiteness did not, for Cookie, present opportunities to learn, grow, and share in cultural enrichment. Instead, the unknown of whiteness presented opportunities to be harmed and let down.

In comparison, Mack focused on what woman eight would bring to the relationship sexually, physically, and potentially in ways that would benefit Mack. Flipping the pages of the photos to woman eight, Mack exclaimed:

Becca! (both laugh). Becca, damn, actually, it depends on her personality, but...off first looks, I'm not hollerin' at Becca (laugh). I'm not gonna lie, but nah. Becca don't got no ass or none of that. Yeah, Becca don't, Becca don't have no ass. I'm not hollerin' at her, her lip is skinny. Her top lip is very skinny. Becca look like she, we could smoke though. You know, we'd be cool. She cool. We'd smoke gas. She look like she'd give me some money though. Let's start a daycare together, Rebecca. Looks like she's got a daycare too. She's a soccer mom. She's totally down for that. I can see that in Rebecca.

Woman 8 is not particularly exciting. Mack's comments on her lips and butt point to a lack of sexual enticement. Woman 8's whiteness made her approachable, trustworthy (with children), and safe, allowing Mack to want to be her friend. Cookie and other Black women found a lack of ability to trust white women or a discomfort in being with them. In contrast, cis-het, Black men

like Mack found white women to be bland, unappealing, and not particularly noteworthy. Cookie did not find white women to be noteworthy, but she did not easily dismiss her either. For Mack, woman 8 is a joke. For Cookie, woman eight is a worry. While stereotypical “Becky’s” might call the police on Black men and in this way present trouble, Mack and the majority of cis-het, Black men I interviewed lived in racially segregated areas and mostly interacted with Black people, meaning that there was a lesser chance of interacting with white women and thus having to worry about them. In contrast, Cookie and other women like her worked in multiracial environments that did not provide the same distance.

White participants, too, found woman 8 to be bland and unappealing. Randall, a 33-year-old, low income, cis-het, white man with a high school diploma, felt that woman 8 was too familiar to be desirable. Ranking woman eight, Randall stated:

Um, I think superficially you know, eight or nine [for woman 8] but um...it also looks so generic and bland. Like I've seen that person 100 times on these, these apps [laughs]. Yeah, I mean, again, again nice smile, but it's just so plain. You know, I went to church with this girl I think growing up so.

For Randall and other white participants, woman 8 presented an already known, already had experience. There was nothing different between her and other white women on Tinder, OkCupid, or any other dating/hook-up app they were on. This same comment was not made about the other women, though. There are also many Black women, Asian American women, and Latina women who utilize these apps for intimacy, yet for whites, it is white women like woman 8 who present a “generic,” over-supplied product. This became apparent in their photo rankings and selections of the most desirable woman in the eight photos, as well. Both cis-het, white men participants chose a woman of color as the most desirable. One selected woman 3 (a

“cis-passing,” Asian American woman), and the other selected woman 1 (a “cis-passing,” Black woman). Two cis-les/bi white woman chose woman 1, as well. Another chose woman 3, and a final woman chose woman 7 (a “visibly trans” white woman). As I stated earlier, no white person chose a white person as the most desirable of the photos.

During our interview, Vincent explained his response to woman 8:

I wouldn't date her....I just feel like...I don't know... hmmm...knowing nothing about her, I'm gonna say something about her. Um I just feel like she'd have like a really limited perspective...on everything....Yeah. Kind of realized throughout this interview I'm kind of trying to distance myself from whiteness and being white. Like, I am white and I...have moments where I will like be ignorant or say something ignorant, but like...I don't know. It's not like...she's not any more white than me. And it doesn't even work like that. So I don't really know.

Vincent, Randall, and other white participants were not somehow less white vis-à-vis personality, less violently white, or less physically white. However, when presented with a “cis-passing,” white woman, they found her undesirable. In lacking desire for white women because of the women's whiteness, white participants did not merely reject these women and prefer and pursue women of color. Instead, their romantic choices and pursuit of women of color coincided with an unacknowledged, perchance subconscious, distancing of themselves from “those racist whites.” In doing so, they allowed themselves to cease doing the work that whites must actively engage in to challenge racism. Vincent, though, was only one of two white participants to begin to realize this during the interview.

In addition to a viewing of whiteness as bland and unappealing, white cis-les/bi women participants also conceptualized whiteness as heterosexual, and a white-passing, cis-het man

participant viewed woman 8 as more feminine than the other photos. This can be seen in the following exchange between Amy (a 37-year-old, low income, white, cis-lesbian Latina who had taken some college classes previously), Vincent, Rachel (a 22-year-old, low income, cis-lesbian, white woman with a Bachelor's degree), and Adam:

Amy: Can you have straight energy in a picture? [All women laugh.]

Vincent: I wouldn't say that but yeah [laughs].

Amy: 'Cause that's yeah, I couldn't remember everyone in these but then I was like oh yeah, the straight chick [all women laugh.]

Vincent: Mmm heterosexual. Yeah gotcha.

Rachel: This is also present in some of like the other photos, but she's like apparently happy and like warm; whereas, some of the other photos come off as more like serious or intimidating.

Adam: Yeah, that's true, and I totally agree with her, and she has that traditional look and um that smile. Makeup and long hair, I believe other women are kind of like more masculine and um...yeah. To me, as a man, I think she's attractive more than other pictures?

Repeatedly in interviews, white, cis-les/bi women referred to woman 8 as appearing heterosexual. Focus group participants were also shocked when I told them woman 8 is transgender. What is conceptualized here as traditionally feminine, warmth, kindness, and heterosexually are intimately connected to woman 8's "cis-passing" whiteness. Woman 2, for example, is seen smiling, staring at whomever is taking her photo. Yet, Adam and Rachel conceptualize woman 8 as the only photo that is not intimidating, masculine, and/or closed off to others. Woman 1 and 3 are also feminine, but their confidence is found intimidating. These

views of Black women and Asian American women as intimidating, cold, and/or masculine are informed by controlling images (Collins 1990) of Black women as the “Matriarch” and Asian American women as the “Dragon Lady” (Lee 2018).

Cis-ness and whiteness here worked in tandem to produce a particular version of womanhood. Woman seven, too, was white. However, she wore flashy, hyperfeminine, exaggerated clothing and makeup. She was more “visibly trans,” and did not fit ideals of white, hegemonic femininities. Woman 8, though, as a “cis-passing,” white woman became the warm, kind, nurturing counterpart to the intimidating, cold, and masculine trans women/women of color. Anti-Blackness, whiteness, and cissexism are intertwined in these conceptualizations of woman eight by white/white-passing participants and Black men participants. In this section, I have detailed how cissexism, whiteness, and anti-Blackness functioned jointly in participants’ conceptualizations of a desirable woman. White supremacy, colonization, and anti-Blackness birthed cissexism and binarism. As such, they continued into the present, hand-in-hand, in the discourse of my participants.

6.3 “It’s Not My Type of Woman”: Gender-Blind Language

In his analysis of colorblind racism, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva conceptualized “abstract liberalism” as the use of “ideas associated with political liberalism (*e.g.* ‘equal opportunity,’ the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (*e.g.* choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters” (2014: 76). An example would be whites stating that they simply prefer to date other whites and should not be forced to date individuals of color—but “*they are not racist.*” A similar form of discourse operated in my interviews with cis-het men and cis-les/bi women. Repeatedly, individuals utilized a language of preference and individual choice in tandem with coded language that I explicate below to

highlight a lack of attraction to trans women without explicitly saying they are not attracted to trans women. Doing so allowed them to shift any culpability off themselves, as they believed individuals should be free to date whomever they desire. However, they simultaneously did not want to appear transphobic.

I analyzed participant discourse, in part, through an attention to their speech patterns and body language. I categorized participant discourse as coded language when their responses relied heavily on tautological reasoning, were highly repetitive with participants having difficulty explaining what they meant, were more incoherent due to an increase in usage of speech fillers (*e.g.* um, uh), and/or coincided with more reticent or nervous body language. When relevant, I highlight how their body language and responses jointly shaped my analysis in this section.

Henry, a 26-year-old, cis-het, Black man living near/below poverty and in the process of attaining his bachelor's degree, for example, did not find woman t2 to be particularly attractive. When I asked Henry why, he responded:

It's not my type of woman, but um, um just what I'm naturally attracted to. Just never been naturally attracted to um...Just because it's not that she's ugly, like she's definitely not ugly (laughs). But it's just I guess it's not my type, and I guess 'cause it's like I said. It's not my type.

Henry attempted repeatedly to say woman 2 is just not his type of woman without ever admitting that a trans woman is not his type of woman. With each photo of "more visibly trans" women, he repeated, "It's not my type." While he otherwise sat with his legs open wide, his arms relaxed on the chair arms, and a smile across his face, during these moments, his body shrank in, legs slightly closing and hands coming together, as he stopped smiling and his eyes bounced around the room rather than maintaining the eye contact we otherwise had throughout the interview. I

asked Henry, as I did all participants, if the woman he found most desirable told him she was trans, would it change how desirable she was to him? He responded, “Uh yeah, only because I’m not into trans women.” With each woman who was more “visibly trans,” he rambled as he did above to say, “It’s not my type of woman.” He did not want to appear judgmental; thus, he did not refer to a woman’s trans-ness until explicitly asked, assuming that by not referring to it, he was not perpetuating cissexism.

At the end of the interview, I asked Henry if there was anything else he would like to share, to which he replied:

My dad is one of those people that shuns, “Oh, look at that boy-girl, look at that this-that,” and I grew up with that, and I got to Atlanta and it was like “Pssh, like look around you, there are plenty of trans people,” and like they’re, it showed me that they can you know, people can work together and still accomplish and do whatever, it doesn’t take away from the fact that they’re less than people. They just made a choice to do that....Like literally some of the coolest people I’ve ever met were trans, so no, seriously, like my, my cousin, her best friend is trans, and I was like, she’s like dope! Like if you ever met her, she’s really, I mean she’s a business woman, but she’s really dope, I was like this is, this is cool.

Henry made an appeal here to individual rights, equality, and the ability to for all to have access to opportunities to survive and thrive. I did not ask any participants, though, about workplace discrimination, work opportunities, or the like. Instead, his comment here, as the ending comment after telling me he would not date trans women, was meant to signal to me that he was not cissexist. Trans women can exist around him. He can spend time with them, even find them “cool,” but he simply cannot date them.

Other participants less explicitly used coded language to signify a lack of attraction to a trans woman. Cookie, for example, spoke to me of woman 2 saying:

Um... I swear I know her [woman 2]. But nah she was cool. That was my boo if that's her. It might not be but it very, very well might be um it's so funny....I would say like 4, that would be my, that would be my homie. We would have a lot of fun. Beautiful smile.

Without context, such a comment would not seem noteworthy. Cookie found the woman undesirable but still beautiful, with the potential to be the best of friends. However, shortly after, Cookie spoke to me of woman seven. Cookie told me, "I, I've dated a trans woman, and it was great. Like, I love her, still talk to her to this day. Um...But I haven't...I've never experienced anything other than pussy." In both cases, Cookie was unsure of whether or not she could date a trans woman. She attempted, though, in woman 2 to say this by saying that they could be friends. Cis-les/bi women repeatedly made similar rhetorical maneuvers, explaining that "more visibly trans" women were beautiful but unattractive to them and that they could not be lovers, but they could be friends. In these cases, trans women are covertly relegated to the realm of friendship and out of the realm of desire. They are not someone who can be desired but someone with whom it is enjoyable to spend time.

Others, like Janelle, an 18-year-old, middle-class, cis-queer, Black woman in the process of attaining her Bachelor's degree, cited dress, makeup, and aesthetic as a particular reason that they found a woman less attractive. As Janelle flipped to woman 7, she remarked:

Okay this, this woman is gonna get a 1 [woman 7]. As in like, would I go up to her and be attracted to her and whatever. But like if I saw her, I'd be like go off sis, but like I'm not attracted to her. I just...like...a woman who is more natural. And I'm seeing a lot of like flashiness and it's too much.

Janelle celebrates and embraces woman seven's attire but is overwhelmed by woman 7's hyperfemininity. Often, participants like Janelle desired a natural look rather than one that was more "flashy" or "exaggerated." As Amber Jamila Musser notes, there exists a cultural desire in which individuals wish to be able to see "objectively" what, who, how, and all there is to know of a person on their surface (2018). Makeup, flashy, hyperfeminine, and/or exaggerated clothing, jewelry, weave/extensions, and wigs, rather than being seen as an extension of a person, become seen as a covering up of what is "natural." Black, Latinx, and/or trans aesthetics, though, exist amidst excess, surplus, and plurality (Rodriguez 2014; Ellison 2017; Musser 2018). A focus on dress, hyper-femininity, and makeup, additionally, ignore the reality in which trans women live. Trans women must appear resolutely feminine to others lest they are questioned or denigrated for their gender, as seen in Mack's comments earlier on in this chapter. Makeup additionally allows a woman to contour her face, allowing her to portray a face that is societally seen as more "feminine." While participants like Janelle desired a "natural face," they also conceptualized women's faces, such as woman six who wears little to no makeup, as masculine. Trans women are caught in a double bind. On both ends of this bind, cis participants discussed facial structure or aesthetic as the reason for a lack of attraction rather than explicitly saying they did not desire trans women, yet the facial structure and the aesthetic are a part of trans-ness.

Coded language, as in the case of Henry, Cookie, and Janelle, allowed participants to present gender-blind arguments as to why they were unattracted to "visibly trans" women. Rather than overtly stating that they thought these women were "dudes" or "ugly" or other such remarks as others made in the previous sections, they invoked language of preference, friendship, and individual choice. Rather than make their comments less egregious or unproblematic,

though, this discursive maneuver merely allows cissexism to remain harder to find, more difficult to root out, and more insidious.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how race, gender, class, and education, shaped participants ranking of photos of women in regard to how desirable each woman was. Each of these factors mattered in terms of how, in particular, “more visibly trans” women and/or Black women were ranked. Those with a lower level of educational attainment and lower incomes rated “more visibly trans” women and/or Black more highly than others. It is important, of course, to recognize that across these categories, “visibly trans” women and/or Black women were still ranked lower than others. For example, even though those with only a high school diploma or less rated “visibly trans” women more highly than those with a college education, they still rated “visibly trans” women lower than they did “cis-passing” women. The differences, here, were by gradation. Further, I have detailed how classed and raced norms of femininities shaped the ways in which “more visibly trans” women’s bodies were interpreted, with white, “cis-passing,” and/or professionally dressed women being viewed as more desirable by participants.

I have additionally elucidated how photos of “visibly trans” women were viewed as masculine even when appearing in hyperfeminine attire. While cis women and “cis-passing” women are able to have the same physical features (such as a chin dimple) or dress in hyperfeminine attire and still be viewed as feminine, women like woman seven who wore hyperfeminine clothing but did not “pass” as cisgender were conceptualized as masculine. Further, I have highlighted how participants’ dislike of particular facial structures, musculature, larger physical features, and facial/body hair are imbricated in cissexism, anti-Blackness, and whiteness. Finally, I have pointed to the importance of attending to gender-blind, abstract

liberalist rhetoric utilized by participants as a way to covertly “prefer” cis women and not “prefer” trans women. This rhetoric not only perpetuates cissexist logic and discourse but simultaneously was difficult for participants themselves to speak. Henry, for example, could not form a concise sentence regarding woman 2 not being his type of woman. It became difficult for participants to explain their “preferences,” because preferences are often assumed to be up to the individual and not something to be questioned, altered, and/or problematized.

To end, I want to highlight the gendered differences in how cis-les/bi women and cis-het men responded to and ranked the photos before turning to why “preferences” and desire matter. Throughout the interviews, cis-les/bi women, across race, had a harder time ranking and discussing photos of women than cis-het men did. Two cis-les/bi women participants would rank a woman or respond to a photo and immediately follow their response with an apology. An additional six cis-les/bi women explicitly told me that they had a difficult time doing the ranking. Two women who had the most difficult time rating women and repeatedly signaled discomfort with ranking women were both white; one was middle-class and the other lived off parental income that fell in the highest income tax brackets. In comparison, only one cis-het man had a difficult time ranking. This participant’s difficulty, though, lay in his desire to know more about their personalities, who they were, and for greater context. Cis-les/bi women, in contrast, found it hard to rank not because they needed more context. Instead, they simply did not want to attribute numbers to other women. Women, more than men, are expected within U.S. society to remain polite and to be kind, nice, and compassionate toward others. In addition, cis-les/bi women participants were women ranking other women. Women often experience being gazed upon, objectified, and ranked by others, and women who were uncomfortable ranking other women may have intimately known this. Part of this difference in gender, though, was also about race.

“Politeness” and keeping quiet are often constitutive of white womanhood, and the desire to not speak about others, to appear reticent to speak is a performative act (Ross 2013). Some women I interviewed found it too difficult to say anything other than a number, wishing simply to move on to the next women and end that part of the interview as quickly as possible. At these times, I focused on their body language, wrote field notes regarding their body language after the interview, and included these data in my analyses above.

Desire, much like politeness, is imbricated in racial-gender-sexual power dynamics. I have explicated this through photo rankings and an analysis of participant discourse regarding the photos of women included in the interview. I sought to problematize, in this chapter, the sentiment of the majority of participants that “preferences” should be left to individuals, as people “cannot choose who they desire.” Desire, rather than being simply about who individuals wish to fuck, marry, or date, is shaped by and shapes the “matrix of domination” (Collins 1990).

Eurocentric-ciscentric standards of beauty shape life chances. Light-skinned, Black people are able to gain prominence in fields in which dark-skinned, Black people are otherwise absent. Women, like woman 8, who is “cis-passing” and white are viewed as kind and motherly. They are both desired by men and less likely to be viewed as a threat by men. Desire and attractiveness influence employment opportunities, income, and loan approvals (Hamermesh 2011), social networks (O’Connor and Gladstone 2017), and even health (Weeden and Sabini 2005). The anti-Black, cissexist discourse and ideologies of participants I interviewed, while focusing on who they find attractive, simultaneously shaped their responses in the subsequent two chapters regarding the murders of Black trans women. These two issues are not separate issues. Instead, the same set of symbols circulate in the discourse of participants regarding both.

“Thinking cis,” or understanding the world through a cisgendered epistemology, perpetuates and is perpetuated by anti-Black, cissexist violence and hierarchies of desirability.

**7 CHAPTER 3 -- “THEY DON’T KILL US BECAUSE THEY HATE US. THEY
KILL US BECAUSE THEY HATE WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE US”: THE
ENTANGLEMENTS OF DESIRE AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE**

In season 2, episode 9 of the Emmy Awarded show, *Pose*^{xii}, a group of Black trans women friends go on a girl trip to a beach house outside Manhattan. Sitting at a table in an otherwise cisgender, heterosexual, white country club, Blanca (MJ Rodriguez), the main protagonist of the show, explains to the other girls that the lifeguard at the beach earlier that day just asked her to take a walk with him. Elektra (Dominique Jackson), Blanca’s mother^{xiii}, responds, “You obviously said no.”

Blanca: No, I said yes. That man is fine. Plus, it’s been a cute minute since I had a man show me that kind of kindness.

Angel (Blanca’s daughter; played by Indya Moore): Take it for the team.

Elektra: You’re insane! It’s unsafe for girls like us to walk in the middle of the night with a stranger. You know you can’t trust a man once the sun goes down.

LuLu (Blanca’s sister; played by Hailie Sahar): That’s true!

Angel: Oh, I didn’t think about that.

Blanca: That doesn’t make any sense!

Angel: Yes, it does. You know these men are afraid of their desires for us. They take it out on us all the time.

Elektra: That’s probably what happened to Candy [one of Elektra’s daughters who had previously been murdered by one of her johns]. They don’t kill us because they hate us. They kill us because they hate what it means to love us.

Blanca: So, am I supposed to just live in fear for the rest of my life? Die without ever knowing love?

LuLu: Maybe you could just meet him for coffee or something before we head back.

Angel: Yeah girl.

Blanca: Where's the passion in that? Listen, I know y'all care for me, but I have to trust my instincts on this one. I'm going.

Elektra: Wait! If you're going to go, at least take this.

At this point, Elektra hands Blanca a switchblade. Angel then proceeds to remove brass knuckles from her purse for Blanca, and LuLu hands her a taser. Fortunately for Blanca, the man she meets does not come to harm her and does not feel bothered by her trans-ness. Instead, he finds her the most desirable woman he's come across yet as a lifeguard.

As a trans woman, I know all too well the risks of dating and interacting with cis-het men. Countless times prior to passing as a cisgender women, I have been threatened by men who yell in my face demanding to know "what I am," who are disgusted by my presence and threaten to physically harm me, who so despise me that they threaten to kill me. I, too, like Elektra, LuLu, and Angel carry on me at all times a knife, taser, and pepper spray, ready to be attacked at any moment. While many women may fear for their physical safety when out in public, those fears are often heightened for trans women—particularly for trans women who are not afforded the same protections my whiteness and "cis-passing" privilege affords me.

In the scene above, Elektra highlights that it is not mere transphobia that gives rise to trans murder. She argues instead that cis-het men kill trans women not simply because we are trans but because we are trans in their presence, and they desire us. Indeed, in my interviews with cis-het men and cis-les/bi women, participants highlighted how interactions with a trans woman

not only repelled or confused them but changed how others would see them. Being with a trans woman does not simply highlight that a person desires this individual woman. Instead, being with a trans woman elicits questions regarding one's manhood and heterosexuality, and for others their womanhood and lesbian identity. Violence functions to reconstitute one's gender identity and sexual orientation—to place one back in a “straight orientation” in the words of Ahmed (2006) or an “upright position” in the words of Strauss (1952) and Salamon (2018). Violence also enables one to renew their position within hierarchies of masculinities (Pascoe 2007; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and ensure that their manhood remains confirmed and validated by other men (Bourdieu 1998).

Salamon (2018) explicates this in her phenomenological analysis of the murder of Latisha King. Salamon notes, “In the trial of Brandon McInerney, the cis-het, white student who murdered [Latisha King], it became clear that Brandon's murderous rage toward Larry [*sic*] was being described as a defense not of Brandon's person or body, but of the integrity of his sexual identity” (5). Latisha was described by Brandon, his girlfriend, staff and teachers at the high school, and others as provoking a response from others by dressing in “women's” clothing, walking in heels, donning makeup, and requesting to be referred to as Latisha. Latisha's very being provoked and taunted the cis-het, white student body, staff, and faculty of her school. Brandon McInerney felt compelled to get rid of her to, in his words, “make everyone's life better” (2018: 153). Latisha's life as a Black trans girl became a problem to solve, and the solution lay in murdering her without apology. Brandon McInerney is not alone in these sentiments nor have these sentiments faded away in the decade since Latisha's murder. In my interviews, it was not uncommon for cis-het men participants to state that certain situations justified the murders of trans women. While no cis-les/bi woman sought to justify the situation,

many spoke of trans women as deceptive, dishonest, and duplicitous, and discursively shifted the blame onto trans women. In this chapter, I analyze participants' discourse to exemplify the tensions between desire and disgust, murder and self-recuperation, as they relate to the ways in which the participants gestured to and spoke of my body. I then elucidate how cis-het men and cis les/bi women participants constructed potential partners as symbolic of themselves, and how they simultaneously constructed violence as symbolic.

7.1 Tensions of Desire and Disgust

I met Josh, a 28-year-old, cis-het, Black man, outside a convenience store in East Atlanta in late afternoon while the sun was still up. Another participant, Iceberg, a 59-year-old, cis-het, Black man, had offered to take me around his neighborhood and introduce me to people he knew to potentially interview for my project. Iceberg and I pulled up to a parking lot housing a convenience store and barber shop, side-by-side with a gap between the two creating a makeshift alley. The building was large enough to have space for several aisles within the store but not enough space to carry a plethora of options. In actuality, it was more the size of a large gas station but without gas pumps located in the vicinity. Next door stood a small barber shop, both buildings bearing faux-brick walls with faux brick columns holding up the fronts of the roofs. The parking lot stalls had mostly faded so that only a few were still visible near the entrance of both buildings. A few men, young and old but all Black, stood in front of both shops speaking, but Josh stood alone staring out at the parking lot. Few vehicles were parked, and few people could be seen through the windows of either shop.

Upon parking, Iceberg stepped out, shook hands with Josh, told him I was doing an interview, and asked if he would participate. It was rather quick, and it was not entirely clear from their facial expressions if they knew each other or if Iceberg was just extremely amicable.

Iceberg stood watch outside the car to make sure that nothing would happen since I was interviewing a stranger in my car. Josh had been leaning against a concrete pillar under an extended roof of the convenience store.

During the interview, two or three young Black individuals I assumed to be men walked past my car to enter the convenience store. Josh mostly paid no attention to who was walking past us; however, he stepped out momentarily to speak with one individual. Josh dapped the other individual in greeting him (or in other words, bumped this individual's knuckles with both of their fists closed). They spoke for about twenty seconds, but I could not tell what was said from inside the car. Aside from that individual, our interview remained uninterrupted.

Immediately upon sitting down, Josh asked, "Are you a man or a woman?" I was taken aback by his question, because he was the only cis-het man participant who verbalized that question or insinuated that I was anything but a cisgender woman. I quickly told Josh that I was not trans, as I did not feel safe disclosing that information to him. In daily life, I do not tell strangers I am trans out of my own fear of harm. Past experiences of being threatened by cis-het men have resulted in me keeping my trans identity a secret to those with whom I do not have a platonic, romantic, or sexual relationship. Josh responded, "Prove it...show me your pussy." As he said this, he glanced down to my legs and back to my eyes, waiting for my response. After a couple minutes in my car, he had told me that he carried a gun for protection. While I should have ended the interview at that point, I trusted that Iceberg would not let anything happen to me, so I continued. I falsely told him I had a boyfriend who would not approve of me doing so, and if he felt uncomfortable continuing the interview because of this that we could stop before we even started. Josh seemed uncomfortable that I would not show him my genitals, but he was ultimately willing to move on with the interview.

As we progressed past demographic questions, I asked Josh, as I did all participants, what he preferred in a woman. Josh nonchalantly told me, “Um if it’s a man tryna be a woman, I will go to jail for murder. I hate *women*. I don’t like *wo-men*. I like women. Straight women.” Quoted here, Josh emphasized the word woman as two words interconnected, signifying a difference between a woman and a wo-man—the latter being “a man tryna be a woman.” I asked Josh why he would go to jail for murder, and he explained, “Because if a man try me on a sexual tip, I will get so angry [pause] and use my weapon. But I’m a very nice person. ‘Cause I don’t play like that.” For Josh, trans women were not women. Instead, trans women were gay men who pretended to be women in order to sleep with straight men they desired. I wanted to know what Josh’s thoughts were about trans women who had undergone gender affirmation surgery and asked if his response would be different if the woman was “born a man” but had a vagina. Josh responded, “No...I would kill him and be happy... ‘cause I [pause] I don’t [pause] I’m a, I’m a, I’m a product of my environment.” When I attempted to probe further, he simply reiterated that he is a product of his environment.

While I began the interview thinking that I was not “passing^{xiv}” as cisgender at that moment, I began to realize that Josh was perpetually paranoid that any woman he looked at may be transgender. He was the only participant to question whether the photos of “cis-passing” trans women were transgender. However, he did not simply question but instead stated, “Yeah, that’s a man right there,” laughing occasionally and pointing out how the women had “manly noses,” “manly shoulders,” or had the face of someone who “turned hisself into a she-male.” This included woman 8 (*see Chapter 2 for photos*), who participants in a focus group had been shocked to discover was trans. For Josh, all women were trans unless proven otherwise. As I

flipped from one photo to the next, Josh increasingly became paranoid that I may be trans. He asked me,

Josh: Can I see if you're a man or a woman please?

Alithia: I'm a woman, but I'm not showing you my vagina.

Josh: Can you stand up; can I see your shape please?

Alithia: Yeah after.

...

Josh: Can I see please? You got me scared.

Alithia: No, you cannot see my vagina.

Josh: I'll show you mine.

Alithia: I don't wanna see your penis.

Josh: I'm getting scared.

Me: Well, we can stop if you want.

Josh's body language remained the same throughout his questioning of me and my body; however, his eyes darted back and forth from my eyes to my chest to my groin. At this point, Josh said to continue with the interview. Interestingly, Josh's paranoia that I may be a "she-male" did not stop him from simultaneously being attracted to me. At one point in the interview, I asked Josh whether he believes that attraction is shaped by race, if at all. He stated yes, to which I probed for further explication. Josh told me, "Um...a white woman like you with a Black girl body, it's wonderful to me. I would marry you." Josh was referring to the fact that I am a tall, white woman with thick thighs, an ass, breasts, wide hips, and a flat stomach—or in other words, that I am "slim thick," a bodily adjective that some Black participants highlighted had increasingly become popular in society through the proliferation of Black culture. As we

continued in the interview, Josh bluntly explained, “I know a lot of people want you [alithia] and I do.” I asked, “Why do you want a woman that everyone else wants?” and Josh responded, “Because they ain’t never...they haven’t had none of her yet. I wanna be the first one to have her. Because I always be the first at things.” At another point in the interview, he stated, “ I don’t want the girl everybody already hit and ran through. I want the girl everybody want. I want cunt like a Kim Kardashian. Khloe. They little sister, Kylie. I want one a those. Mhm.”

