Historical geographies of trans care practices in the United States

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Abstract

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For decades, feminist geographers have emphasized care's role as a basic necessity for the continuation of humankind. This work has largely been shouldered by those who are most marginalized, especially women, people of color, and immigrants, and has, as such, been devalued as a result (Lawson 2007). Within this literature, however, little attention has yet been granted to transgender subjectivities or the gendering of care beyond a feminine/masculine binary. This Master's thesis bridges these gaps by exploring how trans people have engaged with care as intra-community practices during the last half-century in the United States. I explore the following questions: 1) How have US-based trans and gender nonconforming people engaged with care practices from the mid-twentieth century to 2019? How are these practices spatialized? 2) How do trans subjectivities transform theorizations of care?

Using a grounded theory method, I draw from 25 oral history interviews from the New York City Trans Oral History Project to build theory about the relationship between trans subjectivities and spaces of care. Findings from this project demonstrate how the gendering of care goes beyond a male/female binary or even a (cis) male / (cis) female / trans divide. I

consider the ontological implications of Joan Tronto's care framework, the theoretical backbone of much scholarship within care geographies, and ask how trans subjectivities might complicate current academic understandings of caring worlds.

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Glossary

Bottom surgery: Bottom surgery refers to a wide range of procedures to modify one's genitals a part of a gender transition. This includes (but is not limited to) vaginoplasty, metoidioplasty, phalloplasty, vaginectomy, orchiectomy, and hysterectomy.

Cisgender: "[A] cisgender person's gender is on the same side as their birth-assigned sex, in contrast to which a transgender person's gender is on the other side (trans-) of their birth-assigned sex… 'Cisgender,' when used appropriately, helps distinguish diverse sex/gender identities without reproducing unstated norms [about gender]" (Aultman 2014)**.**

Gender affirming surgery: The subset of medical transition technologies that specifically involve surgical procedures, such as top and bottom surgeries, facial modification surgeries, and surgery of the vocal cords. As of publication of this thesis, this is largely considered the most current and appropriate term for this phenomenon.

Gender dysphoria: An incongruence between the gender one was assigned birth and their ideal gender expression or presentation. The term is the source of some controversy, as trans people usually must demonstrate gender dysphoria to medical professionals in order to receive trans-affirming healthcare. It is increasingly understood that one does not need to experience gender dysphoria in order to identity as transgender.

Gender modality: "Gender modality refers to how a person's gender identity stands in relation to their gender assigned at birth. It is an openended category which includes being trans and being cis and welcomes the elaboration of further terms which speak to the diverse experiences people may have of the relationship between their gender identity and gender assigned at birth" (Ashley 2021, 1)**.** For example, if someone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth, then their *gender modality* is cisgender. Their *gender identity* might then be male or female.

Gender reassignment surgery: See *gender affirming surgery*.

Medical transition: These are aspects of *gender transition* that typically involve the intervention of the medical establishment. This might include hormone replacement therapy; puberty blockers (in children); hair removal; surgery to alter gendered aspects of a body, such the chest, genitals or face; speech therapy; fertility preservation; and other items not listed here (UCSF Transgender Care 2016).

Passing: "Those transgender people who show no clear signs of the gender they were assigned at birth 'pass' (as cisgender), while those who do show signs fail to 'pass'... The concept of passing in the United States finds it [sic] origins in racial passing, and particularly in concerns about Black Americans passing undetected as White and/or freedmen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries... there is contentious debate among transgender theorists and activists about whether the desire to pass is 'good' or 'bad'" (Billard 2019, 1–3). Passing is a contentious concept within trans and gender expansive communities, as it simultaneously serves as a safety measure, a barometer for access to medical transition, and a contested form of privilege.

Sex Assigned at Birth: This refers to the sex or gender that was initially assigned to a person, regardless of their current gender identity. Most commonly, this is seen in its gender-specific forms: Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB) or Assigned Male at Birth (AFAB).

Sex reassignment surgery: See *gender affirming surgery*.

Stealth: "… the slang used by many transgender-identified people to describe nondisclosure of transgender status is 'going stealth.' Those living stealth are unknown as transgender to almost everyone in their lives… The very linguistic construction of 'going stealth' depends on the constancy of *going*: of continuing to conceal one's transgender status, even if that concealment can never be airtight" (Beauchamp 2018, 34).

Trans: This term refers to someone who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. I use *trans* and *transgender* interchangeably. There is some debate about how to best describe non-cisgender people. There are many groups of people who do not strictly identify as cisgender or transgender but likely are excluded