For Josh and other cis-het men participants (11/15), the woman they chose to be with served as a signifier of who they are to the world around them. To be with a white woman who has a slim-thick body and olive undertones, and who wears long, bright acrylic nails not donned by other conventionally white women, short skirts, and tight crop tops or tube tops that reveal cleavage, signified racialized, gendered wealth. This sort of racialized, gendered wealth was an example of what González-López (2005) terms “capital feminino,” or a value accorded to the perceived “purity” of a woman. Josh did not want just any woman who looked like me. He wanted a woman who looked like me who had not yet had sex or formed relationships. The idea of “purity” and wanting a woman who no one else has yet experience is rooted in both patriarchy and white supremacy. While historically, unwed virgin women were “worth more” when purchased by their husbands (Carpenter 2005), today, virginity comes to constitute a different form of capital accumulation. For Josh, an “untouched” woman comes to signify a masculine capacity to attain such a woman, as well as the power to prevent the woman from having sex with others. This symbolically raises his masculinity in the hierarchy of masculinities in comparison to men around him. Additionally, Josh’s desire for a white woman no one else he knows has been with yet is rooted in the racist, historical conceptualization of white women as

“sexually pure” and African Americans and Indigenous peoples as “promiscuous” (Carpenter 2005). Josh did not want any, untouched woman. He wanted an untouched *white* woman.

Josh was a drug dealer who allegedly made \$80,000 per year, owned numerous cars, and had his own house. I say allegedly because it is unclear if this was the case. Iceberg later explained to me that Josh was simply a street level dealer and did not earn the amount he claimed. Whether Josh or Iceberg told the “truth” is insignificant, because in both cases, Josh’s bragging about his earnings, wealth, and possessions was an attempt at displaying his racialized, gendered wealth to me, a white woman “with a Black girl’s body” that he wanted to have and parade around on his arm. To Josh, a woman was another possession that allowed him to display to others that he was the epitome of what his peers, other dealers, and those he surrounded himself with defined as manhood. In this regard, a white woman with “a Black girl’s body” carried more value than a Black woman who actually had a Black woman’s body. My whiteness placed me higher in the hierarchy of femininities, which made my womanhood more complementary to the sort of life Josh envisioned. Further, as Schippers (2007) highlights, it is through the relations of masculinities and femininities that the dominance of particular masculinities take shape. Josh’s particular masculinity necessitated a complementary femininity in order to be actualized and validated.

Repeatedly, Josh would grab his genitals through his sweats, his eyes looking me over up and down while he licked his lips, and ask me to drive us around the corner of the convenience store so that we could have sex away from the eyes of Iceberg and anyone else who might pass by to enter the store. Simultaneously, Josh repeatedly asked me to prove that I was indeed a woman as he defined womanhood. This experience highlighted both the dangers of doing this research as a woman of trans experience, as well as the tensions of desire and disgust that cis-het

men harbor regarding trans women. I signified both his ideal woman, his “real-life Kardashian,” and his sexual fear, a “she-male.” Below, I highlight part of my interview with Josh that elucidates what it would symbolize for him to be with a trans woman.

Alithia: If you were with a [trans woman], how would people see you in comparison to how they see you now?

Josh: I wouldn't be a product of my environment anymore. I would break the code. Yup. There's a big code, and I might end up getting killed.

Alithia: You might end up killed if you're with one of these people [in the pictures]?

Josh: Yes, if one of my people found out I messed with a dude, yeah...Because there's a code that supposed to not be broken. And I can't break that code.

Alithia: Why is that part of the code?

Josh: Because you aren't supposed to give away your manhood to another man [pause] where I'm from...And I might even kill myself.

Me: Okay so if there wasn't this code would that change things?

Josh: It couldn't be like that. That, that code been goin' on for 100, almost 100 years. It ran through my family. Yes...Men not supposed to do what they do with females with men. Date. None a that. If a man like a man...that's they business, not ours.

Alithia: So then why would you kill someone or yourself if it's people's own business?

Josh: That's a code that's supposed to not be broken...I would probably be somewhere with a gun blowin' my brains out...or they [others around him] will blow my brains out.

Despite my continual probing of Josh's “code” by which he lived, I was unable to get more information. It is my assumption that his “code” is less a formal prescript of rules and more an informal set of values shaped by those in his immediate environment—family, friends, other

dealers, and intimate partners—as well as a piece of a social contract in a white supremacist, cissexist nation in which trans women are more often than not considered undesirable tricksters (Bettcher 2007). This code was part and parcel of implicit and explicit scripts of a “dominant masculinity” (Charlebois 2010) at play in Josh’s neighborhood. Further, Josh highlighted the effect of “pariah femininities.” Trans women’s non-compliance to cis-heteronormative assignments of particular sexes to assumed “immutable” bodies results in an embodiment of “pariah femininities,” which contaminate the relationship between masculinities and femininities (Schippers 2007). Josh’s “code” may be an example of what Anderson (1999) conceptualizes as a “code of the street,” which “glorifies aggressiveness and ‘promises “an eye for an eye...for transgressions”” (cited from Forrest and Benezra 2018: 176). In this case, cis-het men’s “deception” by trans women becomes conceptualized as a transgression in need of punishment. Further, it is important to discuss the racialization of masculinities and femininities. Josh’s code or scripts of a particular dominant masculinity are shaped by race and place. Josh lived in a predominantly Black area of Atlanta, and in particular, one with a lower socioeconomic status. The policing, criminalization, and ongoing domestic war (Burton 2021) of such communities reduces the tools or options that Black residents can utilize to survive. Dating or being attracted to trans women, and thus, breaking the “code,” could result in challenges to Josh’s masculinity, a masculinity that may have been built up in order to survive as a Black man in this particular neighborhood but also as a Black man involved in underground and criminalized economies (Rios 2011).

Josh, here, additionally contradicted himself regarding the code. It is supposedly one’s individual business with whom they sleep with and what they do, but if Josh were to encounter “a man tryna be a woman,” her gender would cease to be her individual business. Instead, Josh’s

encounter with a trans woman would not only cause him to *desire* her death; it would *require* her death, and if he has sex with her, his as well. Ward, in her research on straight men who have sex with other straight men, highlights that “heteronormative violence gets ramped up, not only for purposes of pleasure, but for the purpose of recuperating heterosexuality (though the latter arguably constitutes its own pleasure” (2015: 44). Josh explicated this relationship between heterosexuality’s need for violence in order to recuperate and/or maintain itself and heterosexuality’s desire for such a situation to occur. Josh *had* to enact violence on trans women to prevent the contamination and degradation of his own masculinity. Josh simultaneously desired to murder trans women—he would feel happy after doing so. The affective domains of fear and pleasure overlapped through this.

Adam, too, highlighted the tensions of desire and disgust. Adam, a 35-year-old, cis-het, white-passing immigrant from the Middle East, explained the importance of how his future partner looks:

The way she looks. And how she, you know, um [pause] interact with society. This is very important, because we’re not living, you know, alone on this planet. So that’s important too. Like, when I want a woman, I want her to be [pause] not just to me but everybody else thinks she’s attractive. Yes.

For Adam and most of the men I interviewed (11/15), a choice in partner was not just about compatibility or individual taste in a woman. Instead, who men chose as a partner signaled to others what kind of man they are. The right partner embodied a femininity complementary to the man’s particular enactment of masculinity; whereas, the “wrong” partner contaminated his masculinity, lowering it within the hierarchy of masculinities (Schippers 2007; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). For some, like Gee, a 38-year-old, cis-het, Black man, being with a trans

woman would result in individuals questioning, “Is he a little bit less straight? Is he gay? Is he bi? Because I know I would see them that way and I would ask those questions.” For others, like Josh, to be with a thick, white woman would signify the power of his manhood to be capable of attracting a woman others allegedly want. Adam knew that trans women are denigrated societally, and he felt that being with a woman that was not viewed as desirable societally meant that he, too, would lower in the ranks of men.

Adam chose woman 8, a white, “cis-passing” woman, as the most attractive woman in the photos. At the start of the interview, he explained that part of his preferences in a woman is that she is white or white-passing, and woman 8’s race factored into his choice. As quoted earlier, when I asked Adam if he met her and then found out she was transgender, would it make her less attractive, he replied:

Yes, it’s, do you know why? It’s, it’s because psychology. You know when you think about how will you be attracted to them? Imagining that person that you see, you know, like I’m imagining that lady being with me in the bed. Will she be a woman of my kids in the future?

In his interview, Adam repetitively appealed to “commonsense,” or what I would refer to as “cissense,” logic. It only made sense to Adam that it is natural for a cis-het man to not be attracted to trans women. Adam could not psychologically make sense of himself lying in bed next to someone who was assigned male at birth, someone with whom he could not reproduce or otherwise fulfill his “duties” as a cis-het man. A trans woman can be physically desirable and even be perceived as cisgender by strangers; however, it is her enactment of femininity as someone assigned male at birth that renders her undesirable for Adam and other cis-het men participants.

After each interview, I asked participants if they would be interested in participating in focus groups. The only focus group that I ultimately facilitated was one of white/white-passing participants, including Adam. Counter to what he stated in the interview, Adam stated in the focus group that he would be open to a trans woman so long as she did not have a penis. I asked him what changed for him. Adam replied that he was not interested at all in being with a trans woman, whether she had surgery or not, “Because I am a man—straight man.” Trans women were an impossible match for Adam. The institutionalization of cis-heteronormativity made it feel so innate to only desire a cis woman that it was difficult for him to explain his lack of attraction other than repeatedly returning to the fact that he is “a straight man.” Despite this, Adam desired to be with me, a trans woman.

The day after the focus group, Adam asked if he could speak to me. I invited him to meet me at my office, where he asked for a copy of the recording, so he could hear it and reflect on it. After asking me for the recording, he asked if I could tutor him in Sociology to help him in his classes. As he had helped me by allowing me to interview him, I felt it only right to help him by ensuring he succeed in his coursework. Two days later, I arrived at the university library, and I asked him how his class was going. Adam replied, though, that he was not actually taking a Sociology class. He wanted to spend time with me in order to become friends. After our first interview, Adam texted me asking me to get dinner with him, and I had declined for ethical reasons. The day we met at the library, Adam explained, “I understand that we couldn’t be more than friends because of ethical reasons, but the priority for me is not dating but getting to know a woman and being friends with her and seeing where that goes.” I responded and let Adam know that we could, indeed, be just friends and hang out on occasion. However, he then explained to me, “You are not my dream woman, but you are very close. Only thing is you are taller than

me.” At this point, I attempted to change the topic and speak about the focus group instead. I was not interested in him, nor did I feel it appropriate that I was misled in tutoring him when what he wanted was to get closer to me as a woman. Adam “naturally” and “psychologically” could not desire a trans woman, yet I approached the descriptions of his dream woman that he shared in our original interview: white, high femme, “not too big, not too skinny...[with] big breasts and big booty,” and “kind of tall, [with] long hair.”

My white, trans, female body was a combination of traits deemed desirable: white with thicker thighs and wider hips; soft, smooth, hairless skin; and hyperfeminine dress out of my own taste in attire. My whiteness also escaped the contempt that some participants held for Black women. Numerous cis-het, Black men participants expressed sentiments laced with misogynoir when explaining their preferences in a woman. Four (26%) of the men interviewed made overtly misogynoirist statements. These four were all Black. Adam, a Middle Eastern American, additionally held sexually racist preferences that contribute to misogynoir by making Black women inferior to white women within a hierarchy of desirability. As discussed in the previous chapter, seven out of fifteen (47%) men interviewed chose woman 8 as the most desirable woman. Woman 8, a white, cis-passing woman, with features approximating my own, was deemed more desirable than even other cis-passing photos. In the focus group, I asked participants whether her whiteness contributed to cis-het men participants choosing her as the most desirable of the photos. Adam responded:

When I said that woman attractive, I chose her um among those ladies here, but there is a lot more attractive woman than her. It could be darker skin. It could be shorter hair. You know? Whatever. But based on those pictures you showed us, I, I said she’s the attractive and now I have her between 8 and 3. And this is just a picture, I mean we not talking about

a person, maybe if we meet in person, that idea completely change, you know? Yeah, because a person, you know, sometimes you think is attractive, but once you interact uh with that person, uh that idea change.

In the interview, Adam said he specifically prefers white women, yet, when asked a direct question about whiteness and desire, he became defensive, and he shifted the focus from his desire for woman 8 to other women existing in the world that he finds more attractive.

Whiteness, like cis-ness, factored into how participants spoke of women and how participants reacted to me and my body. While participants felt comfortable sharing anti-trans sentiments during the interviews and focus group, they were much more reticent to speak of whiteness and the racialization of their desire. Whiteness, cissexism, sexism, and heterosexism were each imbricated in the discourse of participants as they discussed their preferences in a woman, as well as in the tensions of desire and disgust that surfaced in the interviews.

7.2 Heterosexism and Transmisogynoir

In the previous section, I discussed the tensions of desire and disgust as they relate to cis-het men's attractions to trans women. In this section, I analyze the interconnections of heterosexism, transmisogyny, and whiteness as they relate to the perceived symbolic value of one's intimate partner(s). In particular, I elucidate participants' "desire to be sexually unmarked and normatively gendered" (Ward 2015: 35). Cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants felt that attraction to and/or relationships with trans women would shift how they were viewed and treated by others. I tease out the differences between those who were willing to accept the "consequences" of being with a trans woman and those who had a deeply felt desire to remain unmarked and untainted by intimate relations with trans women.

Cis-Het Men Participant's Open-ness to Dating Trans Women

For a majority of cis-het men participants (10/15) and two cis-les/bi women, discovering that a woman they have interest in is transgender would automatically cause the woman to no longer be desirable. Two of the four cis-het men who were completely open to dating trans women had both dated trans women previously. One of them, Musiteli, a 24-year-old, Black man, had been in a relationship with a woman he did not know to be trans. He later discovered that she was trans, and I discuss and analyze this experience in full in subsequent chapters. Another, Randall, a 33-year-old, white man, described himself as heteroflexible. He primarily was attracted to cis/trans women but was open to otherwise gendered partners. Two other cis-het men participants—Ky, a 24-year-old, Black/Haitian man, and Mike, a 24-year-old, white man—were potentially open to dating a trans woman. For Ky, it depended on whether the woman followed a cishnormative narrative of knowing that she was a girl at a young age and felt “trapped” in the “wrong body.” For both Mike, Musiteli, and Ky, it depended upon which genitals the woman had and how “well” she passed as cisgender.

All four highlight patterns found in a recent survey of mostly cisgender respondents that those few (12% of the sample) who were open to dating a trans person were more likely to hold university degrees and less likely to be religious (Blair and Hoskin 2018). Additionally, bisexual, queer, pansexual and other individuals who were not gay or straight were most open to dating trans people. That those who were open to trans people were more likely to hold university degrees is most likely the case due to greater exposures to difference through education and discussion of such topics at college events and in college classrooms. Less religiosity would remove the influence of dogma and ideas of trans identity being a sin, and not being heterosexual or gay would decrease the likelihood that one’s attractions are based on genitalia or gender. Neither Musiteli nor Randall had a formal education beyond high school; however, Musiteli was

currently enrolled in trade school and had taken it upon himself to study topics ranging from sociology to business to the physical and life sciences informally via the internet. Randall was heteroflexible; thus, he was not strictly heterosexual or gay. All four were either agnostic, atheist, or simply not religious. One other participant, Chris, a 46-year-old, cis-het, Black man, was attracted only to trans women. Chris identified as bisexual because of his attraction to trans women. Despite being attracted to and having relationships with trans women, Chris still referred to trans women as men.

7.2.1 Cis-Les/Bi Participant's Open-ness to Dating Trans Women

In regard to the two cis women who were entirely unattracted to women they later discovered to be trans, one was lesbian and one bisexual. One had only a high school diploma and the other had attained some college. Additionally, they did not knowingly have recurring interactions with trans women other than one past trans woman coworker for Sheila. Sheila, though, continually referred to this previous coworker as a man and used “he” pronouns for her. Both were spiritual but not religious, Black, and in their later 20s-early 30s.

Seven cis women were entirely open to a relationship with a trans woman. Of these seven, four were white and three were Black. Six were either in college currently or already had a bachelor's degree, and one had never finished high school. The four white women were not religious or spiritual, two of the Black women were Christian and one was spiritual but not religious. All but one of the women had friends or family who were trans, four were bi/queer, and they ranged in age from 18 to 34. Four of the women had a low income or lived below/near poverty, with one currently living in a homeless shelter. Two others had middle class incomes, and one was financially supported by her parents who earned at the highest tax brackets. It is possible that the differences in levels of education between the two groups (those entirely

unattracted to trans women and those entirely open) played a role in their willingness to date trans women, as I noted in the previous section. While one of the two women who were entirely unattracted to trans women was currently in school, she had only recently entered school the same year our interview occurred. While two of these women were Christian, they both believed that Christianity and LGBTQIA identity were not mutually exclusive. Additionally, half of the cis women participants identifying as bisexual or queer most likely played a role in their openness to trans women. For these women, their bisexuality/queerness meant that they did not feel their attractions were based on genitalia and that they were open to variously gendered partners.

Between these two poles of trans attraction lie two other categories of cis women participants. Four were open to exploring sex with a woman with a penis but were unsure if they could truly enjoy it. Among those six was Cookie, a 27-year-old, homoflexible, Black woman, who felt that she could romantically be with a trans woman but might need to be polyamorous in order to fulfill her desire for a vulva elsewhere. Two of these cis women were Black, and two were Latina, including one white Latina. All four were either in college, held a bachelor's degree, or had graduated from graduate school. Three were spiritual but not religious, and one was not religious at all. Three were in their late twenties or thirties, and one was 20. Three had a low income or were below/near poverty, and one had a middle class income. Only one of them knew or had friends/family who were trans, which differed drastically from the group of women who were entirely open to trans women. It is possible that the slight difference in age for this group, as well as the majority of them not having prior exposure to trans women in their everyday lives made the idea of being with a trans woman less certain than it did for those in the prior categories.

Finally, four cis women could only be with a trans woman if she had undergone vaginoplasty. All four knew friends or family who were trans and were either spiritual but not religious or not religious at all. Three ranged in age from 19-25, and one was 37 years old. Three had a low income or were below/near poverty, while one was middle class. All four were Black women, three were currently in college, and one was a college graduate. Interestingly, this group knew trans women in their everyday lives but were less open pre-operative or non-operative trans women as the former. All four, though, were lesbian, not bi/queer, and they had only ever had sex with cis women, which may have shaped why they would only sleep with a post-operative trans woman.

7.2.2 What It Means to Be with a Trans Woman

In large, what shaped cis men's openness to dating trans women was how they felt they would be viewed by others for doing so. When I asked Gee, a 38-year-old, cis-het, Black man, whether being with a trans woman would change how he sees himself, he responded, "I'm always going to be a heterosexual, and I know I'm a man." Gee had no desire to be with a trans woman but felt that he knew himself well enough that he was secure in his identity even if that his desire changed. However, I then asked him if dating a trans woman would change how others saw him. Gee explained, "They probably would be like, 'Is he a little bit less straight? Is he gay? Is he bi?' Because I know I would see them that way, and I would ask those questions." Gee had no desire to be with a woman "that has ever been a man" and repeatedly referred to trans women as men, using he/him pronouns for pictures of women that did not pass as cisgender. For Gee, to be with a trans woman meant that one was not truly with a woman.

While for some, it did not matter how others viewed them, Gee explained that he would feel bothered if others viewed him as anything other than heterosexual. Gee stated, "Yeah, 'cause I

don't want a man coming up to me on the street and being into me and hitting on me and being gay with me, because then Ima have to set him straight." I asked Gee what he meant by setting someone straight. Gee simply stated, "It's going to depend on how aggressive they are," and he did not explain any more with further probing. For Gee, being symbolically rendered as other than heterosexual meant that he was recognized as a potential date or hookup for gay/bisexual/queer men. Rather than simply taking a compliment from a man flirting with him or responding that he is heterosexual, Gee felt that he would have to "set him straight." The man's queerness, in this instance, is an affront to Gee's being. Thus, Gee's "setting him straight" becomes conceptualized as an act of self-defense. Further, Gee's worries about being perceived as other than a heterosexual man and experiencing other men hitting on him was not only about his sexual orientation but about his gender identity, as well. When I asked Gee about the murders of Black trans women, he responded:

Well yeah, I could see that, I wouldn't kill them, but I could see why men would do that. Like there's a fear, you know, and that's a threat to your masculinity. You'd feel violated in a certain way. I know men who would do that. I wouldn't do that, but I know men who would.

Gee conceptualized dating and/or being with a trans woman as an assault upon his manhood and his masculinity. Being with a trans woman would mean that others may see him as gay or bisexual rather than straight, lowering him in a hierarchy of masculinities to what Connell (1995) terms "subordinate masculinities." Connell notes, "Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of gender hierarchy among men" (78). Thus, even if a gay/bisexual man embodies an otherwise hegemonic masculinity, their non-heterosexual identity functionally depreciates their masculinity and manhood. Trans women's embodiment of a "pariah femininity"

(Schippers 2007) is contaminating to cis-heterosexual men's masculinity, and violence against trans women enables cis-heterosexual men to move back up this hierarchy out of a subordinate masculinity (Bourdieu 1998; Pascoe 2007). While Gee, here, stated that he himself would not commit such violence, he exemplified Connell's conceptualization of "complicit masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Gee would not enact the violence, but he continues to receive the benefits of patriarchy through his allegiance to other cis-heterosexual men and his willingness to justify their actions.

In the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Elektra from *Pose* stating, "They don't kill us because they hate us. They kill us because they hate what it means to love us." Gee explained repeatedly throughout the interview that he did not hate LGBT people. He was more accepting of cisgender LBQ women, because he had a fetish about being with a woman who wants to be with another woman. However, he was tolerant of cisgender GBQ men and trans people. What is at question here, though, is not whether he can accept others existence. For Gee, trans women existing and him being seen as attracted to trans women are two different things. To be with a trans woman would render him less masculine, less heterosexual, and less of a man.

Similar to Gee, 14/15 cis-het men participants conflated gay-ness and trans-ness throughout their interviews. Musiteli, a 24-year-old, cis-het, Black man, did not presently conflate gay-ness and trans-ness but had in the past. Ci-les/bi women did not do so, which makes sense as they are gay/bi but are not transgender. Indeed, cisgender LGBQ people fought to distinguish themselves from transgender people in order to make themselves more palatable to cis-het people (Chauncey 1995; Vaid-Menon 2015). The distinction between gay-ness and trans-ness remains more clearly drawn for cisgender LGBQ people than it is for cis-het individuals.

For example, Henry, a 26-year-old, cis-het, Black man, felt that people who dated trans women were not entirely heterosexual. Henry was not attracted to trans women, repeatedly explaining that “I’m just not into that.” Henry, though, distinguished between cis-passing and non-passing trans women. When I asked Henry if being with a trans woman, in particular woman three, a “cis-passing,” Asian American trans woman^{xv}, would change how others see him, he responded:

Uh I don’t, I don’t think so, only because like I didn’t think she was a trans woman, so no one else would dare to just be like, oh that’s a trans woman, you know, I mean like, if I didn’t know, I know like blindly people are just like oh look at that pretty woman, you know what I mean? So, I don’t think it would change or make any difference. I think if it were obvious like some of the other pictures, it definitely would change my surroundings and who I hang out with and who I associate with.

For Henry, a “cis-passing” woman did not de-heterosexualize, emasculate, or otherwise alter his being and identity. She was merely another woman unmarked by trans-ness, allowing him to remain un-marked by trans-ness. I asked Henry, though, in what ways his situation and how he was viewed would change if the woman were not “cis-passing”. He said:

In the ways where people would, wouldn’t want to associate with me, you know, because one, I’m gay, you know, that’s already a thing, if you’re gay, some people don’t wanna associate, and then two, the simple fact that she’s trans is like, like me and my friends were discussing, me and a close friend, he’s homosexual, but he told me that there are levels to being gay, and I didn’t, you know, I didn’t quite get it, because I’m not in the gay community, but you know, you have your gays and you have your uh bisexuals and you have your uh trans, I mean at the very bottom, which I mean, you know, in the gay

community, put trans people at the bottom, so I think knowing that, it's almost like, it's like almost, and this is a bad analogy, really, really bad analogy, but imagine if, like how back in the days when slaves kind of like, they knew they were slaves but most white men or some white men fell in love with slaves even though they were like the bottom of the bottom at the time, so it would be almost the same. Yeah. Ridicule from everyone, you know?

Henry's analogy, as poor as it is, equates interracial relationships in the antebellum United States with cisgender-transgender relationships in contemporary society. Dating a trans woman would symbolically lower him in a hierarchy of masculinities. While Connell conceptualizes gay men as embodying a "subordinate masculinity" (Connell 1995) and places them at the bottom of a hierarchy among men, Henry argued that being in a relationship with a trans woman would result in being even further below gay men in this gender hierarchy. To be trans, in this equation, is to be in excess of gay-ness. It is to be so gay that it renders one a spectacle, a target, and less than human. Gender, race, sex, and sexual orientation function as "regulatory ideals" which come to "[qualify] a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (Butler 1993). Regulatory ideals are not simply categories that function to identify someone as Black or Asian American, gay or bisexual, transgender or cisgender. Rather, regulatory ideals function to delimit where the human stops and the Other begins. For Henry to be with a trans woman would result in some of the stigma placed on her as a trans woman "sticking," in the words of Goffman (1963), to him. He may be mocked, ridiculed, or further relegated into Other-ness, merely for loving someone who is excessively gay. Cis men dating trans women, thus, become hyper-subordinated within a hierarchy of masculinities.

In addition to conflating gay-ness and trans-ness, Henry conflates enslaved Blackness and trans-ness. It is important, analytically, that scholars do not collapse Blackness and trans-ness in a way that analogizes the two and ignores the intersecting experiences of Black trans people and erases the ways in which such “relationships” between white masters and Black enslaved peoples were more often than not nonconsensual. Henry understands that the analogy made is flawed. Yet, in his analogy is found a set of circulating symbols: differential conditions of life and death, fungibility, captivity, and fugitivity. Gender, produced out of the white supremacist enslavement of kidnapped African peoples and the genocide and internment of Indigenous peoples, “produce[d] ‘gender-variant social formations as an excluded caste’” (Page and Richardson 2010; cited from Snorton 2017: viii). Blackness, trans-ness, and Black trans-ness are abjected from that which is human, that which is desirable, that which is loveable. Blackness, trans-ness, and Black trans-ness are surrounded by constellations of risk, violence, and death. In Henry’s statement above, to love, desire, or be intimate with Black/trans people is to be touched by risk, violence, and death. Bey notes, “Gender is that which is made to attach to bodies of a domesticized space, predicated on the integrity of an ontology constituted by a white symbolic order” (2019: 56). To elude and disobey such a symbolic order is to make a tear in its fabrication, which does not go unnoticed by others who fit within and perpetuate its order. Henry is not so much unattracted to trans-ness as he is unattracted to the symbols that hover around trans-ness, which may hover around him if he finds himself in a relationship with a trans woman.

Henry’s fear of potential consequences for being attracted to trans women are not simply hypothetical. Other participants spoke of the ways in which other men may call them gay/bi, view them as less masculine, crack jokes about them and their hypothetical partner, or even, as in the case of Josh, physically assault or murder another man for being with a trans woman. Such

repercussions of dating a trans woman would come not only from other cis-het men but from cis-het women as well. Chris, a 46-year-old, cis-bi, Black man spoke of his experiences being harassed by cis-het women and men for being attracted to trans women. Chris was solely attracted to trans women and identified himself to me as bisexual because of this. However, he also explained that he did not let many know he was attracted to or dated trans women. In previous relationships with trans women, he had met their friends, but he kept his world separate from the relationship. He explained why:

I hear that every day, "I'm gay." I might sit down a [cis] woman to talk to her and somebody walk past me, "Ooh you gay. You talk to trans." I hear it every day. I walk down the street, I meet a lot of 'em [cis-het women], stop and talk to 'em, ask what they name is, but people who I know, they criticize me, "Why you fuckin around with that?"

At the time of our interview, Chris was involved in a program to prevent him from future re-arrest, as well as to help him find shelter, food, and the like. Chris had shelter, but he did not have a job and did not have any income. He spent a lot of time on the streets of downtown Atlanta, and in spending much time on the streets, interacted with others in the area who were also in similar situations. As some cis-het women came to find out he was attracted to trans women, he was harassed and made fun of. Cisgender men are not alone in policing hierarchies of masculinities. In an editorial follow-up to her work (2007) on homophobia, misogyny, and masculinities among young boys in high school, Pascoe writes of a conversation she had with a student who feared that his future son may want to play with dolls. He explained why he held this fear:

When I was little, I loved playing with Barbies. My sister, she always told me to put ‘em away. One day, she got so fed up; she dragged me outside, and shoved Barbies in all my pockets, and made me stand there while my friends laughed at me. (Pascoe 2007)

While scholarship on masculinities has tended to focus on how cis men police one another’s masculinities (Connell 1995; Bourdieu 1998; Pascoe 2007), it is important to recognize the role cis-het women play in maintaining patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities/femininities.

Cisgender women do not benefit from the perpetuation of patriarchy, misogyny, and hegemonic masculinities; however, they too are socialized within a society that encourages young people to internalize gendered ideals. Schippers (2007) highlights that it is through social practice that masculinities and femininities are enacted and become hegemonic. While she argues against conceptualizing non-hegemonic femininities as subordinate femininities because all femininities are subordinate to masculinity, there is a need for greater discussion of the ways in which cis women do subordinate and oppress trans femininities. Trans femininities, as pariah femininities, contaminate and infect the relations between masculinities and femininities. This results in cis women mocking, degrading, and policing cis-het men’s attractions to trans women. However, the policing of cis-het men’s attractions to trans women is not meant to merely degrade the men but also to mock and denigrate trans women as the “improper” object of cis-het men’s attractions.

While Chris was the only man I interviewed who intentionally dated trans women, two other cis-het men were open to dating trans women. However, they had not had long-term relationships with trans women that could lead others to become aware of their openness to trans women. A 2019 *Vice* article details the experience of one cis-het man whose girlfriend found out he was attracted to cis women and trans women. The article explains:

At first, she cried and interrogated him: Was he gay? Was she just a prop for him to look straight? Why did he hide this from her? Then, she got mean. Over the course of a month, Owen said she used his sexuality as a weapon against him. According to Owen, she pitilessly mocked him, remarking on how disappointed he must be that she doesn't have a dick. He obviously "wanted to be a bottom," he recalled her saying; to "get a good fucking." Sometimes, when they were intimate, Owen said that she would climb on top of him and mockingly simulate fucking him in the ass. (Torujée 2019)

Much like Chris, the man involved in this situation was mocked, chided, and derided for being attracted to trans women in addition to cis women. He was assumed to be on the down low and to be using her as a beard, as she viewed trans women as men dressed in women's clothing. Monosexism^{xvi} and cissexism intersect in this instance, with cis-het women assuming that a cis man can only like men or women, and if he likes women, it is assumed that "woman" only includes cisgender women.

Cis-het men were not alone, though, in feeling as though they would be perceived differently and may experience consequences for dating or being with a trans woman. Janelle, an 18-year-old, cis-queer Black woman, spoke of her hesitancy to introduce any woman she dated, whether cis or trans, to her given family. Janelle had only recently told her mother that she was queer, and her mother reacted poorly, citing Biblical fundamentalism as her "evidence" that Janelle had morally strayed. When I asked Janelle if being with a trans woman would change how others see her, she responded:

Yeah probably...People are judgmental. They'd be like...I don't know just like people are judgmental and...and I don't know, just they, I don't think, I'm just thinking about like my family in specific. But I just gotta live my life for myself and not for others.

Alithia: Okay what might your family say? Do you think they'd be more upset if you were with a trans woman than a cis woman?

Janelle: Yeah, maybe my mom actually will slit my throat.

Janelle, here, was being hyperbolic in regard to her mother murdering her; however, her response echoes cis-het men's response. In Janelle's response, trans-ness is, again, conflated with an excess of queerness—an excess that would push away any familial relationship Janelle wanted to maintain. To be with a trans woman would mean that Janelle's family would rupture, which, for an eighteen-year-old, would be a profound shift in her life.

In addition to cis-het women policing the relationships of cis-les/bi women, cis-les/bi women participants spoke of the ways in which cis lesbian women police the boundaries of lesbian identity vis-à-vis trans women. In the white/white-passing participant focus group, I asked the three cis-lesbian women participants why they felt some cis-lesbian women might have a strong reaction to trans women being in lesbian spaces or claiming a lesbian identity. Vincent, an eighteen-year-old, cis-lesbian, white woman, and Rachel, a 22-year-old, cis-lesbian, white woman, responded:

Vincent: ...I know some of us have had experiences with dating um like men and we kind of equate just like associate like if you identified as a man in the past or if you have or had a penis, well, it's, still kind of an intrusion like and some might have like traumatic experiences with it, not to say trans women don't belong in lesbian spaces, but if lesbians did feel threatened then that might be why.

Rachel: Yeah, I think that some lesbians feel that trans women don't belong in lesbian spaces because they're like quote not real women, um or they feel that like they're like

men trying to infiltrate the like female spaces, which is just um outdated thinking and really inappropriate. Um [pause].

Alithia: How come?

Rachel: Because like...if someone identifies as a woman, like they're a woman, and I don't think we should be questioning that, but I think some older lesbians are like more um cautious too or like more apprehensive about like accepting that.

Vincent, here, notes the ways in which the transphobia, in lesbian communities, may collapse around traumatic experiences with penises. Eighteen point three percent of cis women experience sexual assault/sexual violence in their lifetimes, with Black and Indigenous women experiencing higher rates of sexual victimization in their lifetimes (Black et al. 2011). As such, it would not be uncommon for numerous cis-lesbian women to have experienced sexual trauma at the hands of a cis man perpetrator. Eighty-eight percent of reported sexual assault/violence occurs at the hands of cis men (Black et al. 2011). And, indeed, 37% of trans women experience sexual assault in their lifetimes, with Black, Indigenous, and Middle Eastern trans women experiencing higher rates of assault in their lifetimes (James et al. 2016). Comparing the two rates, trans women experience double the likelihood of sexual assault in their lifetimes. Vincent explains, though, that the penis, rather than the cis man, functions symbolically as a perpetrator of trauma for some cis-lesbian women. As such, trans women, whether they have a penis or not, may be assumed to be potential threats of violence.

Additionally, Rachel attributed anti-trans attitudes to anachronistic, older, cis-lesbian women. Such an explanation functioned to dispel any association with transphobia from herself and other young lesbians and simultaneously explained transphobic attitudes as views that will eventually die away with older cis-lesbian women without needing any other shifts or changes

within lesbian communities and spaces. Vincent and Rachel both explained the ways in which cis-lesbian spaces, communities, and/or identities may be policed by other cis-lesbians. If it is assumed by some that trans women are not real women, can a cis-lesbian woman bring her trans lesbian girlfriend to a lesbian event, for example? Discourse comes to make precarious and fragile the material lives of trans women and those who love them, whether that individual be a cis-het man or a cis-les/bi woman.

7.3 Conclusion

What is at the core of the policing of lesbian spaces and identities and cis-het men's heterosexuality and masculinities is not simply whether a woman is trans or not, but whether a cis individual being with a trans woman may experience some of the barriers, harassment, and/or discrimination that trans people experience in their everyday lives. The symbols that circulate around a sociopolitical conceptualization of "trans woman" can come to stick to those that love and/or have sex with trans women. Violence becomes a way of shedding this symbols. This violence is not merely repressive of trans people, but it is also productive of cis-ness. As Westbrook, notes, "Violence genders, sexualizes, and racializes...violence itself produces and perpetuates gender, sexuality, and race as social systems" (2021: 28). Violence against Black trans women and the ways in which cisgender people make sense of this violence produces an account of Black trans women and other trans women as assaultive, violating, and a threat. Simultaneously, violence against Black trans women enables cis-het men to recuperate their position in a hierarchy of masculinities and produces and maintains cis-ness for cis-het men and cis-les/bi women.

In this chapter, I have elucidated the ways in which a tension between desire for trans women and disgust of trans women exists in the lives of cis-het men. Cis-het men may find

themselves physically attracted to trans women while simultaneously feeling disgusted or angered at the possibility that the woman they are into is not cisgender. In part, the affective dimension of anger and disgust arise out of the regulation of cis-het men's attractions and masculinities by other cis-het men, as well as by cis-het women. Manhood and hegemonic masculinities "must be validated by other men" in order to be actualized (Bourdieu 1998). A lack of respect from other cis-het men can result in cis-het men losing some of the power that comes with their positionalities. For Black cis-het men participants, the consequences of being with a trans woman may be even more serious, as Black men's genders are hyper-regulated in U.S. society (Bailey and Shabazz 2013; Baily and Shabazz 2014). Writing on the gendered and sexual geographies of Blackness, Bailey and Shabazz note, "If Black spatiality is excluded from the white world, then Black queer space...is placeless" (2013). Black cis-het men's masculinities are already policed and questioned. If being with a trans woman means that a cis-het man lowers in the masculinities hierarchy, then Black cis-het men are potentially at risk of further scrutiny, punishment, and racialized-gendered dispossession.

Further, I have highlighted the ways in which the symbolic circuitry surrounding trans women comes to make *being with* trans women undesirable. To be with a trans woman comes to say something about the person with them. For cis-lesbian women and cis-het men, their lesbian identity and heterosexual identity respectively may come into question if they are with a trans woman, particularly a trans woman with a penis. Trans women's embodiment of pariah femininities contaminates the relations of masculinities and femininities, resulting in cis-het men feeling emasculated. In part, this sense of emasculation arises out of a perception that a trans woman's femininity is not complementary to a man's masculinity. For cis-les/bi women, the penis becomes the central obstacle, as so much of what it means to be gay, lesbian, or even

heterosexual in U.S. society revolve around partners having different or similar genitals. In the next chapter, I discuss how cis-het men and cis-les/bi women discursively construct, explain, and/or justify the murders of Black trans women vis-à-vis such ruptures in heterosexuality and lesbian-ness. In doing so, I build off this chapter to further analyze how violence functions to reconstitute one's manhood and lesbian identity and to focus in on the necropolitical dimensions of cis-ness.

**8 CHAPTER 4—“THAT SHIT WOULD MAKE ME MAD AS HELL AND I
MIGHT JUST KILL YOU”: CIS-HET MEN & CIS-LES/BI WOMEN’S DISCOURSE
REGARDING THE MURDERS OF BLACK & BROWN TRANS WOMEN**

In August 2020, three trans women of color friends and social media influencers were attacked in Hollywood by a group of cisgender men while cisgender men and women onlookers laughed, berated, and egged on the men inflicting the physical violence. Joslyn, one of the women attacked, wrote on Instagram, “He said if I was trans he would kill me. He then forced me to hold his hand while he looks [*sic*] for my friends to kill them for being trans. Meanwhile men and WOMEN screaming that I’m a man and telling him to beat me” (Damshenas 2020). Joslyn posted a video that onlookers had taken of the man threatening her and dragging her around the street. The onlooker filming captioned the video, “He mad she was a man...”

Unfortunately, anti-trans violence is not a rarity. When I first began my dissertation research, I was uncertain that cis-het men and cis-les/bi women would tell me their true feelings about anti-trans violence and the murders of Black trans women. As I began interviewing participants, though, I was shocked at the nonchalance with which many reacted to the murders of Black trans women. After asking participants questions about what it would mean to desire or sexually/romantically be with a trans woman, I explained to them:

Sometimes, men have sex with, flirt with, or interact in some way with a woman romantically/sexually, find out she’s trans, and in response, the men will murder the woman, especially if she’s Black. In court, some of these men argue that they were so distraught by finding out the woman was trans that they overreacted and didn’t know what they were doing, resulting in her death. What are your thoughts in response to this argument?

After asking the question, I would reiterate that they can answer honestly and there would be no judgment however they answered. While no cis-les/bi woman participant said that they would kill a trans woman, knew people who would, or that they understood it, 16 out of 32 participants described trans women as deceptive and as “hiding” the “truth” about who they are. Cis-het men participants were more diverse in their responses. Indeed, some found the murders heinous, while others openly stated they would kill a trans woman, knew men who would, or found the murders excessive but understandable.

In analyzing participant data in regard to my question on the murders of Black trans women, I began to see four distinct categories in which participants’ answers fell. These include those who found the murders extreme but understandable. Participants in this category would not murder someone themselves and did not feel they knew anyone who would. However, they were able to make logical sense of the murders of Black trans women. A second category of participants felt they, themselves, would commit such a murder or knew people who would. A third category of participants found the murders of trans women wrong. However, they simultaneously placed the blame of the murder on trans women for, what they perceived to be, a lack of honesty about one’s trans identity. A final category differed greatly from these former three, in that, they reconceptualized cisgender people as being at fault for the murders of Black trans women rather than placing the blame on trans women. In this chapter, I flesh out the reasons offered by participants as to why cis-het men kill Black trans women, including the ways in which participants decried and/or justified such violence. I highlight how trans-ness, itself, was conceptualized as an assault on innocent bystanders, and I discuss how more casual forms of cissexism intertwined with overt forms of cissexism, such as the murders of Black trans women.

8.1 Extreme But Understandable

Three out of 32 participants felt the murders of Black trans women were extreme reactions by cis-het men but were understandable situationally. Of the three, two were Black, cis-het men and one was a Black, cis-bi woman (*See Table 1*). The three were not religious, excepting for Sheila who was Christian but for cultural reasons only. The three were in their mid-20's, were not hypermasculine or hyperfeminine, and did not have any known recurring interactions with trans people. As I show in the next section, as well, those who felt like the murders of trans women were, in some and/or all cases, justified knew few to no trans women. In addition to other demographics I have listed thus far, I additionally categorized perceived LGB acceptance of participants. I did not measure this in an empirical sense. Rather, my categorizations are meant to loosely assess how increased LGB antagonism potentially related to cissexism and transmisogynoir. I categorized LGB acceptance as “inclusive,” “slightly heteronormative,” “moderately heteronormative,” and “very heteronormative” (*see Table 4, Appendix A for categorical descriptions*). One participant who I discuss below was categorized as slightly heteronormative for his belief that some LGBT people may be queer or trans due to childhood sexual/mental trauma.

Table 6. Extreme but Understandable

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Sheila	Cis-Bi Woman	Black	Christian (Low)	Inclusive	0	Some College	Low	25-35
Jake	Cis-Het Man	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Bachelor's	Low	18-24
Ky	Cis-Het Man	Black	Not Religious	Slightly Heteronormative	0	Graduate Degree	Poverty	18-24

However, the other two were overwhelmingly accepting and inclusive of cisgender LGB people. Their problem was not with same-gender sexual attraction. Their problem, instead, lay with trans people, trans surgeries, and what they saw as an “excess” of queerness presented through trans identity.

Sheila, a 27-year-old, Black, cis-bi woman, consistently referred to trans women as men and used “he” pronouns for them throughout the interview. She told me that she had once had a trans woman coworker; however, she referred to her coworker as a “guy” and used “he” pronouns for her. When I asked Sheila how she felt regarding the murders of Black trans women, she responded:

Sheila: They lied.

Alithia: Okay, why?

Sheila: Because, okay um...I don't say—trans as in full operation?

Alithia: Either, both.

Sheila: Um I feel like full operation, that's a different story, still in process [pause].

Alithia: How come?

Sheila: Full operation, because I feel that's a mental thing.

Alithia : For the guy?

Sheila: Yeah, it's a mental thing for the guy, because [pause] in, in [pause] reality [pause] that's a woman. Like on paper, now, that's a woman. And in body form that's a woman.

Um [pause] um so [pause] it's the fact that your mind can't get over the fact that that once had a penis, so in the moment if you flip, because [pause] because you couldn't control yourself or you didn't know what to do, emotionally you were so fucked up in that moment, like I could understand it. On a very small scale. But there are people who say

they flipped after finding out with people still in process. Noooooo. The sex is too intimate for you to not have known. You knew. There's no way. No way. You knew.

For Sheila, the trans woman is perpetually tainted by the once penis. The man has in front of him what looks like a woman, speaks like a woman, is legally a woman *yet* the fact of this woman once having had a penis is emotionally disorienting. A survey of the websites of surgeons conducting trans surgeries and their results photo galleries displays the vulvas of numerous trans woman—vulvas that vary in size, shape, and hair like all other vulvas; vulvas that have labia, clitorises, clitoral hoods, vaginal canals; vulvas that are wet and vulvas that are dry. The fact, though, of the vulva having once been a penis and scrotum is intense enough to, despite this all, emotionally “fuck someone up” enough that “on a small scale,” Sheila can understand why a man would commit such a murder.

In many ways, Sheila's response is reminiscent of the doctors and health care professionals Fausto-Sterling (200) and Davis (2015) discuss who conduct non-consensual surgeries on intersex babies. Such physicians, researchers, and surgeons believe that intersex children's bodies so disrupt the gender binary that they would experience enough harassment and psychic trauma that would “outweigh” the myriad risks and violence associated with the surgeries. Sheila's response highlighted that, while she does not feel murder is an acceptable response, that it is understandable that a man would feel so overwhelmed by a person whose existence defies binary sex/gender logic that he may react in a violent manner. Black trans women murdered by cis-het men face the very violence that doctors argue intersex surgeries can prevent. Trans-ness, as well as being intersex, becomes defined as an assault upon another's psyche.

Ky, a 24-year-old, cis-het, Black man, also felt that the reaction of murder is extreme in response to cis-het men “discovering” that a woman is transgender. Ky, like Sheila, believed murder is wrong and that everyone should be held accountable for committing murder. However, he also felt he could make sense of why a cis-het man would feel overwhelmed and urged to commit murder in this scenario. He stated:

I mean, as far as feelings, people are entitled to their feelings. So I understand there are feelings, not understand, like I relate, but I can mathematically make sense of it, not for me, but for them. As far as an argument for like murder, I don't think it's very strong at all. I'm like, I'm sorry. You're not supposed to murder. I hate that this overwhelming urge came over you. And it resulted in the girl dying, but at the end of the day, you know, you can't murder somebody. So for me personally, it's a trash argument. Maybe I wouldn't give you like a crazy sentence for it. But, you know, you still murdered somebody; that's in no way taking you off the hook.

Despite the extremity of murder, all three participants in this category felt they could understand why someone would commit the crime. Jake, a 23-year-old, cis-het, Black man, too, understood that “she—or he—fucked him [the cis-het man] up mentally, just like if a person killed your child...Like you could fuck somebody up with that.” The “that” here that Jake was referring to at the end is the “hiding” of one’s trans identity. For Jake, Sheila, and Ky, there is an element of trans-ness that is assaultive, duplicitous, and overwhelming. Just as one may feel the need to avenge their child’s murder, they may feel the need to avenge a “violation” of their cisgender manhood and heterosexuality. The conceptualization of trans-ness as an assault renders a man’s murder of a trans woman self-defense. Bourdieu (1998) highlights the role that fear plays for men and masculine individuals. For them, there is a “fear of losing the respect or admiration” of

other men, which would result in a lack of social validation of one's manhood or masculinity (Bourdieu 1998: 52).

Ky, explained this fear of losing the validation of one's manhood/masculinity in further explaining why men might kill trans women. Ky stated:

You know, he's--maybe somewhere deep down he fears he might be gay. He's trying to run from that, see what I'm saying?. And now you know, he had it, he had sex with a trans and for him that trans might be like, yo, I know you say you're trans but you still a man in my mind, transitioned from male, you didn't tell me, you know, it can hurt his pride as a man...He's you know, having all kind of internal identity crises on the inside...And it even feels like this person did something to me...They did this to me, they're the reason I'm here, people with men's pride, you know, so high and so strong and angry with the beast to come out...these melting pot factors come together to kind of create mathematically speaking in a sense.

While Ky's response focused on a man potentially being gay and having internalized homophobia that results in an "identity crisis," it is important to highlight that, whether the man who murders is gay or not ultimately does not matter. The man who murders a trans woman, in being rendered gay, lowers in the hierarchy of masculinities to a "subordinate masculinity" (Connell 1993). Masculinity, though, is a process, not a fixed identity. Pascoe, notes, one "moves out of faggotry by making another boy a fag" (2007). From my analyses, I add that one can move out of faggotry by murdering a woman he finds out to be trans.

While Jake, Sheila, and Ky do not advocate for murder or feel that it should occur, they also do not seek to rule it out as an understandable reaction. Trans-ness, in this way, is an attack against a person. A person, when attacked, "understandably" defends themselves. To define trans-

ness as an assault is to define the murders of Black trans women as a defense mechanism. In other words, participants argued that trans women cause their own murders. Cis-ness, while assumed natural, instead exists in this way as a fragile subjectivity, violated by the existence of someone who defies its logic. The three participants discussed here differed from the overt cissexism participants in the next section displayed. However, while they did not overtly advocate for or support the murders of trans women, the language used to “make sense” of the murders provides the foundation for the logic used by those who do and/or would kill.

8.2 “Now that’s where I might kill you right then and there.”

In comparison to the three participants discussed in the previous section, four participants felt that there are scenarios in which they, or someone they know, would kill a trans woman. All four are cis-het, Black men (see Table 2 for demographics). All four are Christian and repeatedly made reference to religious doctrine throughout the interviews and used heteronormative discourse when discussing LGB people. Mack, for example, emphasized that his fiancée was lesbian but chose to be with him because she was “saved through Christ.” Additionally, three of the four were either very masculine in their expression or attempt to display their masculinity in more grandiose ways, such as Josh, who repeatedly emphasizes his “large dick” as a display of the power of his masculinity. Three of the four had never had any recurring interactions with people they knew to be trans. One of the four, Mack, had known trans women from his time in prison. None of the trans women he knew, though, were friends, family, otherwise intimate relations, and he still referred to them as men. These four men ranged in age from 27 to 59 and in income from living within the poverty threshold to earning a middle-class income. This category of response was the only single gender category; in this case, cis-het men. In addition, it was the

only category of response that was offered by an entirely Christian sub-sample and entirely Black men sub-sample.

The commonality between this category of participants and the former are that none of these participants had friends, family, or other intimates who they knew to be transgender. This lack of social contact with and proximity to trans people may shape their greater willingness to justify or commit murders of Black trans women. Several recent quantitative studies analyzing cisgender individuals' perceptions of trans people have found that those who closely know trans people are less likely to hold anti-trans sentiments (King, Winter, and Webster 2009; Kooy 2010). In comparison to those in the previous category of individuals who found the murders extreme but understandable, those in this current category of individuals willing to commit the murders were all religious, with Christianity strongly shaping their views of the world and how they live their lives. Mack, a 28-year-old, cis-het, Black man, for example, believed that his wife (who identifies as a lesbian) was "saved" by Christ, allowing them to fall in love. Their high religiosity most likely also shaped this category of participants' willingness to commit murders of trans woman or to know individuals who would. Finally, as I will discuss further below, their masculinity as Black men in the US also factored into their responses.

Mack found a trans panic defense and the murders of Black trans women to be nonsensical if they resulted only out of a flirt, as in the case of Islan Nettles, who was murdered by a man after his friends mocked him for flirting with a trans woman (McKinley 2016). While Mack felt that such a situation was extreme and was not a reason to murder someone, he responded otherwise regarding other situations. Mack told me:

I ain't gon' front. If I had sex with a transgender and she told me after I had sex with her, that shit would make me mad as hell, and in that reaction I might just kill you, like, "Oh, I

just shot you.” Know what I’m saying? It happen, I might just have that strap like yo, that’s just ‘cause I’m mad as fuck. Like I’m, I’m, I’m just that type of n***a. I’d kill anybody that fuck with me. Like the deception part. But if she’s tellin’ you, you ain’t do anything, and y’all flirtin,’ you ain’t gotta take it to the next step. Nah, give that n***a the book. I feel like yeah, he deserves the book. Because to me, ain’t I had a reaction. Oh, oh I’m a transgender, oh shit boom. Like...nah bro. What did she do to you? You know what I’m sayin’?

Table 7. I Would/Know Someone Who Would Murder a Black Trans Woman

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Gee	Cis-Het Man	Black	Christian (Low)	More Hetero-normative	0	Bachelor’s	Low	36-46
Iceberg	Cis-Het Man	Black	Christian (Medium)	More Hetero-normative	0	Some College	Poverty	47+
Josh	Cis-Het Man	Black	Christian (Medium)	Very Hetero-normative	0	Bachelor’s	Middle Class	25-35
Mack	Cis-Het Man	Black	Christian (Medium)	Slightly Hetero-normative	3-5	Some College	Middle Class	25-35

Here, Mack did not say, “If I had sex with a woman and she told me after that she was trans...” Instead, Mack said, “If I had sex with a *transgender*.” For Mack, and five other participants, transgender was not an adjective to describe the type of woman one is. Instead, transgender functioned as a noun, referring to a separate gender or type of person. If one recognizes, though, that the woman they are sleeping with is indeed a woman, then there can be no deception, as she is not lying about her womanhood. The discursive description of trans women as deceptive only holds if one believes a trans woman is not, in essence, a woman.

Iceberg, a 59-year-old, cis-het, Black man, also felt that there were certain scenarios in which killing a trans woman was understandable. He, too, distinguished between different situational encounters with trans women like Mack. For Iceberg, if the woman physically

“passes” as a cisgender woman and has a vulva, then “she a woman, because...who would know?” As highlighted in Chapters One and Two, the idea that some trans individuals “pass” and others “appear to be trans” necessitates problematization for several reasons. First, there is no “one look” of trans people or cis people. Trans women and cis women may have large or small hands, curvy or more square-shaped upper bodies, and facial hair or a smooth face. Trans women and cis women vary greatly within group vis-à-vis vocal tone, height, weight, and gender expression, as just a few examples. Ultimately, one cannot know another individual’s gender identity or sex assigned at birth without either knowing the individual or asking. Individuals may be (mis)recognized as particular genders (Pfeffer 2017); however, that (mis)recognition is based off cultural schemas that change across time and place. Further, the categorization of some women as “cis-passing” and others as “visibly trans” presumes that one category is aesthetically superior to the other. While trans women who are perceived to be “cis-passing” by others may experience less direct violence than other trans women, the privileging of “cis-passing” trans women perpetuates cisnormative, white standards of beauty as noted in Chapters One and Two.

While Iceberg would not feel deceived if he slept with a trans woman with a vulva who did not tell him she was trans, he did feel that other situations would lead him to feel deceived. I asked Iceberg:

alithia: What if she hasn’t had the surgery, doesn’t “look” trans—

Iceberg: —And got somethin’ hanging?

alithia: Yeah.

Iceberg: Hell nah [laughs.] Yeah that’s a trick. Nah, we ain’t doin’ that one. I couldn’t do that one now. Now that’s where I might kill you right then and there. Uh-uh no. No, you

got it wrapped up, balls up, uh-uh no. But see I ain't gon' be jumped like that. I wouldn't jump like that. I'm gonna take the time, finna see.

For Iceberg, the penis is the tipping point. To be perceived by others as a woman, to say you are a woman, and to not disclose your genitalia is “a trick.” Iceberg explicated what Dozier (2005) argued in their study of trans men doing gender. Dozier argued that, when individuals are interpreting others' gender and gender expression, what they are often guessing at are the genitals one has. When one appears “as a woman,” it is culturally assumed that they have a vulva. When one appears “as a man,” it is culturally assumed that they have a penis. It is not a question that is oft asked, but to be a woman and not disclose the presence of your penis becomes duplicitous. Not only is the penis the tipping point, though, but the woman's trans-ness and her genitalia become something that she has “covered up” (“got it wrapped up”) and something that is assaulting (“jumped like that”) Iceberg. Ten participants (eight cis men and two cis women), like Iceberg, conflated trans-ness as a covering up of one's sex assigned at birth. When asked if they could tell who is trans and who is not, participants would say it is getting hard to tell, because, as Jake stated, “Some of them are getting really good at like covering it up.” This conflation of trans womanhood and a covering up of one's “manhood” is at the crux of Iceberg's feeling tricked if a woman does not tell him she has a penis. Her gender expression functions, for Iceberg, to cover up the fact of her penis.

Gee, a 38-year-old, cis-het, Black man, also conflated trans womanhood with a covering up of one's “manhood” and conceptualized trans-ness as an assault.

I could see that. I wouldn't kill them, but I could see why men would do that. Like there's a fear, you know, and that's a threat to your masculinity. You'd feel violated in a certain way. I know men who would do that. I wouldn't do that, but I know men who would.

Trans-ness, again, was conceptualized as something that assaults, harms, and threatens. It is, in this way, not a state of being nor a description of one's gender. Trans-ness, instead, functioned for men like Gee as a weapon. As such, the murders of Black trans women become a defense mechanism. Cis-ness, masculinity, and heterosexuality come to necessitate the murders of Black trans women to protect themselves when threatened by attraction to a trans woman.

As discussed in the introduction, Elliot and Lyons highlight, "The function of a phobic object is to specify and contain a generalized threat" (2017: 364). Cis-het men's fear of violation, in part, collapses around the penis, as in the case of Iceberg, Mack, Josh, and other men and women interviewed. The penis is socially constructed as a weapon, as having the power to violate. This is not surprising, given the historical and cultural construction of penises and penetration as a form of power (Bersani 2009). Bersani notes how Ancient Greeks, radical feminists, and various gay men communities have, at different times, conceptualized penetration, writing, "To be penetrated is to abdicate power" (19). In Iceberg, Mack, and Josh's responses, the presence of a penis on a woman comes to be viewed as a sort of social penetration resulting in a threat to a man's masculinity, power, and honor. Iceberg, Mack, Josh, and other cis-het men participants all, presumably, have penises. However, their own penises do not necessarily elicit any threat of violation to themselves. Instead, it is the presence of a second penis on an individual whom they desire that evokes the threat and anxiety of violation. The threat of the second penis is also shaped by the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinities and femininities as different yet complementary. If a man's power or masculinity diminishes upon being attracted to a trans woman, then enacting violence against and murdering trans women may aid in recuperating and building back up his masculine, heterosexual subjectivity, as masculinity and

manhood are accomplished, in part, when men “rise to the challenge of the opportunities available to [them] to increase [their] honor” (Bourdieu 1998: 51).

The cis-het men participants in this section elucidated their perceptions and responses to the murders of Black trans women. Participants relayed these perceptions to me with complete ease and nonchalance. Not only do their responses highlight that they, or men they knew, would kill a trans woman, but their responses also highlight the ease with which they would absolve a man of murdering a trans woman. A conceptualization of trans-ness as an assault and the collapsing of their cissexism around the penis both function to dehumanize a trans woman. She is not a woman but a penis; not a woman but a weapon.

While those who felt the murders of Black trans women were extreme but understandable, and those who said they, or those they knew, would murder a trans woman were all Black, there were also Black participants who sought to challenge cissexism and transmisogynoir, and I will discuss them in subsequent sections. My sample is also predominantly Black, so participants in all categories are more likely to be Black than to be another race. White men and non-Black men of color are not somehow less transphobic than Black men.

Additionally, who men date and racial segregation of neighborhoods is important within this analysis. Both Gee and Jake preferred Black women as partners. While Josh and Iceberg flirted with me as a white woman and their preferences in women were intertwined with whiteness, colorism, and internalized racism, they lived in a predominantly Black part of Atlanta, meaning they were more likely to interact with other Black people. Due to racial segregation of neighborhoods and U.S. heterosexual and same-gender relationships being predominantly intra-

racial (Pew Research Center 2017). Black cis-het cissexist men are more likely to murder Black trans women and white cis-het cissexist men are more likely to murder white trans women.

Further men such as Josh, Gee, Mack, and Iceberg, had internalized racism and perpetuated whiteness through colorism and other mechanisms. Their perpetuation of cissexism is also an internalization of whiteness and white supremacy. The violence they enact against Black trans women is also, in part, a result of the racialization of masculinities and factors of structural racism that limit people's choices and the ways in which they can react to various situations and circumstances. Josh and Iceberg both lived in segregated, impoverished areas in Atlanta, and Mack had previously been incarcerated and was part of a gang as a teenager and young adult. Stuart and Benezra elucidate the role of "cultural collateral consequences" in segregated, impoverished, Black communities, "whereby repeated police surveillance and contact transform (and often disrupt) interpersonal relations" (2018: 175). These collateral consequences include cis-het, Black man compensating for the social control and dispossession of their masculinities by "[embracing] domination of others," (176) including Black trans women. It is also possible, that desiring trans women can result in further surveillance of cis-het, Black men by the police. One method some use is to exaggerate heterosexual relationships and ensure that cis-het women partners are around when on the street in order to reduce police suspicion (Stuart and Benezra 2018: 177). Black trans women, also hyper-surveilled and policed, may be viewed as a threat to this goal. Indeed, Henry, a 26-year-old, cis-het, Black man—discussed further in following sections—told me that he desired a woman who did not "stand out" when in public. He explained, "I'm a Black man....and I think if it's too much attention on me, it can go either way." By this, he meant that too much attention can result in him experiencing violence or social sanction. Thus, cis-het, Black men may feel an added pressure to

cultivate friends and intimate partners who do not draw attention to survive. These structural factors do not justify the murders of Black trans women. Instead, these structural factors may shape part of the foundation of racialized cissexism, and these structural factors must be addressed as part of efforts in ameliorating and ending the murders of Black trans women.

8.3 “Murder is wrong, “but...I feel like a transsexual should just go in and say, ‘I’m a man.’”

In the previous section, I explicated the justifications cis-het men gave as to why they or other men would kill a trans woman. While such statements are overtly transphobic and bluntly accepting of transmisogynoir, I detail in this chapter how more subtle and covert discourse provides the foundation from which cis-het men like the participants in the previous section draw when discussing and/or committing such murders. While only seven out of thirty-two participants felt the murders of trans women made sense, another nine strongly felt that the murders were unjustified, but continued to discursively perpetuate the cissexist arguments that the other seven utilized to justify the murders. Of these seven, four were either not religious or were spiritual but not religious, one was a non-practicing, non-devout Muslim, and one was a fairly religious Christian. One was a non-white Latina, two were white (non-Latinx), one white-passing and Middle Eastern, and four were Black. These seven included a cis-bi woman, cis-heteroflexible man who had dated trans women, and a cis-bi man who was only “trans attracted” (*See Table 3 for more demographics*). Four of the seven had previous recurring interactions with people they knew to be trans, and all but one were inclusive and accepting of LGB people. All seven felt the murders of trans women to be wrong, cruel, and unjustified. However, I highlight here how their responses and positions were not that radically different from those who were overtly transphobic.

Table 8. That's Not Okay, But...

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Adam	Cis-Het Man	Middle Eastern	Islam (Low)	Inclusive	0	Some College	Low	25-35
Amanda	Cis-Bi Woman	Black	Christian (Medium)	Inclusive	3-5	Less Than High School	Poverty	25-35
Chris	Cis-Bi Man	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	11+	Less Than High School	Poverty	36-46
D	Cis-Het Man	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	1-2	Some College	Poverty	25-35
Liz	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-white Latina	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Bachelor's	Low	25-35
Mike	Cis-Het Man	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Bachelor's	Poverty	18-24
Randall	Cis-Hetero-flexible Man	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	HS Diploma	Low	25-35
Renee	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Bachelor's	Low	36-46
Spider man	Cis-Het Man	Black	Not Religious	Very Hetero-normative	1-2	HS Diploma	Low	36-46

Chris, a 46-year-old, cis-bi, Black man repeatedly explained to me that he felt women do not want anything from a man other than his money. He, in particular, felt this way about cis, Black women, who he outright refused to date. His sentiments regarding Black women included Black trans women; however, he was open to dating a Black trans woman. His only long-term relationship had included a fifteen-year relationship with a Black trans woman. One of the issues they had was that she engaged in sex work. He explained, “They wants to go to work, but they don’t wanna go to work. That’s why a lot of them [trans women] are out there [doing sex work on the street].” This sentiment and his experience with his previous girlfriend influenced his response regarding the murders of Black trans women. He did not feel that cis-het men are justified in murdering Black trans women. However, he stated:

I feel like a transsexual should just go in and say, “I’m a man, I got a penis, I’m a transsexual,” just don’t tell a man a lie just to get the man money. Because you want the man money, because they do that too. A lot of ’em get killed.

While Chris was solely attracted to trans women, had known myriad trans women, and had been in a relationship with a trans woman, he still did not refer to trans women as women. Chris repeatedly conflated his attraction to trans women as being part of “the gay life,” and he referred to trans women, in the comment above, as men or as “a transsexual” rather than as a woman/trans woman. Chris, like other participants in this category, conceptualized non-disclosure of trans identity as deceit. Further, Chris’s argument that trans women “deceived” cis-het men in order to get their money blames the victims of anti-trans violence. Rather than cis-het men being blamed for the murder, trans women become blamed for engaging in sex work.

Randall, a 33-year-old, cis-heteroflexible, white man, also utilized the very language that participants in the previous two categories used to justify the murders of Black trans women. Randall had gone on two dates with trans women but had never had a long-term relationship with any trans person. He also knew other trans and nonbinary people. He had grown up in a highly religious, Southern Baptist household, and he had worked to unlearn a lot of the homophobia and transphobia he was taught. When I asked him about the murders of Black trans women and the justification cis-het men provide for their actions, he responded:

Um, I can't relate to that at all. It sounds like bullshit to me. Um, I can understand, like I said earlier, being, like feeling like your consent was violated, but that's like...the extent and it's and it's, that's a different level of consent violation than like, like a violent way or something you know? So, like, I think that is just, just comes from a place of, of homophobic hatred.

Randall's language is the same language used by the men in previous two categories, such as Gee, who explained that a man may feel violated. Indeed, it is the same language used by cis-het men who have killed Black trans women, as Westbrook and Schilt (2013) detail. In addition, it is important to ask what one is consenting to when they have sex with a woman and what precisely is the violation? If a man consents to have sex or be in a relationship with a woman, her being trans does not alter the fact that he consented to a relationship with a woman. To argue otherwise is to insinuate that a trans woman is somehow less "woman." Her statement that she is a woman and the man's belief that she is a woman then becomes a lie or mis-construal of the facts. Further, what participants in this category may be conceptualizing as deceit may better be understood as a secret not yet told. Bok notes, "While all deception requires secrecy, all secrecy is not meant to deceive" (1998: 7; cited from Ashley 2018: 357). To deceive is to pretend to be something that one is not. Trans individuals, though, are not pretending to be something they are not. Rather, they are simply living as who they are. Instead, trans individuals who do not disclose trans identity may keep secret their identity in order to protect themselves from harm.

Finally, Randall collapses anti-trans sentiment and anti-trans violence into a form of "homophobic hatred," as did most participants. Most participants, though, (25 out of 32) were not interpersonally homophobic. While all heterosexuals benefit from and perpetuate heterosexism unless they actively and daily work to challenge it as a system, the majority of cis-het and cis-les/bi participants did not utilize a homophobic discourse, shared that they had utmost acceptance for cisgender, LGB people, and had intimate and close relationships with cisgender, LGB people. Homophobia and transphobia, heterosexism and cissexism, are deeply connected, and indeed, cis-het men who justified the murders of Black trans women utilized homophobic

logic. However, 18 out of the 25 participants who did not justify the murders simultaneously utilized or perpetuated cissexist discourse, as Randall did here.

Liz, a 32-year-old, cis-lesbian, Latina, for example, did not utilize homophobic or biphobic language throughout the interview, nor did she have any overt contempt for LGB people. However, when I asked Liz about cis-het men feeling overwhelmed by a woman being trans and reacting by killing the woman, Liz responded:

Being overwhelmed is the result of being uninformed. Yeah, it's definitely being uninformed, because if you, yeah, I'm not gonna say it's not gonna be a little shocking that you thought it was like woman, a woman who was born woman, and then you find out it's transgender.

Liz's statement was in no way overtly cissexist. Indeed, Liz found such murders to be horrendous and was visibly upset during this portion of the interview. Liz advocated for cisgender people learning more about trans-ness to reduce ignorance. However, she also understood feeling shocked upon learning that a woman is transgender. Cissexism is so institutionalized within society that it only seems natural and inevitable that one would be jolted by the "discovery" that someone is transgender. Indeed, cisnormative conceptualizations of trans-ness, socially and within the law, link trans identity with deception and criminality (Clarkson 2020; Degagne 2021). Thus, it is not surprising that Liz and others do so even when otherwise advocating for trans people's safety and rights.

I asked Liz how she would feel if she learned a partner was transgender after having already been on dates or had sex with this woman. Liz stated:

If you are a man and you feel like a woman, you wanna be a woman, or other way around, it's just like, just be brave and face it. Don't hide it. Yeah, so why would you hide something like that from me? Yeah, so I would be upset.

Liz found it of the utmost importance that trans people out themselves to others, and she compared this to cisgender, gay men who keep their gay-ness a secret from others. To be out and open about one's gender or sexuality was to be "brave." To be otherwise was to be cowardly and deceptive.

Similar to Liz, Randall, and Chris, other participants like D, a 26-year-old, cis-het, Black man, placed the blame of being murdered on Black trans women. However, D took their responses a step further. When I asked D, "If we want to keep men from killing trans women, what do you think would help," he responded:

D: Uh just to make sure that they know. It should be like a law so you can like ax first before um tryin to pursue.

Alithia: So it should be allowed that you meet a girl and then you ask her?

D: Yeah

Alithia: And then what would happen like if, if that was a law, and then she lied, what would happen?

D: Then would be like going to court.

Alithia: And she would be in trouble?

D: Right.

D's response, here, was like that of Ky who felt that the murders of Black trans women were extreme but understandable. While Ky argued cis-het men who murder should receive a lesser sentence in the case of non-disclosure, D felt that trans women, themselves, should be

criminalized. While this present category of participants did not seek to justify the murders of Black trans women, they perpetuated the conceptualization of trans women as embodying a “terrorizing trans-ness” (Clarkson 2020). Trans-ness, for these participants, was a covering up of one’s “true nature,” and a lack of disclosure was a violating concealment.

One need not openly advocate for or support the murders of Black trans women to actively perpetuate these murders. More casual cissexism, as found in the responses of participants in this category, becomes imbedded in everyday discourse, making it seem more natural and “commonsense” to men like Gee, Mack, Josh, and Iceberg that they then would react and kill a woman. Further, the conceptualization of non-disclosure as deceptive becomes more complicated when one considers nonbinary and gender-nonconforming individuals. If a cis-het man or cis-lesbian woman sleeps with someone they perceive to be a woman, and this individual was assigned female at birth but identifies as nonbinary, is there a deceptive violation? Or does deceptive violation only occur when one’s sex organs do not match their gender expression? In this case, a conceptualization of trans-ness as deceptive and violating relies upon a gender essentialist ideology that one is born a man or a woman and ultimately remains a man or a woman despite how they look. Participants in this category argued trans women are women, trans men are men, and nonbinary people are nonbinary. However, in simultaneously arguing that nondisclosure is deceptive, they reified a gender essentialist logic that participants in the previous two categories relied upon in making sense of the murders of Black trans women. In this section, I have highlighted how the disavowal of anti-trans violence does not separate one from the same logic and discourse used by those who commit the violence. Instead, participants in this category were connected to those in the previous two categories through the language used to discuss trans women’s decisions regarding their identities, openness, and relationships.

8.4 “It’s really fucked up the world we live in.”

A final category of participants felt the murders of Black trans women were horrendous. These participants did not utilize cissexist discourse or logic in their responses to the murders, although nine out of sixteen did in other parts of the interview, as I discuss in the next chapter. This sub-sample of participants (half the whole sample) included three cis-het men, four cis-bi/queer/homoflexible women, and nine cis-lesbian women. The respondents in this category included 13/17 cis-women I interviewed and were predominantly lesbian. The majority were Black, with four additional non-Latinx white participants, one white Latina, and one Indian American participant. The majority were also between 18 and 24, with four between 25 and 35, and one between 36 and 46. They were mostly not religious or spiritual but not religious, but they also included one highly religious Hindu participant, and three fairly religious Christians (see Table 4 for other demographics).

Table 9. The Murders are Wrong

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Alyshah	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Alyx	Cis-Bi Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	1-2	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Amy	Cis-Lesbian Woman	white Latina	Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Some College	Low	36-46
Cookie	Cis-Homoflexible Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusivity	11+	Grad Degree	Middle Class	25-35
Henry	Cis-Het Man	Black	Christian (Low)	Inclusive	0	Some College	Low	25-35
Janelle	Cis-Queer Woman	Black	Christian (Medium)	Inclusive	1-2	Some College	Middle Class	18-24
Jessica	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Christian (Low)	Slightly Hetero-normative	0	HS Diploma	Middle Class	25-35
Kylee	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Some College	Poverty	18-24
LaLa	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Musiteli	Cis-Het Man	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Bachelor's	Low	18-24
Peaches	Cis-Bi/Queer Woman	Black-Multi-racial	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	11+	Some College	Poverty	18-24

Rachel	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Bachelor's	Low	18-24
Ryan	Cis-Het Man	Asian American	Hindu (High)	Inclusive	1-2	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Sabrina	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	1-2	Bachelor's	Middle Class	25-35
Shantelle	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Some College	Highest Tax Bracket	18-24
Vincent	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	6-10	Some College	Middle Class	18-24

Participants in this category primarily turned to cultural explanations for why cis-het men commit these murders. These participants argued that cis-het men murder Black trans women because of the ways cis-het men are socialized and the way people in the U.S. are socialized. Cultural influences like toxic masculinity, religious belief, a binary gender system, thus, result in cis-het men feeling embarrassed, emotionally insecure, and out of control when encountering individuals who do not fit within cultural schemas of gender. Alyshah, a 20-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman, for example, explained:

That is toxic masculinity, right there...it has to be some kind of insecurity within yourself...to try to kill someone to retaliate because they said this to you [that they are transgender]...If it happens, it happens. You accept the fact, but a lot of times, men, they try to just justify their actions by saying I was feeling this. I was feeling that. No, you're insecure. That's what it is. You didn't want to face the fact that you, [that] this happened. And so now you're blaming her, and you want to kill her for it, and it has nothing to do with her. It's about you.

Alyshah was currently a college student and had taken several sociology courses. Originally coined in the mythopoetic men's movement (Salter 2019; Harrington 2020), toxic masculinity has since come to signify extremely misogynistic, homophobic, cissexist, and hypermasculine

attributes, behaviors, and believes. For Alyshah, a man reacts with such violent force as murder when a culture has so deeply ingrained in him what it means to be a man and a woman that he cannot face what it means for him to be attracted to someone who disobeys binary logic. Scholars like Salter (2019) and Harrington (2020) have critiqued the use of the term “toxic masculinity,” because it ignores the diversity of masculinities that exist and the ways other forms of masculinity also perpetuate misogyny, homophobia, and/or cissexism. In addition to participants like Alyshah who used the concept of toxic masculinity to explain men’s actions, other participants highlighted that the socialization of cis boys/men is at fault for the murders of Black trans women.

Amy, a 37-year-old, cis-lesbian, white Latina, for example, felt that the ways men are socialized in the U.S. and abroad were at fault for raising generations of men who were emotionally arrested. Amy explained:

Throughout history, we have trained our boys to...think that...they’re the top, like they rule the world...the world revolves around them. We’ve trained them not to have emotions, because men [grunts and flexes]. Um we have like stunted them emotionally, I would argue, intellectually, physically, um we’ve created this monster, you know, generationally...It’s like...just because I’m a passionate person, it doesn’t make it okay for me to take it out on other people. Like you are still responsible for your own actions, I don’t care who you are and what you’ve been through.

Men are not supposed to cry, feel love struck, or otherwise feel “feminine” emotions. However, Amy noted that men are trained to feel entitled, egoistic, and strong. Men, thus, are not, according to Amy, taught to process feelings and emotions or how to respond in ways that are not aggressive or violent. When men, then, come to find themselves in an otherwise foreign (to

them) situation upon meeting someone who does not fit within what they've been taught about gender and sexuality, they may not know how to handle the numerous feelings racing through them. Indeed, Bourdieu (1998) highlights the overwhelming role that fear plays in the lives of men as masculinity and manhood are accomplished through validation by other men/masculine individuals. Thus, such fear may play a role in the resulting violence that ensues when desiring trans women.

Musiteli, a 24-year-old, cis-het, Black man, felt that there needs to be attention placed on cis-het men and why they murder in order to prevent further murders. If we do not attend to the logic, emotions, and decision making of men, we cannot address the root issue. Musiteli explained, "I guess the issue is men. Um...and...it would be, this, I guess this demasculization that they feel, that they feel demasculinized whenever they find out that they've been with a trans woman." As I pointed out in Chapter 3, stigma sticks to bodies (Goffman 1963), and trans women's embodiment of what Schippers (2007) terms pariah femininities contaminates the relations between masculinities and femininities. The stigma of trans-ness lowers cis-het men in the hierarchies of masculinities, and it is through violence that they shed that stigma and recuperate their masculinity.

Vincent, an 18-year-old, cis-lesbian, white woman, and Rachel, mentioned earlier, also felt that cis-het men kill out of anger and fears of being "made gay" and/or emasculated. They explained in the focus group:

Vincent: I think 'cause they get angry. I mean the men that kill these trans women, they're probably like...afraid to be seen as gay like in anyway by anybody, and then they get angry about it. Like it's a defense mechanism, but it's still awful and wrong obviously.

Rachel: Yeah, I think they feel that it's like a threat to their masculinity and their like identity. Um and...yeah so they, they react with anger.

Vincent and Rachel highlight, again, the threat that cis-het men may feel trans women pose to their masculinity, their manhood, and their heterosexuality. Salamon (2018) elucidates how this construction of trans femininities as aggressive and assaultive is a racial-gender construction. Salamon explicates this in the murder of Latisha King. Throughout the trial, “descriptions of Latisha [a teenager] as ‘aggressive’ demonstrate a phobic relation to race as well as, and as intertwined with, gender and sexuality...Latisha was characterized as disruptive, as unruly” (20). During the trial of Latisha’s murder, witnesses, the prosecutor, and the defense did not refer to her Black-ness. Instead, it was decided pre-trial that race was not a defining component of the crime. Similarly, my participants did not point to the role of Black trans women’s Blackness as a part of the equation resulting in their trans-ness being characterized as so aggressive as to injure a man’s gender-sexual subjectivity. Race, though, was a part of the equation.

In addition to the construction of US masculinities and the socialization of cis-het men, participants pointed to the role that media play in the murders of Black trans women. Media images circulate of trans women as a joke or of trans women as “gay men” attempting to “trick” heterosexual men. These images portray trans women to create a cultural reaction of embarrassment, ridicule, and emasculation when a cis-het man finds himself attracted to a woman who happens to be trans. When I asked participants about the murders of Black trans women, several referenced *The Jerry Springer Show* that aired from 1991 to 2018. Stuart Heritage (2020), writing for The Guardian, described the talk show: “In episodes with titles such as I’m Pregnant by a Transsexual! and Lesbolicious, Springer would introduce a guest, hear their complaints, bring on an aggressor and watch as they verbally and physically attacked each

other.” A google search of the show’s episodes bring up numerous trans-related episodes, including “Transgender Triangles,” “I Had Sex with a Tranny,” “Do You Want Me or My Transsexual Brother,” “Dating a Man, Woman, & Transgender Roast,” “Transsexual Shockers,” “Cheated with Transgender Stripper,” and more. The show’s salacious episodes averaged 1.7 million viewers in 2018 and was popular enough to bring the host, Jerry Springer, “a \$30 million, five-year contract in 2000” (O’Connell 2018). Rachel, a 22-year-old, cis-lesbian, white woman, pointed out that her progressive, women’s college student center’s televisions aired shows like Jerry Springer. Rachel stated, “I would walk into the student center and there would be like these weird shows where they would literally...invite trans women on the show just to argue with each other.” Media images of trans women center trans-ness as a spectacle of deception. While media representation of trans characters and stories has increased in recent years, such media representation remains complicated, with some shows detailing the nuance, diversity, and complexity of trans experiences and others continuing to portray flat and limited storylines that perpetuate problems evident in *The Jerry Springer Show* (zamantakis and Sumerau 2019). In an interview with the producers of the Netflix documentary, *Disclosure*, viewers are provided a glimpse of the film in which actress, activist, model, and producer, Laverne Cox, states, “According to a study from GLADD, 80% of Americans don’t personally know someone who is transgender. Most of the information that Americans get about who transgender people are, what our lives are and are about, comes from the media^{xvii}.” Media portrayals, past and present, continue to influence the ways cisgender people feel about and conceptualize trans people and trans lives. Such media representations create controlling images (Collins 1990) of trans women that frame cissexist ideologies as “natural and normal” facets of everyday life.

Controlling images shaped not only how trans-ness is conceptualized as deceptive and duplicitous, but also how Black women, including Black trans women, are viewed in society. I asked all participants to define femininity, and I asked whether race shapes or differentiates femininity. Several participants, primarily Black women, highlighted controlling images of Black women as masculine and aggressive and white women as feminine. As Sabrina, a 25-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman noted, “I think a lot of people would say...African American women are a little bit more aggressive...because we’ve had the stereotype around us of bad attitudes.” Participants also highlighted that Black men are constructed as, or as Cookie put it, “are made to be and appear more masculine.” She explained why this is:

Probably the same reason a lot of Black women are pushed into being more masculine or more independent, um at one point in time even now, pretty much we're kind of forced to um literally talk about Willie Lynch and, you know, us being taken from our men and us being, you know, men being beaten in front of our wives or kids, whether it's the welfare system, and, you know, in order to for us to get services, you know, they couldn't be in a house, we had to fend for ourselves and, you know, absent fathers and the prison system. I think it's a lot. A lot that plays into that so deeply rooted stuff. Some deeply rooted trauma.

Trans women, as a group, are constructed as assaultive, harmful, and aggressive. Black women are constructed as more masculine than white women. Black men are constructed as hypermasculine and more virile than white men. What then, does it look like, for a cis-het man to be attracted to a Black trans woman who is deemed hyperaggressive, hypermasculine, and dangerous as a Black person, a Black person assigned male at birth, a Black woman, a trans person, and a Black trans woman? In this way, cultural socialization of children, the media narratives that circulate of trans women, a rigid, white, gender binary system, and legacies of

white supremacy in the United States funnel into the conceptualization of the murders of Black trans women as a cis-het man's defense mechanism. Participants in this category explained the idea of the murders as a defense mechanism as the thought process of a cis-het man that needs to be changed, healed, and altered.

When I asked Cookie what needs to change for the murders of Black trans women to end, she responded:

The issue isn't the community, the issue is the people that's fuckin 'killing them [laughs,] you know what I'm saying? So, it's like you shouldn't have to like divulge that. Um the person should just care enough to just want to know you and learn you, but we all know that that's not people, you know, and everybody just kind of comes to the table with the same thoughts, feelings ideas....Um I don't know. We need to do a better job with normalizing as a community, we need to do a better job with educating and protecting. Um we need to do a better job of punishing people when they take this action, because there's not always people on the other side of the law that like, care enough about the gay guy or the trans woman or the lesbian woman to actually make an example when someone's, you know, life is taken, or dignity is taken, or whatever. Um you gotta set the example....Because if you kill somebody because they love differently, they live differently or whatever, and they just kind of get off, is that really going to deter other people from doing it? You know, um, I think I think something has to give because this shit's crazy [crying].

Participants like Cookie took an entirely different stance on the murders of Black trans women than participants in the three prior categories. Rather than placing the blame on Black trans women, conceptualizing trans-ness as deceptive or duplicitous, or feeling as though trans women

deserve this treatment, these participants placed the blame on cis-het men. They highlighted the need for a shift in how society understands gender and sexuality, as well as processes of accountability to keep cis-het men from continuing to murder. Cookie highlighted that the law does not protect those experiencing oppression. Instead, through either a lack of empathy or out of a desire to cause harm to those oppressed, those in power enact laws that continue to harm marginalized people and often refuse to enact laws meant to protect (DeGagne 2021).

While the three other categories of participants exemplified the necropolitics of cis-ness, this category of participants explicated it. Cisgender people, cis-het men in particular, are deeply affected by ruptures in the gender binary and contamination of the relations between masculinities and femininities. Violence enables cis-het men to regain their status in the hierarchy of masculinities, and maintains cis-ness as an ideological, political, and social manifestation. The lack of accountability for cis-het men who murder and commit violence against Black trans women sends the message that the law and society hold trans women in low regard. Cis-het masculinity is sustained and recuperated through violence, and cis-ness is protected from further contamination vis-à-vis pariah femininities, as the source of “contamination” is no more. Further, this category of participants also elucidated the role of social norms, discourse, and controlling images. Bourdieu notes, “Symbolic domination...is exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousness but through the schemes of perception, appreciation, and action that are constitutive of habitus” (1998: 37). The construction of a white, cis habitus normalizes social degradation, dehumanization, and pathologization of Black trans women. This habitus comes to shape how cisgender individuals perceive Black trans women and other trans women of color, resulting in participants in the previous three categories conceptualizing the murdered women as deceptive and violating. While the majority of

participants would not commit such murders, half of all participants were able to make sense of these murders due to their positionality within a white, cis habitus. Further, as I highlight in the next chapter, nearly all participants perpetuated cissexist discourse at varying points in the interview; thus, even those who were strongly pro-trans remained shaped by their socialization within a white, cis habitus.

8.5 Conclusion

Participants of all demographics (race, age, income, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth) were scattered across the four categories. However, I found four correlations between participant demographics and the category they fell in. First, white participants (5 out of 7) were more likely to be angered by the murders and refuse to justify them than participants of color. However, when comparing Black participants and non-Black participants, there were no non-Black participants in the first two categories of participants—those who found them extreme but understandable and those who felt they would kill trans women. Six out of ten non-Black participants fell into the final category of participants who found the murders horrendous and unjustifiable. In comparison, only 10 out of 22 Black participants fell into this final category. Part of what is occurring here may be shaped by the role of religion. Participants who were religious (and, in particular, Christian) were most likely to be cis-het, Black men. 6 out of 11 religious participants were cis-het Black men. Two others were non-Black, cis-het men of color, and an additional three were Black, cis women. Kanamori and Xu (2020) utilized structural equation modeling to analyze the role of religiosity and transphobia and found that the more fundamentally religious one is, the more likely they are to express transphobic sentiments.

Additionally, as I have noted, men such as Josh, Gee, Jake, and Iceberg had internalized racism and perpetuated whiteness through colorism and other mechanisms. Their perpetuation of

cissexism is also an internalization of whiteness and white supremacy. Prior to the colonization and genocide of Indigenous peoples in the U.S., the colonization of various areas now referred to as differently named countries throughout the continents of Africa, Asia, and South America, and the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans brought to the Americas, many Indigenous peoples and Black peoples had systems of gender and sexuality other than a binary man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual system now in place (Oyěwùmí 1997; Najmabadi 2005; Mogul et al. 2011; Driskill 2016). The “lack” of a gender binary was, in part, used as evidence of their “primitivity,” and this “evidence” was used as part of the justification for colonization, enslavement, and forced Christianization. Thus, it is not surprising to find the effects of colonialism and white supremacy on Black participants. Further, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, structural factors of white supremacy shape the construction of cis-het, Black masculinities (Stuart and Benezra 2018). Such factors may play a role in the enactment of violence by cis-het, Black men against Black trans women. While Black cis-het men who kill Black trans women are at fault for their crimes, it is important to hold accountable all white people, including white trans people, for the crimes of our ancestors that led to the institutionalization and perpetuation of cissexism today in all communities.

Second, 13 out of 17 cis women participants fell into the final category of participants who found the murders horrendous and unjustifiable, and no cis women participants felt that they would kill trans women nor did they know individuals who would. This is consistent, as well, with quantitative studies that have found cis men to exhibit higher levels of transphobic prejudice than cis women (Norton and Herek 2013; Kanamori and Xu 2020). This correlation amongst my participants was also possibly shaped by sexual orientation differences, as Norton and Herek (2013) found correlations between those harboring prejudice against gays, lesbians, and

bisexuals and those harboring prejudice against transgender people. Further, cis-het men were perhaps more able to empathize with men who murder Black trans women as they intimately understand the social control of masculinities and manhood. Cis-het men participants not only detailed that they could make sense of why other cis-het men feel emasculated by finding out a woman they are attracted to is trans, but they also detailed that they, too, would feel this way. In contrast, few cis-les/bi women felt that they would have their womanhood, queer identity, and/or femininity/masculinity challenged for being with a trans woman.

Third, 5 out of 7 middle class participants fell into the final category of participants who found the murders horrendous and unjustifiable. In comparison, 14 out of 24 low income and/or impoverished participants were in the first three categories of participants who either justified the murders, felt they would kill a trans woman, or utilized the same rhetoric as those who justified the murders. This is in part, potentially, shaped by differences in education and awareness around such issues. Further, it is important to understand the role of class on masculinities and femininities. The subordination of working-class men in relation to middle- and upper-class men may prompt some working-class men to enact exaggerated masculinities and to rely more heavily on gender essentialist ideologies that place men in a superior position to women (Pyke 1996). Displays of hypermasculinity and more overt reliance on a gender binary and gender essentialism can function as “a kind of last resort in asserting power and producing masculinity” for working class men who experience other forms of gendered-classed power inequities (Pyke 1996: 19). Notably, three of the four low-income, cis-les/bi women in the first three categories of participants were attracted to women who were more feminine and shared a similar gender expression as themselves. They were not particularly attracted to butch women or studs. Thus,

perhaps, their attraction to gender-conforming women shaped their responses to trans women as individuals who transgress gender/sex norms.

Finally, individuals who had trans friends, family members, intimates, or close connections were less likely to attempt to justify the murders. Of those who knew one or more trans women, six fell into the third category of participants who found the murders horrendous but still utilized the same rhetoric as those who justified the murders. The other 11 found the murders horrendous and unjustified. In comparison, only four out of fourteen participants who did not have a trans friend, family member, intimate, or close connection found the murders horrendous and unjustified. Indeed, quantitative studies have found that social contact with trans individuals significantly decreases the likelihood of individuals harboring transphobic prejudice (Barbir 2015; Kanamori and Xu 2020). Previous studies have found that heterosexual individuals with multiple social contacts who are gay/lesbian are even less likely to harbor homophobic prejudice than those with just one or two social contacts (Herek and Capitanio 1996). Similarly, those participants in my study who had multiple friends, family, or partners who were trans were less likely to justify the murders than those who only knew one or two. The role of contact in participant responses cannot fully be fleshed out, because it could be that cisgender individuals who are more trans friendly are more likely to have trans friends, family, and/or intimate partners. Or it could be that cisgender individuals with trans friends, family, and partners are able to learn from these relationships and unlearn cisnormativity in the process. Either way, social contact plays an important role in assessing the likelihood that one will seek to justify the murders of Black trans women and/or commit such murders themselves.

Race, gender, class, and social contact each played differential and overlapping roles vis-à-vis participants' responses to the murders of Black trans women. Further, cultural discourse

shapes how individuals come to make sense of the world around them. There is a limited cultural discourse from which cis people make sense of trans people. This limited discourse includes trans people as sick, as a joke, as deceptive and dishonest, and as harmful to individuals and society. This discourse becomes utilized by cis-het men and cis-les/bi women, as I detailed in this chapter, to justify and/or perpetuate the murders of Black trans women. While few (7 out of 32) participants felt that the murders were understandable or that they or people they knew would commit such a murder, the majority of participants provided the foundation for the logic that those who kill or those who understand the killings then use to justify such murders. I have shown in this chapter how cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants responded to the murders of Black trans women and their explanations as to why the murders occur. I have detailed the roles of race/racism, class, gender, and social contact on participants' responses, and I have explicated the role that violence against Black trans women plays in allowing individuals to recuperate their masculinities/femininities. In the next chapter, I elucidate how microaggressive transmisogyny and transmisogynoir, casual cissexism, and overt cissexism are not distinct from one another. Indeed, while all but four of the participants distanced themselves from "those" who harm or oppress others, twenty five out of thirty-two participants still perpetuated or utilized cissexist discourse at varying points in the interview.

9 CHAPTER 5 – CIS-LES/BI/QUEER WOMEN THINKING CIS

In the previous four chapters, I have elucidated the sociopolitical and cultural contours of cisness. In this chapter, I turn to the title of my dissertation, “Thinking Cis.” I discuss and explicate what exactly it means to “think cis.” I home in on how cis-les/bi women “think cis” to elucidate the diverse manifestations of cissexism outside of the overt cissexism espoused in the previous chapters. Thinking cis is a way of making sense of the world. It is the perpetuation of a cissexist and binarist ideology in reducing human bodies to a “naturally” occurring sex binary of male and female that supposedly correlate with a “naturally” occurring gender binary of man and woman. It is the belief that trans identity and community and nonbinary gender identities are a new facet of human society and the co-belief that the gender binary has been core to humanity since the evolution of the species or the “divine creation” of man and woman. To think cis is not only to believe that trans women are not really women and trans men are not really men but that gender operates as a binary the world over, as well as that gender exists the world over.

Thinking cis is not only a cissexist, binarist, and sexist ideology and discourse but a racist and colonialist ideology and discourse, as well. To think cis is to believe that men and women are fundamentally different: they behave, look, and act differently. It is to believe that men are meant to be the dominant “head” of the species, with white men superior to all and white women their helpmate. Thinking cis proliferates within white supremacist ideologies that argue white men and white women must join together in heterosexual matrimony to reproduce the white, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied nuclear family and protect it at all costs from those who “infringe” on their white picket fence (*e.g.* immigrants, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, queer/trans people, and disabled people).

One example of thinking cis is trans exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) thought. In an interview with *The Trans Advocate*, cisgender, feminist blogger, TigTog, explains why she and others began using the word “TERF” to describe a particular version of feminism. TigTog states, “We wanted a way to distinguish TERFs from other radfems with whom we engaged who were trans*-positive/neutral” (2014). Radical feminism, different from liberal feminism, does not seek to reform a patriarchal system. It aims, instead, to get at the root causes of patriarchal oppression (Tong 2014). Radical feminism, different from liberal feminism and other feminist theoretical strains and activist organizing, focuses in on the social construction of the gender and sex binaries and orients itself around a (a racially and gender reductionist^{xviii}) women’s liberation by women as a “sex class” rather than a group of people “born” and identifying as female. Most importantly to my analysis, radical feminists argue that the sex and gender binary function as a “set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (Rubin 1975: 159). Thus, radical feminism shares with a critical trans politic the understanding of the sex/gender binary as a sociocultural construction fabricated for purposes of domination. Despite this fundamental overlap between the two forms of thought, trans exclusionary radical feminism argues that “‘sex’ is immutable” and pro-trans legislation provides “men” “unfettered access to women-only spaces” (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020).

In my interviews with cis-les/bi women, several brought up their disappointment with trans exclusionary radical feminism. Indeed, it served as the reference point of what constitutes a transphobic, cis woman. In this chapter, though, I argue that TERFs are only one version of how transphobia manifests amongst cis women. I distinguish between TERFs and what I conceptualize as the “Conditionally Accepting Cis-ter” and the “Casual Transphobe.” I then

discuss what I conceptualize as “Critical Cis-ness,” or an active and sustained pushback against cissexism.

9.1 Different Ways of Thinking Cis

Cis-ness, like whiteness, abledness, and straightness, is an ideology. It is a way of making static, stable, and controllable an otherwise dynamic, fungible, and disorderly world. Human life is not static, stable, or orderly vis-à-vis the social, biological, historical, and/or psychological. The study of epigenetics highlights how environmental factors can alter the phenotypic expression of genes (Weinhold 2006). Biologists and psychologists have explicated how environmental factors shape neural networks and influence our development as individuals (Fausto-Sterling 2000). History scholars elucidate the varying shapes “gender” takes across time and place, including ways in which many societies historically did not have a concept of gender prior to colonization (*see* Laqueur 1990; Oyěwùmí 1997; Najmabadi 2005). Despite countless evidence detailing the fictitious nature of the gender/sex binary (Laqueur 1990; Oyěwùmí 1997; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Lugones 2007; Mogul et al. 2011; Najmabadi 2005; Driskill 2016; Gossett 2016) and the harm of the white, gender/sex binary and cissexism (Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Spade 2011; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Aizura 2014; Shakhsari 2014; James et al. 2016; schuster 2017), cis-ness remains a predominant ideology vis-à-vis seeing, categorizing, and reacting to myriad bodies.

In an essay on “sex and gender issues,” author J.K. Rowling declaratively stated and explicated why she believes trans-ness poses a potential threat to cisgender women. She wrote:

As many women have said before me, ‘woman’ is not a costume. ‘Woman’ is not an idea in a man’s head. ‘Woman’ is not a pink brain, a liking for Jimmy Choos or any of the other sexist ideas now somehow touted as progressive. Moreover, the ‘inclusive’ language that

calls female people ‘menstruators’ and ‘people with vulvas’ strikes many women as dehumanising and demeaning. I understand why trans activists consider this language to be appropriate and kind, but for those of us who’ve had degrading slurs spat at us by violent men, it’s not neutral, it’s hostile and alienating.

Statements like Rowling’s are not new. Divisions within feminist and/or lesbian spaces have repeatedly engaged with and debated the “transgender question.” Lesbian feminist, Charlotte Croson, in her essay regarding the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festivals’ trans exclusionary politics wrote, “We as feminists owe it to ourselves...to deconstruct and oppose...trans politics. In a feminist analysis, they are, to put it simply, on the wrong side. In opposition to feminism” (2001; cited from Green 2006: 232). A study surveying cisgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual participants about their reactions to a transgender character in an early 2000’s soap opera found cisgender lesbian participants to repeatedly deny the validity of a trans woman’s womanhood and the possibility that a trans woman, and any woman who dates her, could be a lesbian (Morrison 2010).

While individuals like Rowling and Croson who espouse feminist ideas that intentionally exclude trans women view trans women as “men” masquerading as women and regard gender-inclusive language as a detriment to society are the predominant image of cissexism, such forms of overt cissexism are only one manifestation of cis-ness. Even more insidious than overt forms of cissexism are the “brief and commonplace, daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative” slights against trans, nonbinary, and/or gender-nonconforming people (Sue et al. 2007). These include the sensationalized inquiry of what genitals a trans person has, the fetishization of trans people as “the best of both worlds,” and the belief that one can tell who is

transgender and who is cisgender. Such occurrences are not identical to the language espoused by Rowling above. However, these actions are so recurrent and commonplace that they often go unquestioned and come to form the basis of a cissexist discourse utilized by TERFs and other overtly cissexist individuals.

9.2 Categorizing Thinking Cis

Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs), who also often refer themselves as gender-critical feminists, are overtly cissexist not only in their exclusion of trans women from feminist movements and organizations but also in how they conceptualize and (dis)regard trans women.

TERFs recurrently regard trans women as male due to their conceptualization of sex as “biological,” immutable, and dyadic^{xix}. Further, they conceptualize trans women as men^{xx} or “simulacra” of women^{xxi} and foster a notion that trans women pose a threat to women and women’s movements and spaces^{xxii}.

Table 1. Thinking Cis

TERFs	“Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters”	“Casual Transphobes”	“Critically Cis”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize trans women as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male ▪ Men ▪ Dangerous ▪ Mentally ill due to their trans-ness • Belief that sex is immutable and biological • Belief that trans women cannot be lesbian and that cis women attracted to trans women cannot be lesbian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize trans women as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Female & women <i>if</i> they have had surgery ▪ Fundamentally different from cis women • Conceptualize desire as individual • Belief that “preferences” for cis women and not trans women are not transphobic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize trans women as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Female ▪ Women • Belief that you cannot tell who is trans & who is cis but that you can ask • Conceptualize desire as individual • Belief that “preferences” for cis women and not trans women are not transphobic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize trans women as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Female ▪ Women • Belief that you cannot tell who is trans & who is cis • Refusal to ask people about their genitals & bodies • Desire to protect trans people from cis people • Reflexivity vis-à-vis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their own gender ▪ Their desires

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that trans women are deceptive and dishonest if they do not “out” themselves • Misgender trans women and other trans/nonbinary people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that trans women are deceptive and dishonest if they do not “out” themselves • Misgender trans women and other trans/nonbinary people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that trans women are dishonest <i>but not deceptive</i> if they do not “out” themselves • Referring to trans women with they/them pronouns in place of she/her 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that trans women can choose whether to “out” themselves or not at their discretion • Referring to trans women as she/her
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TERFs often highlight a hyperbolic fear that allowing trans women into women’s restrooms, for example, will open the door to men in dresses entering women’s restrooms to sexually assault (cis) women. Due to these beliefs, TERFs and gender-critical feminists often misgender trans women, referring to trans women with he/him pronouns and with male adjectives and descriptions^{xxiii}. As TERFs and gender-critical feminists do not believe trans women are, indeed, women, many do not believe trans women can be lesbian^{xxiv}. Much akin to many of my participants, TERFs argue, as well, that a lack of “disclosure” of one’s trans identity “constitute[s] cases of rape by deception” (Wild 2019). Each of these beliefs and behaviors constitute only a portion of what constitutes trans-exclusionary radical feminism and/or gender-critical feminism. However, I introduce them here to provide a concise description of TERF/gender-critical feminism and to differentiate this position from other ways in which my participants engaged in “thinking cis.”

None of my participants engaged in a wholly TERF discourse. Instead, many engaged in trans-inclusive and trans-exclusive discourse at different times in the interview. “Think Cis,” rather than a binary of TERF-ism and Pro-Trans Feminism, is much more a spectrum of fluid categories that participants moved in and out of depending on what was being asked (*e.g.* whether trans women are women and/or female, whether a cis woman-trans woman relationship

is a lesbian relationship, how they would respond to having sex with a woman they did not know to be trans). Adjacent to TERFs are those participants I conceptualized as “Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters” (see Table 1). Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters are women who seek to appear trans inclusive while still pulling from a repertoire of anti-trans rhetoric. While TERFs disregard the reality that trans women are women and female, Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters conceptualize trans women as women and female *if* they have had surgery.

In analyzing the data, I began to see distinct patterns in how cis women discussed trans women’s bodies. While some were TERF-adjacent, others spoke overtly of support for trans women but continued to mirror a discourse similar to those who were TERF-adjacent. These women viewed trans women as women and believed trans women have a right to women’s and lesbian spaces, but they also often misgendered photos of “more visibly trans” women (see Appendix F for photos) and perpetuated the idea that trans women not outing themselves was dishonest. Finally, other cis women participants were highly critical of cis people, cis-ness, and the gender binary in comparison to these two other groups. In seeing these patterns, I analyzed participant discourse for those characteristics that were most shared across interviews and were either similar to or different from characteristics common among TERFs. From there, I placed participants into the categories that most fit—or which represented most of their discourse about trans women. These categories, though, are not fixed. Instead, they are porous, as I detail later. In this chapter, I explicate three conceptual categories of “thinking cis.” These include Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, and “Casual Transphobes.” I also flesh out an additional category I termed “Critically Cis,” which included participants who discursively positioned cis-ness as an assault on trans people.

9.3 The “Conditionally Accepting Cis-ter”

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/ Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Jessica	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Christian (Low)	Slightly Hetero-normative	0	HS Diploma	Middle Class	25-35
Liz	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-white Latina	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Bachelor’s	Low	25-35
Sheila	Cis-Bi Woman	Black	Christian (Low)	Inclusive	0	Some College	Low	25-35

Table 2. Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters

I categorized three participants as Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters (*see* Table 2). Two of these women were Black and one participant was non-white, Latina. None of the three were particularly religious. Both Jessica and Sheila were Christian but purely for cultural reasons. Sheila, for example, felt a cultural attachment to Christianity as a Black woman but did not necessarily feel a desire to live according to the dogma of the religion. Jessica felt many Christians, in particular pastors, were hypocritical, financially corrupt, and problematic in their intense homophobia. Liz, while not Christian, was similarly spiritual, believing in a higher power, but not religious. Of the three, Liz was the only who had attained a bachelor’s degree. Jessica had a high school education and Sheila had recently begun studying nursing at a local college. All three were between 25- and 35-years-old, and none had recurring interactions with individuals they knew to be trans. Sheila had one former coworker who was transgender, but they did not work together long, and Sheila repeatedly referred to her as a “man” and used he/him pronouns, so I do not believe they were particularly close coworkers. I categorized Jessica as slightly heteronormative, because she viewed bisexual people as “greedy” for not having an attraction to a single gender.

Each of the Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS expressed their gender in ways that mirrored the desires of many early radical feminists to embody “any potpourri of masculine and feminine characteristics...that strikes their fancy” (Tong 2014: 28). These participants’ gender expression and how they engage in “thinking cis” were both adjacent to TERF and other anti-trans feminist cis women. Jessica had short, tightly textured hair and did not wear any makeup. She wore pants and a loose top. Liz, a 32-year-old, cis-lesbian, Latina woman described herself:

I consider myself in the middle [of masculinity and femininity]....I don’t really like a lot of makeup. I don’t do a lot of makeup. Um, I’m gonna say, I can’t do makeup at all sometimes. Um but I don’t really like also wearing, you know, boy’s clothes. Mostly, I mean, sometimes I like feeling comfortable, but no. Like someone that I see, they just look, like they wear guys’ clothes, and I don’t like that. I just like something in the middle, yeah.

Sheila, too, was not explicitly feminine or masculine. She wore her hair natural and shaved close to the scalp. She did not wear any makeup other than a touch of bright pink lipstick. She wore a dark blue, puffy “women’s” jacket with jeans and a grey sweater. Her nails were long but were neither painted nor manicured. She described herself, “I’m the kind of person who can get dressed in thirty minutes and be out.” She embraced a masculine aesthetic approach with a desire for “comfort” over “style,” while also having minor, “feminine” touches like lipstick. Indeed, each of these women bore a similar gender expression.

I asked participants questions regarding whether they would still desire a woman if they later found out she was trans and how dating a trans woman would potentially shape or reshape their gendered and sexual understandings of self and their social and familial lives. I also asked participants whether they regarded trans women to be women and/or female and trans men to be

men and/or male. I intentionally asked both woman/female and man/male to assess whether participants saw the two words differently and whether they saw gender and sex as separate concepts. When I asked Jessica, a 33-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman, this question, she first responded simply, “Yes.” When I asked her to elaborate, she contradicted herself saying, “For me, I think that it’s the genitalia, so like if you’re completely changed over then I feel like you’re a man, you’re a male. But if you’re a man walkin’ around with a vagina, then I feel like, I don’t know, you’re still a woman.” For Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, like Jessica, trans women were only women and/or female and trans men were only men and/or male if they had undergone gender affirmation surgery. While trans people are often criticized by TERFs and other trans exclusionary feminists as reifying gender/sex essentialism for altering their bodies to fit with their own gendered/sexed perceptions of their bodies, Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters and TERFs alike view gender as inherently tied to the body. The difference between the two is regarding the (im)mutability of gender/sex. For TERFs, gender and sex are immutable. A trans woman is permanently a man/male simply because she was born with a penis and potentially (if endosex) higher levels of testosterone and XY chromosomes. For Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, a trans woman is a woman/female and a trans man is a man/male if they have undergone surgery. Gender/sex were mutable for participants I categorized as Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters. However, its mutability, for them, did not disconnect gender/sex from one’s genitalia. The belief that gender/sex are mutable, then, does not inherently negate gender/sex essentialism.

Additionally, such a demand for individuals to alter their genitalia in order to be appropriately recognized as a man or a woman ignores the cost of gender surgeries. Gender affirmation surgery (GAS)—sometimes referred to as gender confirmation surgery, gender reassignment surgery, or sex reassignment surgery—is an expensive procedure. GAS (as I’ll

refer to it) can cost anywhere “from \$7,000 to \$50,000, although average male-to-female surgery costs only \$23,000 over two years” (Zimmerly 2013). For trans men and trans people assigned female at birth, there are three surgical options vis-à-vis genitalia: 1). Metoidioplasty, or the extension of “clitoral” tissue into a small penis; 2). Phalloplasty, or the creation of a penis from skin and tissue grafts from elsewhere on the body and the extension of the urethra; 3). Scrotoplasty, or the creation of a scrotum with prosthetic testicles from “labial” tissue, which can be done alone or in combination with either other surgery. Metoidioplasty, though, costs between \$6,000 and \$30,000 on average and phalloplasty costs between \$20,000 and \$150,000 on average (Clary 2018). Without universal and/or affordable health care, such a demand is not only problematic from a feminist and critical trans standpoint but also financially unreasonable.

Further, the reliance upon the body by both TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-terns relies upon a white, Western view of sex, gender identity, and gender expression. A focus on the genitalia one was born with and the genitalia one has at present is core to what Oyěwùmí terms “body-reasoning,” or “a biological interpretation of the social world” (1997: 5). Disentangling sex and gender from the body is a nearly impossible endeavor for many individuals socialized within a Western ontology of sex and gender. For example, articles, reddit questions, and online forums abound with individuals seeking to understand what it means to be nonbinary, what nonbinary identities “look like,” how to use they/them, zie/zer, and other pronouns, and how to *definitively know* whether an individual is a man, a woman, both, or neither. In comparison, Yorùbá peoples, prior to colonization, did not have a concept of sex or gender, did not organize society according to sex or gender, and did not “privilege the physical world over the metaphysical” (*Ibid.* 14). To conceptualize the body as the definitive marker of an individual’s identity is to perpetuate a white, cissexist notion of the self and to disregard the varied and

differential ways in which the self—and selves together—can be interpreted. An ontology built on “body-reasoning” is but one present form of what could and should be.

In addition to womanhood and manhood hinging on genitalia for Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, these participants also viewed trans women as fundamentally different from cis women. For Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, even if a trans woman had elected to medically transition, her body and her womanhood were not equal to cis womanhood and cis women’s bodies. Instead, trans womanhood and trans women’s bodies were a curious amalgamation of “male” and “female” physicality. When I asked Sheila, a 27-yearold, cis-bisexual, Black woman, whether the words female and woman meant the same thing, she responded:

Female? No. I feel like female’s a gender term. Female and woman...granted they’re the same thing but I feel like in my mind, they’re different. A female is because you...have female genitalia. A woman is...a state of mind. A way of life. A becoming.

While Jessica did not differentiate between sex and gender, Sheila felt that trans women can indeed be women, but they can only be female if they have had bottom surgery. Gender, for Sheila, was tied to a “part of the psychic self” (Meadow 2018). Sheila conceptualized gender as something one feels and sex as something one has. However, Sheila felt that, even if a trans woman had undergone GAS, her body would not be a “real” female body. She explained:

I don’t like that mix. Um it’s a little awkward to me. Um...because I know like, you don’t have boobs, I’m sorry. And then if you did, because I’m an overthinker, my mind is always gonna be like “these are not your boobs!” Um...yeah. But I mean it’s like I would still wanna get to know her.... I would wanna see it [the trans woman’s vulva], like [breaths in] I gotta see it. We gotta talk about this. We gotta have this conversation.

Sheila assumed that trans women cannot physically develop breasts through hormone replacement therapy even though many trans women can. Regardless, Sheila's characterization of a trans woman's boobs as "not her own" is not a statement that the trans woman's boobs are not her property or they are not a part of her body. Rather, trans women's genitals and secondary sex characteristics were conceptualized as something separate from "real" or "natural" materiality. While Haraway (1985) celebrated the cyborg as a being heralding the blurring of boundaries, identities, and the fictive separation of artifice and naturality, Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, like Sheila, found trans women's bodies to be an undesirable amalgamation of what is deemed proper to the body and that which is not and of that which is deemed female and that which is male. Repeatedly when viewing photos of trans women, Sheila would laugh while characterizing various "visibly trans" photos as men (see Appendix F for photos). As a bisexual, cis woman, Sheila desired feminine women and masculine men.

In addition to conceptualizing trans women and trans men as only female and male, respectively, if they have undergone GAS and trans women as fundamentally different from cis women, Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters also conceptualized trans women as deceptive and dishonest if they do not tell intimate partners that they are trans. Take for example Liz's response to my question, "If you met a woman and she had a vagina and you had sex, then she told you afterwards that she's trans, how would you feel or react?":

I would be upset. Yeah, because why wouldn't she be honest with me before? Like I said, it's something no one should be hiding. Um...I always, I talk with my friends that are gay, I have a lot of guy friends that are gay, and a lot of them are...they stay in the closet for a long time and some of them, they were like just out to their family so easily, and I, I see the ones that were out to their family like, hey this is who I am, it's up to you if you're

gonna accept me and love me who I am, I call that bravery. If you are a man and you feel like a woman, you wanna be a woman, or, or other way around, it's just like, just be brave and face it. Don't hide it. Yeah, so I would be upset, definitely.

Liz highlighted what other Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters also explained, which is a greater embrace of trans women who unapologetically “out” themselves with each new person they meet despite the potential risk inherent in doing so. It was more important to these participants that they know a woman is trans than it was to acknowledge the physical and emotional risks that one makes herself vulnerable to in “outing” herself. While Liz and other participants explained that women who “outed” themselves were brave because they chose to express who they are no matter whether they would be accepted or not, they minimized the emotional and physical violence to which one is often subjected when telling others they are trans. As Black trans women and other trans people are ushered into “coming out” and are increasingly made visible in media, they are also subjected to greater “surveillance, institutionalized exclusion, and violence” (Pimentel and Segura 2018: 94). The conceptualization of those who “out” themselves as brave and those who do not as “weak” constructs a false binary of invisibility and visibility, safety and harm, resistance and acquiescence.

Meadow (2018), for example, highlights the complex negotiations that parents of transgender and gender-nonconforming kids make regarding whether others know their child is trans. Parents in their study often feel pressure to usher their children into a stealth lifestyle to protect them from the violence they may otherwise be subjected to by making themselves visible Others. Additionally, “coming out” is not a universal phenomenon. Rather, it is a Western, white conceptualization of sexuality that ignores the numerous and differential ways gender and sexuality manifest across space and time (Almaguer 1993; Decena 2011; Moore 2011).

Much like Liz, Sheila felt that trans women should “out” themselves to others. Rather than creating a false dichotomy of brave women and weak women, though, Sheila called for the physical chastisement of women who do not tell cisgender people they are trans. For example, when I asked Sheila her feelings and reaction to the murders of Black trans women, she explained:

I feel like a homophobic people are people who um...struggle with homosexuality like, it's something that um...they deal with that they're not dealing with, so when they counter it um encounter it um, I wanna say, unknowingly, it's a shock to the system. And instead of handling it like an adult, they act out. I have a tantrum because you quote-unquote tricked me. You knew. Granted, you should've said something. You shoulda got beat up, but...not kill. Because I feel like you should disclose that information.

Sheila did not explicitly describe trans women as deceptive and dishonest if they do not “out” themselves. However, her call for the physical assault of women who do not tell men they are with that they are trans highlights the assumed intensity of wrongdoing. To call for the physical assault of a woman who does not “out” herself while simultaneously describing a woman telling a man she is trans as a “shock to his system” is to conceptualize trans-ness and the safeguarding of one’s trans identity as an assault against the man. The trans woman being assaulted for not “outing” herself would function both as a punishment as well as a warning to other trans women. Further, this conceptualization of women as dishonest and deceptive if they do not “out” themselves as trans elucidates Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters conceptualization of trans women as fundamentally different from cis women. If one recognizes a trans woman as, indeed, a woman, then she is keeping nothing from a potential partner if she does not “out” herself.

However, to argue that a woman is specious for not “outing” herself is to conceptualize her womanhood as a disguise or sham.

This conceptualization of a trans woman’s womanhood feeds into a shared characteristic of both TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters. Both groups of cis women repeatedly misgender trans women. Both Jessica and Sheila had previous interactions with women coworkers they knew to be trans. However, both women described their former coworkers as men and referred to them with people she knew to be trans, she responded:

Jessica: I’ve had personal interactions with people that I’ve known were trans but not that have told me they were trans.

Alithia: How did you know?

Jessica: Um I just knew them like before and going through so.

Alithia: And were they trans men or women?

Jessica: Um men to women.

Alithia: Okay, how did you know them?

Jessica: One person I was in the military with and he’s out now and he just started the transition. And then another one, I knew him just from when I was younger. Like we hung out at the same place.

Alithia: Okay, okay. Do y’all still talk?

Jessica: No, the guy who was in the military. I talk to him once every few months, but we’re not close like that anymore.

I include the entirety of this conversation to explicate the numerous times Jessica misgendered her former coworker within a minute or two of conversation. When I asked Jessica whether her coworker was a trans woman or trans man, her response signified a lack of understanding

regarding the gender of a trans woman and a trans man. Rather than state trans women, she characterized the coworkers as “men to women.” The former coworkers’ transitions remained pivotal to Jessica’s understanding of these women. Conditionally Accepting Cis-terms conceptualizations of trans women are informed by what Connell (2009) terms “contradictory embodiment.” If a trans woman medically transitions, those who knew her prior to hormones and/or GAS remain influenced by her previous embodiment in how they view her. The medical transition and her previous embodiment and time “passing” as a boy remain central to how those who knew her at both times in life. For Conditionally Accepting Cis-terms, a trans woman’s transition is what defines her womanhood, marks her womanhood as fundamentally different from cis womanhood, and leaves her vulnerable to being misrecognized and misgendered.

9.4 The “Casual Transphobe”

While TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-terms are overtly transphobic, “Casual Transphobes” are not. Participants I categorized as Casual Transphobes may overtly appear to be trans inclusive and trans friendly, and, indeed, they may even identify as such. However, their discourse and gender-sexuality ideologies remain imbricated in cissexism. As racism and white supremacy have increasingly become more covert and reified through coded and discrete language (Bonilla-Silva 2015), cissexism and transphobia have, as well—in large part due to the coproduction of cissexism and white supremacy. While participants coded as Casual Transphobes recognize trans women as women and female and do not openly conceptualize of trans womanhood as fundamentally different from cis womanhood, they perpetuate transmisogyny in other ways, including a comfort in asking people who “appear to be trans^{xxv}” if they are trans, referring to trans women with they/them pronouns, and viewing trans women as dishonest (albeit not deceptive) if they do not “out” themselves to potential partners.

Additionally, one trait that both Casual Transphobes and Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS share is the conceptualization of desire as individual. Both groups of participants hold a neoliberal ideology of desire, which holds that: 1). Individuals are entitled to “preferences” vis-à-vis race, body size, disability, and trans-ness, among other characteristics; 2). Who one desires is biological, psychological, and/or otherwise ingrained; 3). Who one desires is not reflective of power dynamics in the larger society; and 4). Who one desires does not shape or reify power dynamics in the larger society. In this section, I explicate the discursive and covert ways participants I coded as Casual Transphobes perpetuated cissexism. I then elucidate how their neoliberal ideology of desire is imbricated in white, ableist, cis-patriarchy.

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Alyshah	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Amanda	Cis-Bi Woman	Black	Christian (Medium)	Inclusive	3-5	Less Than High School	Poverty	25-35
Amy	Cis-Lesbian Woman	white Latina	Not Religious	Inclusive	0	Some College	Low	36-46
Kylee	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Some College	Poverty	18-24
LaLa	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Renee	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Bachelor's	Low	36-46
Sabrina	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	1-2	Bachelor's	Middle Class	25-35

Table 3. "Casual Transphobes."

While participants categorized trans women as women and female, their responses were more complicated than a mere yes or no. Amanda, a 34-year-old, cis-bisexual, Black woman most exemplified this in her response after I asked her whether a trans woman is a woman and/or female. Amanda replied:

Um if they get the surgery, then yes I would. But a lot of people don't have to go through getting the surgery done, if they, you know, because they already have little things, but hey, it takes a lot for them to get their body the way that they want to, so of course I would just go along and go with the flow, whatever.

Amanda's response, while ultimately signifying a recognition of trans women as women and female, in comparison to those in the previous section and those in the forthcoming section was not a mere disavowal of trans women's womanhood nor a complete recognition of it. Instead, Amanda's response explicated what is core to those participants I categorized as Casual Transphobes; that is, a rambling answer due to a lack of forethought. Throughout the interview, Amanda repeatedly noted a lack of thinking about these questions prior to that day. For example, at the end of the interview, I asked Amanda if there were anything she wanted to share that I had not otherwise asked. She responded, "That was a good one. I just can't get over that one. I don't see myself tryin' it, but hey, that was a good question. I've never had that question before." Here, Amanda did not mean a single question I asked. Instead, she meant the entirety of the interview. She had never thought about whether or not she would date a trans woman, whether trans women are women and/or female, why cis-het men murder Black trans women, and other questions throughout. There was neither an overt hatred, fear, or intolerance of trans women by these participants, nor an overt celebration, acceptance, and/or love for trans women. Such lack of attention to trans women and cissexism resulted in responses akin to Amanda's above.

A lack of forethought also resulted in microaggressive responses that did not signify an intent to harm trans women but that still perpetuated in the reification of cissexism. Alyshah, a 20-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman felt that trans women are women and female. However, when I asked her if others would see a trans woman differently for being with her as a cis

woman, she responded, “Probably or maybe....Because I’m the actual female, probably.” While Alyshah recognized trans women as women, her responses at other points like this reified a differentiation of trans females and cis female., Alyshia viewed cis females as “real” or as an “original” point of deviation for trans women.

Such microaggressive responses were evident in another factor regarding my categorization of Casual Transphobes. Casual Transphobes, in comparison to TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS, acknowledge that one cannot tell who is trans and who is cis. However, Casual Transphobes responded that one should feel comfortable asking individuals if they are trans if it appears that they may be. Such a concept may seem contradictory. If one cannot tell who is trans, then how would one ascertain that it is okay to ask certain people if they are trans and not everyone? For example, during a focus group with white/white-passing participants, I asked the group which photos of trans women in the photo elicitation portion of the interview they thought were transgender (see Appendix F for photos). Each of the cis-women participants stated a discomfort with doing so. Amy, a 37-year-old, white Latina, cis-lesbian for example, explained:

Yeah it’s definitely uncomfortable and even if I had to guess, I don’t have an exact guess, ‘cause there’s a couple that I don’t know. I mean I’ve seen very...that’s, that, there’s all body types within that, so it makes me uncomfortable to begin with but even moreso when I’m like, there’s no way I could know that. I can tell you which one isn’t [laughs.]

Amy, like other participants I categorized as Casual Transphobes did not feel that they as cisgender women should contribute to the gendering and sexing of bodies. However, during our interview, Amy’s responses differed. The two other cis-lesbian women in the focus group had shared a response similar to Amy’s aforementioned comment prior to Amy speaking. This

signifies a potential desirability bias during the focus group. In comparison, during our interview, Amy selected woman 1, a “cis-passing,” Black woman as the most desirable of each of the photos of women. I asked Amy whether people would view her differently if she were with this woman and this woman were trans. Amy responded:

Amy: Um...I think they're gonna view her...this just occurred to me, I think...so we're using number 1. I think they're gonna view her differently than...if she looked more like the one whose eyes I loved [woman 2].

Alithia: What would you say are the differences between how people would view number 1 and number 2?

Amy: They would probably say that [number 2] looks a little more masculine. See but it's the hair that throws me every time um and that may just be me um...I also am not crazy about their shirt I just realized where [number 1] is like, I like black [the color]. [Laughs] that could also be what it is too, I don't know, um...but for like someone else looking, I don't think me, I don't think me standing next to either one of those is gonna make a difference. It's not me, it's what, it's where people are and what they do when they look at you.

Amy's response, like Amanda's earlier, was a rambling one. Within just a minute of the interview, she shifted from bodies/faces having a masculine/feminine compartment to masculinity and femininity being stylistic to finally it being something interpsychic (*i.e.* “what they do when they look at you”). Her answer was not necessarily preconfigured, unlike those I categorized as Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters or “Critically Cis.” Thus, along the way, her response was variously essentialist and constructionist. In many ways, Casual Transphobes highlighted how difficult it is in U.S. and Western discourse to move beyond the body in

describing individuals. At various points in the interview, Amy attempted to stray away from “body-reasoning,” but her discourse continually referred back to the body before shifting to an undefinable “energy” that signified to her whether someone was a man or woman and gay or straight.

Amanda, too, despite her recognition of trans women as women and female and belief that you cannot tell who is trans and who is cis, felt comfortable asking individuals who “appear” to be trans if they are. For example, Amanda noted:

You just really have to ask questions....I would just be right upfront with it, because of the simple fact that it goes a long way. Hey, I know you’re cool and all but you (whispers) one of those little trannies right?

At this moment in the interview, Amanda was smiling, kind, and calm. She did not use the slur “trannies” as an attempt to injure others or engage in microaggressive behavior. Amanda was living in a homeless shelter, did not have a high school education, was unemployed, and had previous interactions with the criminal legal system. Her use of the word “tranny” may have been more about not having had the chance to learn yet that the term is a slur. However, the fact that Amanda and others in this category felt comfortable asking individuals whether they are trans reifies the miscategorization of certain attributes, characteristics, and behaviors as fundamentally female and/or male. In reality, if one feels the need to ask anyone if they are trans while also believing that one cannot tell who is trans, then they should be asking every single individual if they are trans or not. Otherwise, a contradiction arises between what they are saying and what they are doing. There was a desire among Casual Transphobes to not be transphobic, yet their actions did not align with this desire.

This was evident in interviews with participants in this category when discussing whether trans women must “out” themselves. Casual Transphobes did not feel that trans women were deceiving anyone by not “outing” themselves as they recognize and validate trans women as women. However, they continued to perpetuate the idea that trans women not “outing” themselves was somehow dishonest. The desire to not be transphobic had not yet fully translated into understanding the disconnect in this sentiment. In my interview with LaLa, a 20-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman, I asked:

Alithia: If you met [a woman] at like a bar or somewhere and y’all went back to your place or her place and you hooked up and she had a vagina, y’all had sex, and then the next day she told you she was trans, how would you react or how would you feel?

Lala: I don’t know. It, it wouldn’t...matter. Cuz I mean the deed was already done so.

Um...yeah. It wouldn’t matter

Alithia: Okay, would you be upset at all or no?

Lala: I would be upset that I wasn’t informed first, but it wouldn’t...it wouldn’t matter.

Like cuz it’s....I feel like, like...if, if you went through like a major change like that, that’s something that you should inform someone who you potentially might have sex with or potentially see. Because then it’s like, it’s kind of like lying I guess, but not. I don’t know.

I don’t know how to explain it. But yeah I would wanna know first if...it might not change my mind, it might change my mind. I don’t know. Depends on how I’m feeling that day type.

LaLa’s desire to know “if you went through a major change like that” reflected that of other participants in this category. Cis-les/bi women in this category felt that, if one did not disclose that they are trans and have undergone GAS, then they are keeping secret major life events that

may affect intimate partners. There was not the same sentiment of being “deceived” as there was for TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-terns, but the responses stated here pulled from the prior categories’ discursive repertoire. Further, the pressure on trans women to “out” themselves in order to not be “dishonest” places a double bind on trans women. The demand to “come out” assumes there is something fraudulent, nefarious, or—again—deceitful about the individual’s womanhood. It additionally places the trans woman in a vulnerable situation in which she may be subject to greater violence (Bettcher 2009). This is evident vis-à-vis media visibility and anti-trans violence. Scholars have highlighted what is termed the “paradox of visibility,” in which, as visibility of and education about trans-ness increases, so too has violence against trans women (Gossett, Stanley, and Burton 2017).

While it could be argued that individuals have the right to desire to know information that is salient or important to an intimate partner’s identity, it is important to question which information about another’s body is deemed need-to-know and which is deemed okay to find out later. For example, do cis women who undergo labiaplasty in order to have smaller labia more akin to those disproportionately represented in porn need to share that information with intimate partners? Alternatively, do individuals generally ask cis women partners if they have undergone labiaplasty during the formation of a relationship? I did not ask participants about their thoughts regarding cis women and plastic surgery, although future research should attend to cis people’s perceptions vis-à-vis cosmetic surgery and the similarities/differences with those perceptions and those of GAS. It still bears questioning, though, in order to understand how different bodily alterations are viewed by cis women partners.

Casual Transphobe participants’ emphasis on “coming out” as trans is connected to the other microaggressive behaviors and beliefs they portrayed, such as how Amy and Amanda

discussed trans women's bodies above. "Casual Transphobe" participants also often misgendered trans women when discussing photos of women that appeared "more visibly trans." When approaching the photo elicitation segment of interviews, I would explain to participants:

For the next several questions, I have some photos I want us to focus on of eight different women. For each woman, you will rate her one to ten, with one being that you find her completely undesirable and ten being that you find her completely desirable. You can, of course, choose a number anywhere on that scale, and then just explain.

At this point, I would place the photos in front of the participant, and ask, "Alright, what do you think of woman one?" At the bottom of each photo, I also had captions stating "Woman _," with the blank being filled with a number between one and eight, so the participants and I could easily reference which photo we were discussing. Despite numerous statements describing the photos as being of eight women and referring to them with she/her pronouns, "Casual Transphobe" participants would refer to photos of "cis-passing" women with she/her pronouns and photos of "more visibly trans" women with they/them pronouns. While they/them pronouns are gender-free, meaning they can be used to refer to any person of any (a)gender, a dissonance arose when participants would use different pronouns of a set of photos of all women. I did not give them photos of people and allow them to assume the genders of people in the photos. I did not give them photos of two or more genders of people. I, instead, overtly gave participants photos of women, and I made it clear that they were photos of women. Saguy et al. (2019) highlight how using gender-free pronouns for everyone would decrease misgendering and decrease gender inequality. In comparison, the use of they/them pronouns for "more visibly trans" women who are not "clearly" interpreted as "women" or "men" singles such individuals out and signals a lack of validation for their womanhood.

The photo of woman 1 is of a “cis-passing,” Black woman. The photo of woman 6 is of a “more visibly trans,” Black woman. In response to woman 1, Amanda said, “So I would say, I would give her a three...she just look like she stressed out...so that’s why I would give her a three.” In comparison, in reference to woman 6, Amanda stated, “Okay, um...this is a different look. Um but they’re attractive.” Amanda’s use of gendered pronouns for “passing” women and gender-free pronouns for “non-passing” women signifies a disconnect between how she is interpreting these women. Amanda was not alone in this. In response to woman 1, Amy stated:

She’s a ten. Uh, because she...’cause she’s gorgeous. I mean, she’s got like....the uh general standard of beauty, you know what I mean? Like her face, her skin. Um...I love her hair. She’s, you know, the standard thin, fit, all of that.

In comparison, woman two is a photo of a “more visibly trans,” Latina woman. In reference to woman two, Amy responded, “Pretty. Uh, I probably would not be attracted to them myself...But I do think that she’s very pretty.” Amy first used they/them pronouns before switching to she/her pronouns after a pause in her explanation.

Kylee, a 19-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman, did the same. Kylee found woman 1 to be the most desirable woman among the eight photos. I asked Kylee, “We’re gonna stick with [woman one] for a bit, and, remember there is not right or wrong answer, but if you met her, and you’re into her, and you found out that she is transgender, would it change how desirable she is to you?” Kylee responded:

It would depend on um, if they’re...if they’re...if she was going to get the operation. Because like sexually, you know, that’s a big part of a relationship, you know, so that would be something.

It would be easy to write Kylee, Amy, and Amanda's use of they/them pronouns off as accidents or slips in speech if they were one offs, but they were not. Instead, the use of gender-free pronouns intentionally for women who are "gender-nonconforming" or who are "more visibly trans" signals a misinterpretation of these women as not properly woman or not recognizably woman. The use of they/them pronouns in place of he/him pronouns shows an intent to not misgender, but the use of they/them pronouns for individuals known to the participants as women is a lack of recognition of the womanhood of women known to be trans. To misgender someone is to refer to them with incorrect gender pronouns, adjectives, and signifiers. To refer to women who "appear" to be cis women and women who "appear" to be trans women with different pronouns is not a matter of impoliteness. Instead, it is an often unintentional, discursive Othering of individuals who do not fit cisnormative standards of womanhood.

In addition to not problematizing the use of they/them pronouns for "more visibly trans" women, the conceptualization of not "coming out" as dishonest, and the belief that you can or should ask people if they are trans, Casual Transphobe participants also conceptualized desire as individuated and preferences as natural and/or inevitable. This conceptualization is shared by both casual transphobes and Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, though most striking among this group of participants due to their intent to not harm or hurt others and simultaneous lack of problematizing the many ways in which their actions and/or beliefs do cause harm.

As I approached the end of interviews, I asked each participant, "How do you feel overall about which bodies are deemed beautiful, attractive, and desirable in society? Do you feel individuals are entitled to like who they like or should their preferences be problematized?"

Alyshah, a 20-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman responded:

I think...preferences aren't bad. Preferences aren't bad at all. It's okay to have a preference, but it's also okay to be open. It's all about how you go about doing it. And like I said, some people, their preferences, it's like, okay, well, these are my preferences, they gotta be your preferences too. Um that's the problem with that. People are saying that you should do this and not do this. And you should do that and not that. It's kind of like you're pushing your beliefs on me.

Alyshah mirrored Althusser's (1972) note that one can never escape ideology by arguing that one can never escape preferences (*i.e.* to be open to anything is to prefer anything and anyone). That sentiment is largely unquestionable. However, Alyshah also felt that individuals should not be pressured to problematize their preferences. Scholars note the problem of particular preferences, such as racial preferences for whites or light-skinned people of color, with such preferences conceptualized as sexual racism and colorism (Caluya 2006). Such analyses also extend to the idealization of thin bodies and enabled bodies (Long 2018), and I argue here that these analyses must also extend to the idealization of cis bodies. As discussed in Chapter Two, the conceptualization of certain faces as "feminine" (*e.g.* faces with narrow, v-shaped jaws, small, narrow noses, small foreheads, high eyebrows, and no facial hair) is both cissexist and racist. It is a cisnormative, Eurocentric standard of women's faces. Participants' preferences for such faces was, unquestionably, an individual preference, yet their individual preferences cannot be separated from the social forces that shaped said preferences.

Participants categorized as Casual Transphobes, though, felt that preferences are shaped by each individual and not by the social. My first few cis-lesbian interview participants mentioned witnessing transphobia in lesbian spaces online or in person, so I began to ask participants about this. I asked Sabrina, a 25-year-old, cis-lesbian, Black woman, "Have you, in lesbian spaces or

online in lesbian groups, heard people say anything in particular about lesbians dating trans women or trans women being in lesbian spaces?” Sabrina responded:

Um...I might have seen one or two comments. Um but they haven't been negative. No.

Like I've just seen people say that they would date a transgender woman. And then some people said they wouldn't, just a preference thing. Mhm.

Much as Sabrina nonchalantly noted that some people are open to trans women and some are not, Amanda felt similarly about individuals' attractions vis-à-vis race. I asked Amanda, “Do you think in terms of who is seen as desirable that race shapes who is seen as attractive?” Amanda stated, “In society probably not. But when we have a man and we ask a man that question, he probably has his set kind of race he prefers. So I couldn't answer that one.” Amanda and Sabrina's acceptance of individual racialized and gendered preferences was core to Casual Transphobes' lack of forethought regarding issues of cissexism and desire, race, and gender. Casual Transphobes aimed to be open to all individuals, including those who hold racialized/gendered preferences. Their openness to all individuals, though, stopped there. They did not seek to interrogate cis-ness and whiteness further than to make space for all individuals to desire what they wish sexually and romantically and for all individuals to actualize their gender and sexuality in ways that they desired. The emphasis on the individual apart from the social is influenced by neoliberal logics of individual responsibility, self-actualization, and maximization of one's interest apart from any social concern, understanding, or accountability (Winnubst 2012).

Casual Transphobes were not overtly cissexist in the ways that TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-ners were. Instead, Casual Transphobes perpetuated cis-ness through microaggressions. These microaggressions included misgendering “visibly trans” women by

referring to them with they/them pronouns instead of she/her pronouns and asking individuals who “appear” to be trans if they are trans. These microaggressive behaviors appeared to be trans-inclusive to participants, but the normalization of these behaviors reified cis logic of gender/sex binaries. If the gender binary is taken to be true, then there are men and there are women. If one cannot tell if one is a man or a woman, then they must ask if they are in order to know how to refer to them and treat them. In reality, though, there is no way to tell if anyone is a man or a woman unless they declare that they are. Manhood and womanhood have no essential physical characteristics, social attributes, or individual behaviors. To ask individuals who “appear” trans if they are is an attempt to make sense of where an individual fits within the binary. To use they/them pronouns for women who “appear” trans is to point out they do not appear to fit within the binary. Finally, an unquestioned acceptance of individual, racialized and gendered preferences allows cis and white hierarchies of desire to go unquestioned. Each of these behaviors and beliefs covertly perpetuates cis-ness by allowing it to remain unquestioned and not requiring cis individuals to interrogate cis-ness on an individual, interpersonal, and social basis. In the next section, I attend to participants I categorized as “Critically Cis,” who did interrogate cis-ness/whiteness on each of these bases.

9.5 “Critically Cis”

While TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters overtly perpetuate(d) cis-ness and Casual Transphobes unintentionally perpetuate cis-ness, this final set of participants, categorized as “Critically Cis,” went the farthest in actually interrogating cis-ness and whiteness. In doing so, they worked to actively challenge cis logics and cis privilege. This distinction does not mean they were not cissexist. Rather, as I detail, participants aimed to ameliorate the effects of cissexism as an active process instead of a destination. They did this by conceptualizing trans

women as female and women, refusing to ask people about their genitals and bodies, and referring to trans women with she/her pronouns. Critically Cis participants also believed that you cannot necessarily discern who is trans and cis and that trans women can choose whether to “out” themselves or not at their discretion. These participants additionally desired to protect trans people from cis people and interrogated their own genders and desires. These participants’ discourse point to the ways in which they interrogate cis-ness, and detail how Critical Cis-ness can work to counter the necropolitics of cis-ness and neoliberal logics of desire. Finally, I detail how these participant categories were fluid, with all participants utilizing cissexist discourse at some point in the interview.

Name	Gender & Sexual Orientation	Race/ Ethnicity	Religion & Religiosity	LGB Inclusivity	Number of Known Trans Interactions	Education	Income	Age
Alyx	Cis-Bi Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	1-2	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Cookie	Cis-Homoflexible Woman	Black	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusivity	11+	Grad Degree	Middle Class	25-35
Janelle	Cis-Queer Woman	Black	Christian (Medium)	Inclusive	1-2	Some College	Middle Class	18-24
Peaches	Cis-Bi/Queer Woman	Black-Multi-racial	Spiritual But Not Religious	Inclusive	11+	Some College	Poverty	18-24
Rachel	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Bachelor’s	Low	18-24
Shantelle	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	3-5	Some College	Highest Tax Bracket	18-24
Vincent	Cis-Lesbian Woman	Non-Latinx white	Not Religious	Inclusive	6-10	Some College	Middle Class	18-24

Table 4. "Critically Cis"

During the focus group with white/white-passing participants, I asked participants which photos of the eight women shown to them during their interviews they assumed to be trans (see

Appendix F for photos). While the one cis-het man participant, Adam, immediately pointed out who he assumed was trans and referred to our interview, during which he had done so as well, the cis-lesbian women participants were more hesitant to do so. Rachel, a 22-year-old, cis-lesbian, white woman, and Vincent, an 18-year-old, cis-lesbian, white woman discussed their hesitance, saying:

Rachel: I mean I know that some of the women are transgender, but I feel kind of uncomfortable pointing it out?

Alithia: Okay why?

Rachel: Um I don't know because communities that I'm in, I've kind of learned that it's like not appropriate to like point out if somebody is trans unless they're talking about it with you or something. Or even nonbinary. I don't know, basically as a cis person, I try not to talk too much about people's bodies.

Vincent: I mean it's kinda weird asking like what makes this person different than other women, like...

Rachel: Yeah because it's kinda like pointing out how they're like not passing.

Participants who engaged in what I conceptualize as Critical Cis-ness aimed not only to be inclusive but to actively learn how to better be in solidarity with trans people and to interrogate the questions individuals ask interpersonally and as a society about marginalized people. Vincent highlighted that marking someone as “cis-passing” and someone as “trans-appearing” marks one's womanhood out as somehow Other and deviant from cisgender womanhood. This not only would Other “visibly trans” trans women but also “visibly trans” cis women who have traits deemed “trans.”

Janelle, an 18-year-old, cis-queer, Black woman, too, refused to assume who is trans and who is cis. She highlighted the oddness of this bodily preoccupation. I asked Janelle, as I did all participants, “In general, can you tell if someone is trans or not?” She responded:

In general...you know, I don't like, I don't like to um assume. If you tell me, I'll be like, “Okay,” but like...if not...then...I'm not gonna assume. I know there are some trans people who are more cis passing, that's perfectly fine, but like I'm not just, I'm not, I don't try to assume. Usually I'm minding my own business; I'm not looking at someone like, “Hmmm, I wonder if they have a vagina,” like no! Like I'm worried about my own vagina, like when am I getting my period [laughs]? You know? So I don't try to worry about things like that.

Here, Janelle, highlighted a need to shift away from a focus on others' bodies to her own body. The refusal to ask about other's bodies and genitals and the refusal to categorize bodies not only works against cissexism but against Western, white ontologies of gender, as well. As noted earlier, Oyěwùmí (1997) highlights the West's preoccupation with the body in how the self is understood in relation to others. Rachel and Vincent, having learned to not ask about bodies, had now internalized a discomfort in even hypothetically engaging in “body-reasoning,” (Oyěwùmí 1997). This discomfort has the potential to open the way to new ways of relating as people.

This potential new way of relating as people is evident in this group of participants' desire to protect trans women from cisgender people. In aforementioned groups of cis-women participants (*i.e.* TERFs, Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters, and Casual Transphobes), there was a focus on trans women “outing” themselves in order to make a cis person feel trusted, not “deceived,” and not “pressured” to feel as though they must be open to desiring trans women. Participants categorized as Critically Cis sought to ensure that trans women felt that *they—trans*

women—could trust cisgender people to not harm them. This is a shift from conceptualizing trans-ness as deceptive and as an assault to a conceptualizing of trans-ness as vulnerable to the harms of cisgender people.

Take, for example, Alyx, a 19-year-old, cis-bi, white woman. At the time of the interview, she was dating a trans individual. Alyx, as a bisexual woman, was open to people of any gender. Her current partner as a genderfluid individual assigned male at birth who primarily used he/him pronouns. When I asked Alyx, “Would you have any hesitancy introducing a trans woman partner to friends, family, or coworkers,” she responded by relating her answer to how she chooses whether to introduce others in her life to her partner’s trans-ness. She explained:

Um friends no. Um family, (sighs) a little bit, and I hate to say that, but like also I know how my family can be and that’s part of why my dad doesn’t know that Tim’s genderfluid, because he’s like that. Uh and I would, it’s not something that I would be the one to outwardly like say. It would be up to her to come out to them, um...unless she like actively wanted me to, but even then it’s sort of a touchy situation as far as like my dad goes. Mom, I’d be more lenient with um but yeah.

Alyx’s hesitancy regarding introducing her partner to her family did not center her feelings of the potential discomfort, embarrassment, or shame she may face as someone who dates trans people. Instead, Alyx actively reflected on how individual family members’ behaviors, discourse about trans people, and the amount of empathy and willingness to learn that she perceived in them. This is a dramatic shift from Sheila, who was a Conditionally Accepting Cis-ter. Sheila had a young child, and when I asked her if she would be open to dating trans women, she responded, “I think a lot with my child too, like I got a child, like...that’s a deep conversation.” Sheila was worried about how her child would respond to and digest such information, even though studies

find young, elementary school aged children are extremely capable of understanding trans-ness (Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar 2012).

Other participants who displayed Critical Cis-ness also demonstrated a concern for how their people beyond their immediate family would treat their trans partners but a willingness to follow the lead of their partners' in making decisions regarding familial, friend, and work introductions and discussions about the partner's trans identity. When I asked Janelle, "Would you be hesitant to introduce a trans woman partner to your friends or coworkers," she responded:

Janelle: Friends or coworkers, no. I mean when I like people, I have to show them off, so like, I mean, if I like her, I'ma show her off, but [pause] you can still like show people off [pause] and be brave but still be scared. You know?

Alithia: Would you be scared about being a woman with another woman or scared for how they'd react to her being a trans woman or?

Janelle: Her being a trans woman, because you know people [pause] like people are trained to discriminate people based [pause] I don't, they're like doing a lot of things in law that has to do with like if you like [pause] depending on your sexuality, you can be fired from a job or things like that, so like that's very scary or and also the family like just so many factors. It's just like anxiety-driven for me. So yeah, I, I, I feel like [pause] being scared or timid is [pause] justified in this sense. In this world that we live in.

Janelle was not afraid of how others would perceive her for being with a trans woman. Instead, she worried about them both living in a society that punishes individuals who deviate from cisgender, heterosexual norms of dating and relationships. Such fears of being harmed were perhaps more pronounced for her, with her and a hypothetical partner being two women vulnerable to the harms of cis-hetero-patriarchy. These fears, though, were not simply about

whether they would be accepted by others, but whether they would be able to survive and thrive, as LGBT people, particularly trans people, do not have workplace discrimination protections in many states across the U.S.

Peaches, a 24-year-old, cis-bi, Black woman, connected such fears to racial ideologies. I asked Peaches, “If you were with a woman and knew she was trans, and y’all had been together for awhile, would you be hesitant at all to introduce her to your family?” Peaches responded:

Peaches: No. That’s a lie yes. Like my family are, they, they can be ignorant and like my mom especially, love her to death, but she says like a lot of insensitive things. My mom’s white. She doesn’t think before she talks a lot. So, if anything, I would just be like a little bit hesitant to like take her around my family, because I wouldn’t want them to say anything in front of her um that could make her feel uncomfortable

Alithia: Okay would they do that whether it was a cis woman or a trans woman?

Peaches: Um I think it, they wouldn’t do it as much with a cis woman, yeah.

Peaches was raised by a white, Portuguese mother and a Black father, and she noted her mother’s whiteness as integral as to why she microaggressed others. Peaches was referring to gender and racial ignorance and highlighted a fear of how her mother would treat a trans woman partner. Her connection of this ignorance, cissexism, and racism is part of a larger epistemology of white ignorance that functions to protect “those who for “racial” [and gendered] reasons have needed not to know” how their understandings of the world deny the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other cisgender/transgender people of color and other transgender people (Mills 2007: 35). This white ignorance produces a misunderstanding of reality as inherently binary vis-à-vis sex and gender and an inculcated “alexithymia” (Feagin 2006), or a socialized inability to feel empathy for racialized Others. Thus, Peaches’ mother’s repetitive “[saying of] a lot of

insensitive things” is not so much about a hatred of trans people/of color but the result of an actively developed ignorance.

In comparison, Peaches, and other Critically Cis women, aimed to understand the lived realities of other marginalized people. This extended to this group of participants’ beliefs that trans women can “out” themselves at their own discretion without being considered dishonest or deceptive. For example, I asked Shantelle, an 18-year-old, cis-gay^{xxvi}, white woman, “If you met someone, would you want them to tell you straight up, before going on dates and getting to know each other that they’re trans?” Shantelle responded, “That’s for them to decide because you have to be like comfortable enough with yourself to share that with other people. Just like telling someone you’re gay.” Shantelle had nothing more to add upon probing other than to repeat what she had already stated. For many participants who engaged in “Critical Cis-ness,” there was a connection to their own lived experiences and an active interrogation of self that led to their refusal to force trans women to live according to the whims of cisgender people.

Alyx, for example, stated that she respected if someone did not want to immediately tell her they are trans. In response, I asked her, “What makes you respect that decision?” Alyx explained:

I grew up in [a predominantly white, wealthy, conservative city in Georgia,] and it’s not exactly like the most welcoming place, so like I super understand if you don’t wanna like put that out there immediately. That could be dangerous for some people. Um so it’s, yeah, it’s someone’s own personal decision.

Alyx “came out” in middle school, and her first non-cisgender, man partner was an individual who “came out” to her as a trans man in the middle of their relationship. After “coming out,” she

experienced overt and covert heterosexism from adults in her school, and her experiences of discrimination led her to understand why people would not want to be out as LGBTQ.

Another participant, Cookie, a 27-year-old, cis-homoflexible, Black woman, utilized her sociological imagination to understand why a trans woman would not want to tell her that she is trans. When I asked Cookie how she would react if she dated or slept with a woman who later “came out” to her as trans, she answered:

I wouldn't really be mad because I understand. From her standpoint, how scary something like that might be, um, just because of how, you know, people may have responded to her in the past, or fear of how people might respond, or the fear of losing me as a friend, as a partner, whatever. So, I would be like, “Damn,” but like, it wouldn't change anything. Like we wouldn't stop talking, like I wouldn't stop talking to her because she neglected to tell me until late or wouldn't stop talking to her because it, that was the reality of the situation. Like I get it, like people go through their own stuff. People, you know, heal and grow and learn in their own ways. And I would be a bullshit ass person to just, ‘cause I'm sure there's things that I probably might not tell her 'til sometime down the road. You know?

Cookie understood the reality of a cissexist world that socializes trans women to be hypervigilant regarding to whom and when they “out” themselves if at all. Cookie shifted the emotional labor off the trans woman in regard to “outing” herself and onto cis partners to process potential feelings of disappointment on their own. Further, Cookie highlighted the time it takes for individuals to share various pieces of themselves. Rather than viewing trans women not “outing” themselves as deceptive or dishonest, she normalized it by comparing trans women's decisions to any other mundane decision when dating.

While Cookie's response was a longer, more introspective answer, most participants who engaged in Critical Cis-ness answered questions regarding trans women "outing" themselves succinctly and nonchalantly. I asked Peaches, "Do you care whether a woman tells you right away or not that she's trans?" Peaches said, "No, I think that should be someone's option when they're ready to tell you, they can tell you....I don't think I would be upset because if she identifies as woman, then she's a woman at the end of the day." Peaches did not have to consider her response, nor did she figure herself into the equation. Instead, she like other participants in this category centered trans women and displayed forethought regarding the lived experiences of trans women.

Their forethought factored into what was potentially the most important of Critical Cis-ness, which was an interrogation of their own genders and desires. Participants in this category did not believe that their desires and "preferences" were individual, innate, or disconnected from racialized, gendered, and sexualized notions of desire and attraction. Further, they questioned themselves regarding why they consider themselves to be women. This interrogation of the "self" highlighted the internal work they had done previously to better understand trans women and their lived realities. Additionally, this interrogation highlighted the work others had done to help them challenge internalized cissexism. I asked Rachel, for example, "If you approached a woman and she told you she was trans, how would you respond?" Rachel explained:

Rachel: Like that's okay with me.

Alithia: Okay has that always been okay with you or was it something you had to figure out or?

Rachel: Um I think like—because of the community that I kind of like went through my coming out process in like I've always been around like other women, I've always been

around trans people, so it's not, it wasn't like exclusionary. I don't feel like it was something I really had to learn but it was just kind of like yeah.

Alithia: Okay and that's from like childhood on or college [at women's college] or?

Rachel: Not like childhood, but I guess like [pause] I came out at like the end of middle school, and like my first girlfriend was very like [pause] um [pause] like playing with her gender. Like wearing binders, and she like changed her name and stuff so um I guess like, I wasn't ever like um [pause] like lesbians are only attracted to certain types of women or something like that.

While only 16% of the U.S. has been found to report knowing someone who is transgender (Adam and Goodman 2015), Rachel's intimate connections to trans-ness through her individual queer community provided her an entrée to queer-ness and lesbian-ness that normalized and embraced trans-ness. This connection to trans people and an understanding of the lived experiences of trans people provided her with a different understanding of being cisgender and a lesbian woman than she otherwise may have developed. While she stated she never had to learn that trans women need not "out" themselves to others or that lesbians can be attracted to any gender of people, her reference to her first partner who later "came out" highlights the work that trans individuals in her proximity did to lead her to this point. This work may not have been overtly visible to Rachel as work. However, her partner's visibility as trans and her friends' openness about their trans-ness were indeed work that most likely required "backstage" emotional labor.

Rachel, though, also interrogated and reflected upon what it means to be a lesbian in contemporary U.S. society. I asked her, "If you were with a trans woman, would it in anyway change how you see yourself?" Rachel responded, "No," and explained:

Um I guess like I feel like—I mean like I know that I am a woman. I identify as a woman and like, I guess like if I'm dating someone [pause] um [pause I think like, I'm in love with the person who they are and so um like I do consider myself to be attracted to women but like even like if I were dating a nonbinary person, I would still identify as a lesbian, because it just makes sense to me. Like I don't think I would be like bisexual or pansexual. Like I'm just more comfortable with the label, lesbian. I think like as um times are changing, I think like the lesbian like identity is kind of like becoming more like malleable and can be like applied to nonbinary people and things.

Rachel's reflection upon the meaning of being lesbian due to her individual queer community and her proximity to trans individuals led to the development of a lesbian identity that was not only inclusive and accepting of trans women but a lesbian identity that was not built upon a gender/sex binary. While homosexuality and heterosexuality are often conceptualized as sexual identities built upon a same-sex/opposite-sex paradigm, Rachel's construction of lesbian identity refutes the binary. A lesbian is not solely a woman attracted to other women. Instead, for Rachel, a lesbian is simply one who says she is a lesbian.

Other participants in this category worked as well to interrogate how they know themselves to be women. Shantelle had mentioned at the beginning of our interview that she was still working to figure out what it means for her to be a woman. I asked her, "What are some things that are prompted you to want to figure that out or to need to figure it out?" She responded:

Okay, so one time I had this therapy session....my therapist, I don't even know what, what the reason was, but she asked me about it. And....she was like, "What, what's different for you between like, men and women? What do you feel like you are?" I was like [shrugs]

and I've been sitting on that for like, three years, I still don't know. So, I just don't know. Yeah. 'Cause I'm like growing up in the age where people really talk about gender like a lot more than they ever have. So, it's like, I don't know, I know I'm not like nonbinary or anything. That doesn't really fit for me, but I can't really figure it out. But I like being a woman.

Shantelle continued beyond therapy to interrogate what it means to be a woman but was never able to arrive at an answer. Trans people are often expected by doctors, clinicians, and everyday strangers to explain why they know themselves to be a man, woman, or another gender.

Shantelle, though, elucidates the difficulty in arriving at an answer beyond comfort or discomfort with one's assignment at birth. Her therapist's encouragement of her to begin questioning gender and her generation's proliferation of discourse vis-à-vis gender reconfigured womanhood for her as a place of comfort rather than a biological pre-destination.

Finally, participants in this category were critical of social understandings of desire, beauty, and attraction. Rather than conceptualizing of everyone as having their own innate preferences, participants who engaged in a Critical Cis-ness viewed desire as socialized and connected to power. At the end of each interview, I asked participants "How, if at all, should our understandings of who is beautiful, attractive, and desirable?" Janelle responded:

I think—they should change. They should change. You know that store Aries, you know American Eagle and like they have this, they have like a little mini story for like lingerie. Yeah, and if you go onto their advertisement or you go onto Aries, their models are Black, white, skinny, fat, disabled, like it's honestly amazing. It needs to be like that, like I feel like all places should cater to all types of individuals and like also the range of sizes and things like that. If I go to Victoria's Secret and I can only be a small, medium, or large or

XL but I'm a 2x or a 3x, Ima be like I'm less desirable, but if I go to Aries and they got a range up to like 4XL, I'm going to feel really good about myself. I'm going to feel like whoa, I can buy things from here, it's beautiful, it makes me feel sexy. I'm gonna feel desirable. So we just have to, us as a society has, we have to stop like neglecting other [pause] types of people....Things like that and like the media like I said....The media, capitalism, needs to change, like if you really wanna make money, even though I hate capitalism, but if you're really tryna make money, you need to stop looking for, to make one demographic happy and try to make all demographics happy. Period.

Janelle connected who is seen as desirable to what is sold as being desirable within a hyper-capitalist society. This contrasts with those in previous categories who saw desire as an individual preference, potentially something innate, but inherently disconnected from social forces. Further, Janelle highlights that being desirable is not merely about being desirable to others but also a inner feeling of self-attraction. When one cannot find clothing in their size at any store or see themselves reflected in the advertisements, branding, and ownership of a business, it becomes that much more difficult to feel as though there is something beautiful and of value about oneself. Continuing to discuss this within our interview, Janelle discussed Eurocentric standards of beauty and issues of colorism. Janelle elaborated on the connection between white supremacy, colorism, capitalism, and desire:

It's like the more white you seem, that equals the better opportunities you can have. So, like that's why people are usually more attracted to like European features, because not only are people in general attracted to it, but jobs are attracted to it and things like that, work opportunities.

Such a connection to beauty and job opportunities is even more exaggerated for women and feminine individuals who are held to white standards of hair styling (Greene 2012; Opie and Phillips 2015), scrutinized for how they do their nails according to white and classist standards (Kang 2010), and policed for wearing “women’s” items if they are not women or are not perceived to be women (Bartlett 1994). This is even more evident among trans women, for whom expectations to “pass” according to cisnormative, Eurocentric, middle-class standards of what a woman should look like drastically affects not only one’s workplace opportunities but whether one will be more likely to be targeted for violence and harassment.

Alyx, too, felt that social conceptualizations of desire, beauty, and attraction should change. In explaining her answer, she noted:

Um I mean there’s always like, with, with any social issue, I feel like there’s um some group in a position of power that would like to stay in a position of power, and [pause] beauty standards might sort of play into that a lot. Um and that people who are deemed pretty would like to continue to be deemed pretty.

Alyx, Janelle, and other participants in this category conceptualized beauty and power as interconnected rather than separate phenomena. These participants worked to challenge neoliberal logics of desire and individual “preferences,” highlighting the way in which power infiltrates all facets of society and is perpetuated by all individuals.

Black/Hawaiian trans activist and media mogul, Janet Mock, discusses what she terms “pretty privilege,” noting, “My beauty is not something that I earned. I did not work for it, yet it has opened doors for me, allowing me to be seen and heard...Being perceived as pretty has contributed to my success and made the road a bit smoother” (2017). Race, class, and gender shape how others perceive individuals and what they have to offer at home and the workplace.

For TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-ners, trans women are conceptualized as offering dishonesty, deception, and difficulty. For those engaging in Critical Cis-ness, trans women are conceptualized as potential partners with cis people conceptualized as the ones offering difficulty, harm, and violence.

Participants who engaged in Critical Cis-ness worked to actively challenge the necropolitics of cis-ness. Cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants who perpetuated the murders of Black trans women through the discursive construction of trans-ness as an assault and cis-les/bi women who perpetuated cisnormative ideologies of trans women as deceptive and dishonest. In comparison, participants who engaged in Critical Cis-ness constructed trans women as vulnerable to the harms of trans people and cis-ness as an assault. Black trans women, thus, need protection (including self-defense) from the harms of cis-ness. Cis-ness is marked as pathological, problematic, and violent. Finally, participants' discussion of desire and power as interconnected challenges those in prior categories who argued preferences were apolitical and biologically innate. Instead, participants in this category argued that power shapes who is seen as desirable and that those marked as desirable have greater access to power.

9.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elucidated the dimensions of "thinking cis," or the ways cis-les/bi women participants reified, perpetuated, and/or challenged cis-ness as an ideology. This included those who engaged in trans exclusionary radical feminism (or TERFs). TERFs conceptualized of trans women as male, men, dangerous, and pathological and perpetuated a Western, cisnormative ideology of "body-reasoning." Further, TERFs reified essentialist logic by believing that sex is immutable and biological. TERFs additionally conceptualized of trans women as deceptive and dishonest if they do not "out" themselves as trans due to the belief that trans women are "men."

As such, TERFs additionally misgendered trans women and other trans/nonbinary people and argued that trans women cannot be lesbians.

Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS relied upon a malleable “body-reasoning,” in which the body is mutable but womanhood and manhood still rely upon the body. Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS also conceptualized of trans women as deceptive and dishonest for not “outing” themselves due to their belief that trans women are fundamentally different from cis women. While no participant engaged in trans exclusionary radical feminism, many participants continued to perpetuate transphobia in differing ways, including Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS.

While TERFs and Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS were more overt in their perpetuation of cis-ness and whiteness, Casual Transphobes were more covert in doing so. Casual Transphobes believed trans women were women and female and as such believed that there could be no deception if trans women did not “out” themselves as trans. However, Casual Transphobes still believed trans women were not wholly honest if they were not transparent about their trans-ness. Casual Transphobes also microaggressed trans women, referring to “visibly trans” women with they/them pronouns even when they knew the women to be women. Casual Transphobes often perpetuated cissexist microgressions, not because they were anti-trans, but because they simply had not reflected upon trans-ness, cis-ness, and gender/sexuality as systems prior to being asked to do so in an interview setting. Microaggressions, rather than innocent accidents, allow for the further institutionalization of cis-ness, as they are more likely to go unchallenged.

Casual Transphobes, as well, elucidated the porosity of these categories. The categories of TERF, Conditionally Accepting Cis-TERS, Casual Transphobes, and Critically Cis are fluid and

interlocking categories. Often, those now categorized as Critically Cis previously engaged in cissexist behavior and discourse before engaging in an active attention to their cis-ness. Amy, for example, also displayed Critically Cis behavior, such as some attention to her cis-ness. However, that was just one piece of her discourse, and I categorized her as a Casual Transphobe because her discourse fell much more in line with the beliefs and behaviors of this category than those of the Critically Cis category. Finally, Critical Cis-ness is not a state of arrival. Instead Critical Cis-ness was an active attention to cis-ness that required constant reflexivity and self-awareness, meaning that individuals may not once and forever fit in this category and instead may shift back and forth across their life.

Participants I marked as Critically Cis were exempt from being cissexist. Rather, engaging in Critical Cis-ness meant that participants were actively working to reflect upon, interrogate, and challenge cis-ness, gender, and sexuality as systems and ideologies, recognizing that one makes mistakes in the process. In doing so, they challenged the necropolitics of cis-ness that conceptualizes of the deaths of Black trans women as the justified reactions of cisgender people acting in self-defense to maintain themselves, their genders, and their sexualities. Further, Critical Cis-ness worked to challenge the neoliberal logics of Conditionally Accepting Cis-ters and Casual Transphobes that saw desire as an individual “preference,” disjointed from power.

10 CONCLUSION: PROTECTING BLACK TRANS WOMEN

As of October 16, 2021, at least 40 trans, nonbinary, and/or gender-nonconforming people have been killed already. Simultaneously, 109 bills were introduced in state legislatures across the U.S. seeking to limit the rights of trans/nonbinary people vis-à-vis healthcare, education, sports, and access to public accommodations (ACLU 2021). An additional 38 anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced that attempt to provide increased religious protections for employers and individuals in health care, education, and other settings if they choose to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals (ACLU 2021). Black trans women, trans women of color, and other trans, nonbinary, and/or gender-nonconforming people continue to exist in a heightened state of risk and precarity. Throughout, I have sought to analyze the social, political, and cultural conditions that give rise to racialized, cissexist violence. Trans-ness remains policed by the very colonial conditions that gave rise to anti-Black, anti-trans violence. Ideologies of a gender binary, gender/sex essentialism, whiteness, heteronormativity, and transmisogynoir have changed over time yet they remain alive and well in contemporary society.

As I note in the introduction, the Sociology of Gender/Sex and the Sociology of Sexualities have yet to thoroughly theorize and analyze what exactly constitutes cis-ness. Throughout, I have fleshed out cis-ness as an ideological, political, and discursive manifestation. While, to my knowledge, my participants did not actively murder Black and Brown trans women or other trans women, their responses to trans women's bodies and murders and discussion of intimacy with trans women provide a discursive foundation for the material reality in which Black and Brown trans women and other trans women find themselves. In part, this discursive foundation is evidenced in participants' conceptualization of trans-ness as a "covering up" of the natural body and as a performance that one either does "well" or "poorly." This explicates that

trans women are not only viewed as not women or something other than women but also as that their womanhood is viewed as a guise. This conceptualization then justifies cis-het men feeling “tricked” or “duped” when finding out that a woman they are attracted to and/or with is transgender. While sociologists highlight that gender, as a social construct, is a performance, it is important to simultaneously recognize that, among my participants, cisgender people’s genders were not conceptualized as a performance while trans people’s genders were. If cisgender people’s genders were also recognized as performances or if transgender people’s genders were affirmed and validated as real, then there would be no basis to cis-het men feeling “tricked” or defending murder through “trans panic” defenses.

Further, my data highlight the tensions between desire and disgust. Several of the cis-het men I interviewed, including Adam, Josh, and Iceberg, asked me on dates, told me how beautiful I was to them, asked to have sex, and sexually harassed me while simultaneously describing their disgust of trans women. However, their disgust of trans women was less about trans-ness, itself, and more about what it meant for them to desire a trans woman. For each of these men, desiring a trans woman meant holding within oneself unnatural, sacrilegious, and/or unmanly attractions. For them then to find out that the woman they were attracted to was trans signified not only something Other about her but something Other within themselves, as well. In this slippage between desire and disgust arose questions around what it meant to be a man or a woman, a heterosexual or homosexual. However, violence functioned as a way of reasserting one’s masculinity and heterosexuality. Violence reconstituted cis-ness when it ruptured in that slippage between desire and disgust.

While cis-les/bi women participants did not feel as though their lesbian or bisexual identity was called into question and/or blurred when desiring a trans woman, many, like Sheila,

for example, highlighted a tension between desiring someone trans and feeling as though her body is not “real” or “natural.” For cis-les/bi women, then, ideas of what a “natural” a “real” woman were what blurred when they found themselves attracted to trans women.

A set of sociopolitical symbols circulated around “trans-ness” conceptually for cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants. Their potential desires for a trans women momentarily broke this circuitry causing shock, confusion, or panic, and violence (physical and/or emotional/verbal) helped fix things back into a binary logic (natural/unnatural, man/woman, straight/gay, male/female, desirable/disgusting). My analyses detail cis-ness as necropolitical. Violence becomes the justified vehicle for the symbols that circulate around “trans-ness” to not stick to cis people, preventing them from having to question gender/sexuality and/or experience some of the shame and harassment that trans people themselves experience. Trans people, thus, become stuck in a double bind of what scholars term the paradox of visibility (Tourmaline, Stanley, and Burton 2017). If trans people are “out” and open about their trans-ness, they may experience violence. However, if they are not “out” and open about their trans-ness, then they are perceived to be “tricking” others, which may also result in violence.

Western ontologies of “body reasoning” (Oyèwùmí 1997) remain prevalent shaping the ways in which individuals are interpreted in society. When individual’s interpretations of other’s bodies do not line up with preconceived notions of sex/gender, they are left without the cultural tools to make sense of the individual in front of them resulting in panic, confusion, and violence. This was evident as well in participants’ desire for a “natural” woman vis-à-vis hair, makeup, aesthetic, (hyper-)femininity, and “body,” with trans women, fat women, and disabled women viewed as “unnatural” or “naturally” undesirable and hyperfemininity as masculinizing. The body and the symbols that attach value to some bodies and not to others are central to cis-ness.

Trans bodies are excess or surplus to the binary logic of cis-ness, and, thus, they are not only undesirable but unnecessary. It is this lack of value attached to trans bodies and trans people that allowed many participants to justify, understand, and/or make sense out of the murders of Black trans women.

These data also highlighted the inextricability of cis-ness and whiteness. It is not possible to thoroughly analyze and make sense of cis-ness without attention to the ways in which it was birthed out of colonization, enslavement, and genocide and simultaneously perpetuated through anti-Black racism. Not only was this evident in cis-het men participants' ranking the photo of a white, cis-passing trans woman as more desirable than photos of other women, but it was also evident in how they spoke of the range of women presented in the photos with the white, "cis-passing" woman being viewed as warm, kind, non-threatening, and nurturing in comparison to photos of more "visibly trans" women of color which were described with harsher features, such as "sharp" facial structure, strong, mean, and "ratchet." Race, class, and gender intersected in how women were viewed not only in terms of desire but also in terms of "passability." The racialization of "passing" as cisgender elucidates, in part, why trans women of color may be more vulnerable to being seen as trans and thus targeted for anti-trans violence.

Finally, my analyses and data flesh out cis-ness as a multidimensional ideology. Cis-ness is not only perpetuated by trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) or cis-het men who commit the murders of Black trans women. Instead, cis-ness is much more of a spectrum ranging from those who espouse explicitly cissexist sentiment and enact physical/verbal violence on trans women to those who are willing to accept some trans women and some trans people but continue to berate and denigrate those who are nonbinary, do not "pass" as cisgender, and/or who do not fit social notions of "proper" womanhood to those who are more aware and critical of cissexism

but continue to misgender trans women or make cissexist microaggressions without self-reflection.

There were those participants, as well though, who engaged in a more critical cis-ness. These participants highlighted that the perpetuation of cis-ness is not an inevitability. Instead, they demonstrated that cis individuals can act in agentic ways to actively support trans people. In doing so, they worked to actively challenge the necropolitics of cis-ness by acknowledging the vulnerability and precarity that Black trans women and other trans people of color experience, by marking cis-ness as pathological, problematic, and violent, and by recognizing and working against the ways in which desire shapes and is shaped by sociopolitical power. Finally, these participants explicated what it means to “think cis,” with thinking cis being a lens through which the world is constructed, mis-interpreted, and perpetuated in racialized-gendered ways. Thinking cis is an epistemology of ignorance which produces a misunderstanding of reality as inherently binary, inculcates an inability to feel empathy for racialized-gendered Others, and justifies the micro-, meso-, and macro-aggressions that Black trans women and other trans people experience throughout the life course. Ultimately all people, cis and trans, are socialized within a society in which “thinking cis” is perpetuated as the norm, yet participants who engaged in critical cis-ness elucidated the potential of cis individuals to work to continually unlearn cis-ness and relearn new ways of relating to bodies in variously gendered and agendered ways.

10.1 Future Research

In my dissertation, I have focused on cis-het men and cis-les/bi women participants to analyze the discourse of those groups that are most likely to come into intimate contact with trans women. However, there is needed analysis around the role that cis-het women and cis-gay/bi men play in transmisogynist and transmisogynoirist violence. One participant, Chris,

noted the harassment he experienced from cis-het women in regard to his desires for trans women. He was the only participant who mentioned this and only one of two cis-het men participants who had dated a trans woman. However, he highlighted a potential factor to consider in the social conditions that give rise to racialized cissexism. If cis-het women mock, denigrate, and/or refuse to date cis-het men who desire women of any sex assigned at birth, then it is feasible that cis-het women contribute to the perpetuation of toxic masculinity, which numerous participants spoke of when asked about the murders of Black and Brown trans women. Further, while only one participant spoke of this, the harassment of a group of trans women of color in L.A. (see Chapter 4) and cis women onlookers cheering on cis-het men threatening the lives of these women highlights that Chris was not an anomaly.

Additionally, it is necessary to more deeply analyze the role that cis-gay/bi men play in the violence that Black and Brown trans women and other trans women experience. In 2016, Milo Yiannopoulos, a conservative, white, cis-gay man and cultural commentator, mocked a trans woman student while speaking at her university. He remarked:

This quote unquote non-binary trans woman forced his way into the women's locker rooms this year. He got into the women's room the way liberals always operate, using the government and the courts to weasel their way where they don't belong...I have known some passing trannies in my life...The way that you know he's failing is I'd almost still bang him. It's just...it's just a man in a dress, isn't it? (McNamara 2016)

Yiannopoulos highlighted that simply because LGBT people are lumped categorically does not mean that they share experiences, nor does it mean that they are in solidarity with one another. Yiannopoulos not only deadnamed and misgendered this student, but he also perpetuated the same discursive construction of trans-ness as a “covering up” of the natural body that cis-het

men and cis-les/bi women participants did in my interviews. Yiannopoulos is not alone in doing so. The UK-based LGB Alliance formed in 2019 in order to defend cisgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women from the “threat” of trans activism. The group has since spread to numerous nations across the globe, including the US, and continues to work to ensure that cisgender lesbian women and cisgender gay men have access to cis-woman only and cis-man only spaces (LGB Alliance 2019). Thus, future research should attend to the unique ways in which cis-het women and cis-gay/bi men similarly and differently perpetuate transmisogynoir/transmisogyny.

While I was not able to analyze domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and anti-sex worker violence, each of these forms of violence deserve greater attention vis-à-vis the murders of Black and Brown trans women. Yerke and DeFeo (2016) explicate that nearly 50% of transgender people are likely to experience intimate partner violence. Further, many of the known murders of Black and Brown trans women and other transgender people occur at the hands of cis-het men they know or have met through intimate settings. Bianca Muffin Bankz, a young, Black trans woman, was murdered in her apartment by her friend, Moses Allen, who committed suicide after killing her (Hennie 2021). Later this same year, Fifty Bandz, a 21-year-old, Black trans woman, was murdered by Michael Joshua Brooks, who had been “hiding their romance and had repeatedly threatened bodily harm against her” (Clifton 2021). As I edited my dissertation, Jeffrey JJ Bright, a 16-year-old trans boy of color, and his sibling, Jasmine Cannady, a 22-year-old, nonbinary person of color, were both murdered by their mother. Each of these stories are not anomalies, but instead, when looking the Human Rights Campaign’s annual list of murdered trans, nonbinary, and/or gender-nonconforming people, form a pattern of violence committed against trans people by the very people meant to love them^{xxvii}. While some

research has analyzed the violence and harassment trans women experience doing sex work (Bianchi et al. 2014; Ristock et al. 2017), these studies could be further expanded to include larger sample sizes, quantitative analyses, and a deeper analysis of the connection of the murders of Black and Brown trans women to engagement in sex work. Additionally, few large-scale surveys and/or qualitative analyses of trans/nonbinary people's experiences of IPV, as well as interviews of those who kill intimate partners, have been conducted (Yerke and DeFeo 2016). Finally, no study to the best of my knowledge has analyzed the murders of Black and Brown trans women as committed by given-family members. Each of these various dimensions of the murders of Black and Brown trans women need deeper attention in sociology to piece together a larger picture of the sociopolitical and cultural conditions that give rise to this violence.

While I focused on the murders of Black and Brown trans women, similar research also needs to be conducted on the murders of Black and Brown trans men and nonbinary people. Murders of trans people of color are, in large part, murders of trans women of color. However, it is necessary to analyze whether differing conditions and discourse foster violence against trans men and nonbinary people.

When I began my study, I wanted to more thoroughly analyze the ways in which the penis, and in particular Black penises, factor into transmisogynoir and violence against Black trans women. Ultimately, I was unable to conduct such an analysis with the data I collected. I was able to ask participants about their desires for women and how genitals figured into this, and while many noted a lack of attraction for penises, I did not collect enough data to analyze the potential connection between white supremacist fears of Black penises and the murders of Black trans women. Westbrook and Schilt (2013) discuss what they refer to as "penis panics" as relates

to the murders of trans women; however, future research should attend to whether all penises factor equally into “penis panics” or whether some penises elicit fear.

I find it important, as well, to highlight a need for more analysis of the ways in which “trans-attracted” cisgender men perpetuate violence against trans women. In my interview with Chris, he told me at one point, “Y’all are easier to get than women.” Here, Chris simultaneously conceptualized trans women as easy to seduce and as something other than women. While Chris was attracted only to trans women, he repeatedly misgendered trans women and referred to them as men and as part of the “gay life.” However, what I find more important to attend to that needs further analysis is the conceptualization of trans women as “easier to get.” When we, as trans women, are perceived of as “easier to get,” is it out of an assumption that we are simply more open to relationships, that we are more sexually active than cisgender women, that we are more desperate and, thus, manipulatable because of said desperation? If it is the latter, then how does that figure into the violence that trans women experience? As I noted in the dissertation introduction, studies of cisgender men who seek out trans women sex workers have found that trans women are sought out by these men because they are perceived of as “free of intimacy, attachment, and obligation...disposable” (Reback et al. 2018: 3; Bianchi et al. 2014). This conceptualization correlated, in these studies, with high rates of violence against trans women sex workers. Thus, if similar conceptualizations of trans women are found amongst cisgender men in general, then does this conceptualization facilitate higher rates of intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, and murder? Unfortunately, I am unable to answer this question. More analysis of cisgender men who seek out trans women as sexual/romantic partners needs to take place.

Finally, additional studies like mine need to take place with individuals of different races-genders undertaking these studies. As I noted in my discussion of my methods and methodologies, my white womanhood figured centrally into my recruitment of participants. In particular, the fact that many of my participants, such as Josh, Adam, Iceberg, and others, flirted with me, made passes at me, and/or sexually harassed me throughout the interviews highlights the ways in which their attraction to me potentially figured into their decisions to participate in the study. As a white woman, it was surprising to me and to my dissertation committee chair that I was able to get a predominantly non-white sample, as a predominantly white sample for a white researcher is much more common. If I were not attractive to the men, would my sample have looked the same? I cannot answer the question definitively, but I would certainly assume so. Thus, issues of internalized racism and misogynoir among cis-het men participants may have arisen differently with other participants and with a researcher who was not conventionally attractive, white, a woman, and/or feminine.

10.2 Shifting Toward a Pro-Black, Pro-Trans Politic of Mutual Care

While my dissertation does not focus on the needs and experiences of Black trans women, I find it imperative to note in this space the need for sociologists to be active agents of change. In analyzing the socio-political and cultural conditions that foster racialized cissexism, I wish to end with a call for a societal move toward a pro-Black, pro-trans politic of mutual care and away from a necropolitical order of white cissexism. What does it mean that the murders of Black trans women continue to occur on a seemingly never-ending basis? What does it mean that cisgender men and women stand by watching, smiling, mocking, and laughing at the harassment and assault of trans women of color? What does it mean that for many of my participants, trans women were something to laugh about? The institutionalization of whiteness and cis-ness have

left Black trans women and other trans people without protection, legal and social rights, and the capacity to survive and thrive. The 2021 American Sociological Association Annual Conference theme of “Emancipatory Sociology” calls for sociologists to “push the limits of knowledge to point us toward relief from gender discrimination and sexual harassment, racism, ableism, heteronormativity, devastating class inequalities and epistemological and methodological blindness [sic],”^{xxviii} and it is in this vein that I write this section.

A pro-Black, pro-trans politic of mutual care involves the abolitionist and transformative justice goal of “undoing the society we live in [that]...feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and [control]” (Critical Resistance 2021). While my dissertation focuses on sexualities and desire, it is critical to understand that desirability shapes not only one wants to date or sleep with but also who one is willing to house, hire, and protect. A pro-Black, pro-trans politic of mutual care, thus, in part, involves the abolition of the prison industrial complex and immigrant detention facilities. Black trans women and other trans women face exorbitant rates of sexual assault, physical violence, and mental distress in sex-segregated criminal legal and detention facilities (James, et al. 2016). However, simply reforming this to place trans women in women’s prisons does not undo the ways in which Black trans women and other trans women are hyper-surveilled by police under suspicion of involvement in sex work (BreakOUT! 2014; James et al. 2016), arrested for involvement in survival crimes such as theft, drug dealing/purchasing, and loitering/solicitation (James, et al. 2016), and often prevented from obtaining asylum in the US due to the need to “prove” that they are trans, that they experience cissexist violence in their home country, and that they cannot simply “change how they appear” and stop experiencing violence (Solomon 2005).

A pro-Black, pro-trans politic of mutual care also involves the provision of housing, food, jobs, universal basic income, and affordable and/or free (physical and mental) health care, all of which would serve to eliminate high rates of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and lack of health care among Black trans women and other trans women (James, et al. 2016), and would provide them greater security and safety from violence by moving them out of places of high risk (such as the streets, homeless shelters, and so forth). Further, such a politic involves a cultural shift in which trans people of all genders are recognized and validated as the (a)gender that they know themselves to be, the hyper-gendering of most, if not all, facets of US society is undone, the legacies of colonialism and white supremacy are finally attended to at a systemic level on an active and ongoing basis, and individuals, organizations, and systems exist in which to prevent violence and to support Black trans women and other trans women the moment in which violence arises and after harm has occurred. This cultural shift must also include a greater societal celebration of trans people. Westbrook (2020) highlights that the overfocus on the murders of trans women hyperinflates for trans people. An overfocus on anti-trans murder and violence has resulted in the conceptualization of trans lives as “unlivable lives.” Thus, it is critical that trans lives become celebrated and that trans people are able to see other trans people surviving, thriving, and celebrating themselves.

In part, such a cultural shift would involve the mass education of individuals, beginning at a young age, on queer and trans identities and experiences, antiracism, and other issues of oppression and inequality. However, education should not be the end point. Throughout my interviews, I noticed among two participants that a willingness to learn does not translate to self-change. One participant, Musiteli, for example, noted that he was most attracted to light-skin, Black women and explained that he knew this was rooted in colorism; however, he had no desire

to work on and/or undo his perpetuation of colorism despite learning about and recognizing it in himself. Henry, as well, was a former student of mine. He had taken my Introduction to Social Problems course in which we cover the intersections of white supremacy, heterosexism, and cissexism. Henry was one of the most attentive students, often staying after class to discuss the topics further, yet he still perpetuated cissexist discourse throughout the interview.

Additionally, new discursive strategies need to be developed to attend to the conflation of trans-ness and gay-ness. While throughout, I have worked to flesh out the differences and attend to the ways in which such a conflation is rooted in cissexism, I find it important to also highlight a need to move beyond counter-arguing that it is not gay to be with trans women. It is important to recognize that trans women are women and, thus, that men who date trans women are not gay. However, fighting to detach trans-ness from gay-ness may discursively reproduce heterosexist ideologies that there is something wrong with being (perceived to be) gay.

Finally, while legislators across the country work to limit the rights of trans women and girls and the Senate continues to prevent the Equality Act from further consideration and passage, it is crucial to recognize the limits of the law in ending the violence that Black and Brown trans women experience. The creation of hate crime laws that would criminalize the murders of trans women would facilitate an increase in the criminalization of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (Spade 2011), as passage of similar hate crime laws has increased resources provided to the criminal legal system. Providing cultural “humility” and/or “competency” trainings to police and immigration officers would potentially decrease harassment of trans women by legal agents, but it would not shift the cultural logic that provides the foundation for the murders of trans women. Further, the outlawing of “trans panic” defenses and “gay panic” defenses does not preclude the use of such defenses by lawyers in criminal

cases. For example, in 2006, California passed AB 1160, “the ‘Gwen Araujo Justice for Victims Act, [which] outlawed the use of either ‘gay panic’ or ‘trans panic’ defenses in criminal murder trials,” yet, just five years later, lawyers for Brand McInerney who murdered Black trans girl, Latisha King, still utilized a panic defense (Salamon 2018: 21).

Instead, transformative justice solutions offered by the Movement for Black Lives offer long-lasting, abolitionist alternatives to punishment and incarceration that can lay the groundwork for a society in which Black and Brown trans women are able to survive and thrive. These include:

- Legalizing sex work.
- Providing housing, jobs, basic universal income, and healthcare, including universal access to gender-affirming care.
- Abolishing the prison industrial complex, including the police and immigrant detention facilities.
- Emotionally and financially investing in the lives and leadership of BIPOC trans women.
- Recognizing and validating the humanity of all BIPOC, including trans, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, and intersex people.
- Ensuring bodily autonomy and self-determination for all BIPOC. (Adams, M. Ash Stephens, Toni-Michelle Williams, Janetta Johnson, Ola Osaze, and Sean Saifa Wall 2020)
- “Developing restorative, rehabilitative, and healing justice modalities beyond the carceral system while holding perpetrators of violence accountable.” (Gupta and Willis 2017)

- And demanding “...that all places of worship including churches, synagogues, and mosques, and spaces like barbershops, hair salons, gyms, and public pools begin to foster more healthy dialogue about the importance of gender diversity in order to make these environments safe, affirming, and nurturing for Black trans women and Black trans femmes.” (Trans Agenda for Liberation 2020)

It is my hope that this dissertation provides a deeper understanding and analysis of the conditions that give rise to the murders of Black and Brown trans women, and in doing so, can provide a basis for future research by and for Black and Brown trans women in order to develop a blueprint for a more just society. Black trans activist, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, once stated, “I’d like for the girls to get a chance to be who they are. For young transgender people to go to school, learn like everyone else does, and then get out there and live their lives, not afraid or thinking that the only solution for them is death.” It is time that we, Sociologists, and all people, do more to ensure that Black trans women and other trans women are able to survive and thrive by studying the conditions that give rise to violence, assessing strategies for the creation of more just societies, and by working toward liberation in the streets and not just in the academy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A—Demographic Tables

Table 10. Religiosity

Name	Level of Religiosity ¹
Adam	Low
Alyshah	N/A
Alyx	N/A
Amanda	Medium
Amy	N/A
Chris	N/A
Cookie	N/A
D	N/A
Low	Low
Henry	Low
Iceberg	Medium
Jake	N/A
Janelle	Medium
Jessica	Low
Josh	Medium
Ky	N/A
Kylee	N/A
LaLa	N/A
Liz	N/A
Mack	Medium
Mike	N/A
Musiteli	N/A
Peaches	N/A
Rachel	N/A
Randall	N/A
Renee	N/A
Ryan	High
Sabrina	N/A
Shantelle	N/A
Sheila	For Cultural Reasons Only
Spiderman	Low
Vincent	N/A

¹ “Level” of Religiosity is not to empirically assess religiosity but rather to display self-coded differences in level of religious expression. Participant religiosity was categorized based off a “point system”. Participants accrued a “point” for each of the following: having a temple/alter at home; attending church/temple regularly; praying regularly; holding to scriptures dogmatically. Participants accrued a half point for each of the following: praying occasionally; attending church/temple occasionally. These were selected based of what participants offered as descriptions of “how religious” they are. Low religiosity: ½-1; Medium: 1.5-2.5; High: 3-4. “N/A” is used for participants who were not religious.

Table 11. Gender Expression

Name	Gender Expression ¹
Adam	Very Masculine
Alyshah	More Feminine
Alyx	More Feminine
Amanda	Very Feminine
Amy	None of the Above
Chris	More Masculine
Cookie	None of the Above
D	More Masculine
Gee	Very Masculine
Henry	More Masculine
Iceberg	More Masculine
Jake	More Masculine
Janelle	Very Feminine
Jessica	Very Feminine
Josh	Very Masculine
Ky	More Masculine
Kylee	More Masculine
LaLa	More Masculine
Liz	None of the Above
Mack	Very Masculine
Mike	More Masculine
Musiteli	More Masculine
Peaches	More Feminine
Rachel	More Feminine
Randall	More Masculine
Renee	More Feminine
Ryan	More Masculine
Sabrina	More Feminine
Shantelle	More Feminine
Sheila	More Feminine
Spiderman	Very Masculine
Vincent	More Masculine

¹I self-coded gender expression in order to tease apart the ways in which varying “intensities” of masculinities and femininities potentially shaped how participants viewed and reacted to trans women. I coded based off how participants described themselves *and* how I perceived them. This is in no way meant to be representative or generalizable, but instead to detail connections between gender expression and reactions to trans women. Adam, for example, described himself as very masculine, and indeed he express his gender in very masculine ways. He wore a “men’s” suit, “men’s” dress shoes, had a beard, wore cologne, spread his legs wide, and commented on my looks and single-ness. LaLa described herself as none of the above, but she wore more “masculine” clothing—a loose hoodie, loose pants, “men’s” shoes—spread her legs wide and described her aesthetic as comfortable, so I rated her more masculine. Cookie had “feminine” and “masculine” attributes. She was warm, smiling, her legs and arms together rather than spread apart, and she mentioned that she, at times, wears heels. But she also had locs, wore “men’s” clothing, and described herself as fluid. I placed her in none of the above rather than androgynous, because she didn’t appear to me or describe herself as androgynous.

Table 4. LGB Acceptance and Trans Proximity

Name	LGB Acceptance ¹	Number of Recurring Known Trans Interactions ²
Adam	Inclusive	0
Alyshah	Inclusive	0
Alyx	Inclusive	1-2
Amanda	Inclusive	3-5
Amy	Inclusive	0
Chris	Inclusive	11+
Cookie	Inclusive	11+
D	Inclusive	1-2
Gee	Moderately Heteronormative	0
Henry	Inclusive	0
Iceberg	Moderately Heteronormative	0
Jake	Inclusive	0
Janelle	Inclusive	1-2
Jessica	Slightly Heteronormative	0
Josh	Very Heteronormative	0
Ky	Slightly Heteronormative	0
Kylee	Inclusive	3-5
LaLa	Slightly Heteronormative	1-2
Liz	Inclusive	0
Mack	Slightly Heteronormative	3-5
Mike	Inclusive	0
Musiteli	Slightly Heteronormative	3-5
Peaches	Inclusive	11+
Rachel	Inclusive	3-5
Randall	Inclusive	11+
Renee	Inclusive	3-5
Ryan	Inclusive	1-2
Sabrina	Inclusive	1-2
Shantelle	Inclusive	6-10
Sheila	Inclusive	0
Spiderman	Very Heteronormative	1-2
Vincent	Inclusive	6-10

¹LGB Acceptance was not measured in an empirical sense but rather to loosely assess how increased LGB antagonism potentially related to transphobia. Participant LGB acceptance was assessed on a “point system.” Participants accrued points for each of the following: not wanting “it” in their face; having a lesbian/bi woman fetish; bi exclusionism; intolerance for gay men; referring to LGB identities as “choices;” believing religion could “save” an LGB person and convert them back to heterosexuality; believing trauma causes LGB identity; referring to AIDS as a divine punishment for “homosexuality.” These factors were simply categorized based off participants’ discussions of LGB people and the phrases they used to refer to LGB people. Inclusive: 0 points; Slightly Heteronormative: 1-3 points; More Heteronormative: 4-6 points; Very Heteronormative: 7-8 points.

²Participants were asked at the end of the interview how many recurring interactions they have had with trans people, and particularly trans women, including friends, family members, (former) partners, and coworkers.

Appendix B—Interview Guide

Thank you for participating in this interview today. The purpose of this interview is to understand how individuals deem certain bodies desirable and how they make sense of their desires. I have questions in mind that I want to touch on, but largely, I want this process to be one in which we can chat with one another. I'll ask questions about race, gender, dating, hooking-up, bodies, genitalia, and more. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. I ask that you do not use your real name or the real name/identifying information of anyone you discuss during this interview. At any point during this interview, we can stop and take a break. We can take a break if you need water or to use the restroom or for any other reason. Additionally, you can choose not to answer any of the questions I ask you or to end the interview at any time for any reason. You don't even need to give me a reason, and there will be no consequences for doing so.

1. Before we start, could you choose a name that is not your own that you would be comfortable with me using for you in this study?
2. What's your gender?
3. What's your sex—as in male, female, etc.?
4. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
5. What's your race and/or ethnicity?
6. What's your highest level of education?
7. How old are you?
8. What would you estimate your annual income to be?
9. How did you hear about this study?
10. To start, could you describe what makes a woman desirable to you? In other words what makes her attractive to you?
 - a. *Probes: Personality? Bodily characteristics? Life experiences? Cultural affiliations? Heritage? Gender expression (for example how feminine or not she is)? Race? Income/profession/education/family background? How she does her hair/nails/makeup? The feeling or scent of her skin? Her voice? Mannerisms? Life goals/values? Genitalia (should it look a certain way? smell a certain way? taste a certain way? hair?)*
 - b. What in particular about these things makes her desirable to you? What makes the other characteristics undesirable?
11. Do you have any hesitancy or lack of desire in dating Black women, Latina women, Asian women, Native women, white women? Why/why not?
12. Could you define femininity for me?
 - a. Would you say there are any differences in how feminine women of different races are? Do you feel that some are more feminine than others or that some are less feminine? Why/why not? How does this affect whether you find them desirable?
13. What is a woman to you? What makes someone a woman? How so?
14. I have eight photos that I'm going to place on the table of various women. I want you to rate each one from one to ten in terms of how desirable the women are to you based purely on looks with one being extremely undesirable and ten being extremely desirable. As you rate the women, please state why you are giving them the rating you are.

- a. Okay, now I want you to organize the women in regard to whom you find most desirable and whom you find least desirable. At one end of the table, place the woman you find least desirable out of all eight. On the other end, place the woman you find most desirable. And then line the other six women along this scale from least to most desirable.
 - i. *Can you explain your sorting?*
 - b. Remembering that there's no right or wrong answer, if I were to now tell you that (randomly choose women from their top 5 including the most desirable) were trans women, meaning that they were assigned male at birth but identify as women, would this change how you sorted? Why/why not?
15. If you were to meet these women at a bar, would you want them to tell you right away that they are transgender? Why/why not?
- a. Does your answer change at all if they are the ones approaching you? Why/why not?
16. Let's imagine a scenario where you meet a woman and begin dating. You start to really like her and want to be with her in a committed way. She later tells you she's trans and you accept her and love her as she is. Does this change you see yourself? Why/why not?
- a. How others see you?
 - i. Friends? Family? Coworkers? Religious leaders?
 - ii. Why/why not?
 - b. How you see her? Why/why not?
 - c. How others see her? Why/why not?
 - d. Would it in any way challenge or confuse your views of yourself as a **(man/woman)**? Why/why not?
 - e. Would it make you think about gender differently? How/how not?
 - f. Would it in anyway challenge or confuse your views of yourself as **(heterosexual/lesbian/same-gender loving)**? Why/why not?
 - g. Would it make you think about sexuality differently? How/how not?
17. Is there any difference to you in how desirable a trans woman is if she has a vagina, breasts, feminine hair and looks, smooth skin, no facial hair, and sounds feminine or, in other words, appears "just like any other woman" and is also trans? Why/why not?
18. Whether or not you would be open to dating trans women, let's suppose you are once again. Would you be hesitant to introduce her to friends? Why/why not?
- a. Family?
 - b. Coworkers?
 - c. Religious community?
19. Would you say that men who date trans women are heterosexual? Why/why not? **OR** Would you say that cis women who date trans women are lesbian/same-gender loving? Why/why not?
20. Do you consider trans women to be women? Female?
- a. Why/why not? What do you consider to be the differences between being female and/or a woman?
 - b. If answer is no, do you consider trans men to be men? Male? Why/why not? What do you consider to be the differences between being male and/or a man?
21. Would you say you're attracted to trans women? Why/why not?

22. Sometimes, men have sex with, flirt with, or interact in some way with trans women romantically/sexually and then murder them. In court, some of these men have claimed a “trans panic defense” where they argue that they were so distraught by finding out the woman was trans that they overreacted and didn’t know what they were doing, resulting in her death. What are your thoughts in response to this argument?
23. If you had to venture a guess, what do you suspect may be the reason for trans women of color experiencing high rates of murder and low life expectancies in society? Please elaborate.
 - a. What do you think would need to change for these statistics to change?
24. Can you tell if a woman is trans or not before you get to know her?
25. How would you describe the role of race/racism in terms of who is seen as desirable within society?
 - a. Would you agree with the overarching social view?
26. How would you describe the relation of body size to who is seen as desirable within society?
 - a. Would you agree with the overarching social view?
27. Would you say that disabled people are seen as desirable within society? Mentally ill people?
 - a. Would you agree with the overarching social view?
28. How do you feel overall about which bodies are deemed beautiful, attractive, desirable, etc. in society? Do you feel there are problems with social views? Do you feel that social views have a purpose?
 - a. Should social views change, and if so, in what way and/or how?
 - b. Should individuals change, and if so, in what way and/or how?
29. If they mention penises in any of their answers vis-à-vis attraction to trans women: Would you date a trans man who has not and does not want a phalloplasty, or in other words, who has a vagina and maybe breasts but maybe not? Why/why not?
30. To end, I just have a few more questions:
 - a. In general, would you say you are more or less accepting of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals?
 - b. Are you a person of faith? If so, what faith? How often do you attend services? How strictly do you adhere to the beliefs?
 - c. Have you had personal interactions with people who told you they were transgender, either at work, in public, within your family/friend groups, etc.? If yes, how many people would you estimate you’ve interacted with on a recurring basis?

Thank you for participating in the interview today. I’ve enjoyed speaking with you, and I’m extremely appreciative of you taking time out of your day to talk with me. To compensate you for your time, I have fifteen dollars for you. Additionally, I will be holding focus groups with heterosexual men and lesbian women in regard to similar topics, would you be interested in being on the focus group? Participants are compensated twenty dollars and the focus group will last about the same amount of time as the interview tonight. If interested, what would be the best way to contact you with the information at a later date?

Appendix C—Focus Group Guide

Thank you for participating in this focus group today. The purpose of this focus group is for you all to be able to respond to one another's various views, build off one another's answers, disagree with others, and/or think together as a group. I have questions in mind that I want to touch on, but largely, I want this process to be one in which you all are able to have a conversation. I'll ask questions about race, gender, dating, hooking-up, bodies, genitalia, and more. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. One of the operating rules of today is that what is said here stays here, meaning that I ask that you don't share what others say and that you also don't share who was here. I want to reiterate that at any point, you should feel free to step out if you need water, a break, or to use the restroom or for any other reason. Additionally, you do not have to respond to each question or even any of the questions and you are free to leave at any point during the focus group.

1. What is a woman to you? What makes someone a woman?
 - a. How so?
2. What is a man to you? What makes someone a man?
3. Explain cisgender. Explain transgender.
 - a. How well would you say you understand what it means to be transgender? Had you heard this term before? Other terms like it? What about cisgender?
4. Do you feel that what a woman is differs for cis-het men and cis lesbians?
 - a. Are trans women women?
 - b. How can you tell who is a trans women?
5. What does it mean to be cisgender to you?
6. Should a trans women "disclose" up front that she is transgender if she is interested you and vice versa?
 - a. Does it matter whether they've had gender confirmation surgery (*i.e.* have a vulva)?
7. How does/doesn't race affect how desirable someone is?
 - a. Body size?
 - b. Disability?
 - c. Class/Income?
 - d. Should these views change? How so and/or why not?
 - e. How do individuals' preferences in regard to whom they find desirable form?
8. How could someone be attracted to trans women without fetishizing them?
9. I want to show you all the photos people have rated most desirable in interviews. What similarities do you see in these photos?
 - a. Differences?
 - b. Why do you think people rated these photos most desirable?
10. What is society's role in regard to the high rates of violence, harassment, and murder for trans women of color?
 - a. What, if anything, is society's responsibility in regard to this?
 - b. How do desire and dating experiences factor into this if at all?
 - c. Why do people react to others with violence? Why do people react to sexual and/or romantic partners with violence?

Thank you for participating today. I've the conversation, and I'm extremely appreciative of you taking time out of your day to participate in this focus group. To compensate you for your time, I have \$20 for each of you.

Appendix D—Recruitment Flyer

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS FOR A GEORGIA STATE
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH STUDY ON DESIRABILITY
AND DATING

Seeking 20 women attracted to other women and
20 men attracted to women.

Participation involves a 90-120 minute interview.

Eligibility:

- * You must be 18 years or older
- * You must be attracted primarily and/or only to women
- * You cannot be transgender
- * You must live within the METRO Atlanta area

To participate, email azamantakis1@gsu.edu with your gender, sexual orientation, and age.

Appendix E—Interview Debriefing Script

When you were recruited to participate in this interview, the consent form, the recruitment flyer, and I stated that the purpose of the study was to understand how popular ideas of gender and race affect who is attractive and who is not. That is true; however, the purpose was kept vague in order to elicit attention from a wide range of people. The full purpose of the study is to understand how men and women who are not transgender and are attracted to women form ideas of attraction in regard to Black transgender women and transgender women of color, as well as how ideas of desire support the murders of Black transgender women and transgender women of color. I did not state this at the beginning of the interview or place it in the consent form or recruitment flyer for two reasons. First, many people do not know what transgender means and would otherwise ignore the flyer. Second, many people have high levels of bias against transgender individuals and may let that bias keep them from participating. However, in order to have a nuanced understanding of desirability schemes, I sought to recruit individuals of all levels of bias.

I understand that concealing this information may cause anger and/or confusion, and I want to allow you now to share how you are feeling.

- Is there anything you wish to be clarified now that this information has been revealed?
- Now that this information has been revealed, would you like your data to be removed from the study or are you okay at this time allowing us to continue to use your data for this research study? There are no consequences for withdrawing and you will still be compensated.
- Do you need any resources that I could potentially provide because of this concealment?

Appendix F—Photos for Photo Elicitation



Figure 2. Woman 1

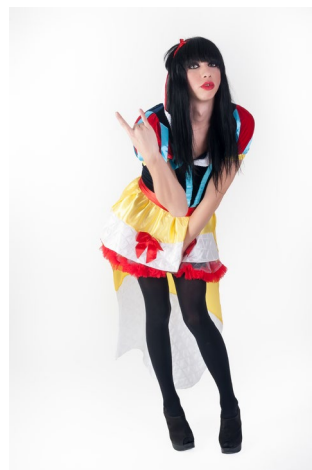


Figure 4. Woman 4



Figure 3. Woman 2



Figure 6. Woman 5



Figure 4. Woman 3



Figure 6. Woman 6



Figure 7. Woman 7



Figure 8. Woman 8

Notes

ⁱ See Chapter Two for the photos.

ⁱⁱ Here, Spiderman was not attempting to distance himself from his response (*e.g.* “Others say this but not me”). Rather, Spiderman was attempting to distance himself from those who would want someone disabled.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Next Shark* (2016) highlights the story of Australian student, Iyia Liu, who invested 4,300 U.S. dollars into her own waist trainer company and was able to earn a return on investment of 2.5 million U.S. dollars in her company’s first year on the market.

^{iv} Throughout, I place “passing,” “passability,” “cis-passing,” and “visibly trans” in quotation marks because there are no characteristics that make one person look “more” trans than another. While trans women are singled out for larger hands, taller height, squarer jaws, facial and body hair, and even lower-set eyebrows, cis women also have these features. There are cis women with hairy faces and cis women who are six feet tall with large hands and broad shoulders. The focus of these features on trans women is a function of transmisogyny and transmisogynoir, as trans women’s bodies are policed and deemed a man for any “masculine” features.

^v Stud and butch both refer to masculine expressing women. Stud was, as would be expected, used by Black participants, while butch was used by white participants.

^{vi} A low income is categorized as between \$20,000 and \$44,999 by the Pew Research Center.

^{vii} N.A. 2019. “How Much Do Human Hair Wigs Cost?” Retrieved 26 September 2020 from <https://www.wigs.com/blogs/news/how-much-do-wigs-cost>.

^{viii} Ortved, John. 2013. “Ratchet: The Rap Insult That Became a Compliment.” *The Cut*. Retrieved 22 September 2020 from <http://thecut.com/2013/04/ratchet-the-rap-insult-that-became-a-compliment.html>.

^{ix} It is unclear from the study what the racial and ethnic demographics of the “Hispanic” sub-sample were for their analysis. Hispanic references people of Spain, as well as Spanish-speaking Latin America, but does not include Brazilians, who are Latinx but not Hispanic. It is unclear, as well, whether Brazilians were included in the study.

^x Note, bodily differences between Black people and whites do not signify that race is biological. Instead, biological differentiation and variation has become racialized in the U.S. and across the world in varying ways.

^{xi} It is important to note that these embodied differences are not “evidence” of race as biological. The presence of differences in how individuals’ bodies manifest does not mean race is natural or preordained. Rather, differences in embodiment became racially categorized and then imbued with racialized meaning.

^{xii} Developed by Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, and Steven Canals, and produced by Janet Mock, *Pose* follows a group of Black trans women and queer men in the 1980s house and ball scene. The show is fictional but relies on actual events that took place in the lives of trans people.

^{xiii} Here, mother refers to an individual who serves the role of a chosen mother as well as a mentor in the balls. The balls are events where Black and/or Latinx queer/trans people “walk” categories, such as “Face,” “Body,” and “Executive Realness,” among others and compete to be legendary (or among the best). Mothers not only mentor their children within the balls but also provide housing, food, and a family for children who otherwise have been forced to leave their family of origin or were kicked out for being queer and/or trans.

^{xiv} See Chapters One and Two for discussion and critique of “passing” as relates to trans individuals.

^{xv} See Chapter Two and Appendix F for photos.

^{xvi} Monosexism refers to is a sociopolitical ideology that assumes that individuals are only attracted to one of two genders in a binary gender schema (Toft and Yip 2018).

^{xvii} Netflix. “Why I Made Disclosure: The Story Behind the Netflix Documentary.” Retrieved 26 August 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGaTwxS92hw>.

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- ^{xviii} For example, see: Kubala, Julie. 2020. "Teaching 'Bad Feminism': Mary Daly and the Legacy of '70s Lesbian-Feminism." *Feminist Formations* 32 (1): 117-136. DOI: 10.1353/ff.2020.0010.
- ^{xix} For example, see: Rustin, Susanna 2020. "Feminists Like Me Aren't Anti-Trans—We Just Can't Discard the Idea of 'Sex'." *The Guardian*. Retrieved 8 October 2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/30/feminists-anti-trans-idea-sex-gender-oppression>.
- ^{xx} For example, see Wark, Kirsty. 2015. "Germaine Greer: Transgender Women are 'Not Women'." *BBC*. Retrieved 8 October 2020 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-34625512>.
- ^{xxi} For example, see: Pateman, Carole. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- ^{xxii} For example, see: Weinberg, Justin. 2018. "Derogatory Language in Philosophy Journal Risks Increased Hostility and Diminished Discussion." *Daily Nous*. Retrieved 8 October 2020 from <http://dailynous.com/2018/08/27/derogatory-language-philosophy-journal-hostility-discussion/#Sosa>.
- ^{xxiii} For example, see: Raymond, Janice. 1979. *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- ^{xxiv} For example, see: N.A. N.D. "About Us." *Get the L Out UK*. Retrieved 8 October 2020 from <http://www.gettheloutuk.com/>.
- ^{xxv} I place "appears to be trans" in quotations here to highlight that trans bodies and aesthetics are not a monolith. There are cisgender women who are six feet and taller, as evidenced by the WNBA. There are cisgender women with facial, chest, buttocks, arm, shoulder, hand, and back hair. There are cisgender women with square jaws, larger chins, large gaps between their upper lip and bottom of their nose, large noses, wide noses, protruding brow bones, receding hairlines, short and/or no head hair, large hands, large feet, large clitorises that may resemble a small penis, internal testes, and deep voices, among other characteristics.
- ^{xxvi} Shantelle preferred the identity label gay rather than lesbian to describe herself.
- ^{xxvii} See: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2021>.
- ^{xxviii} See: asanet.org/annual-meeting-2021/theme-and-program-committee.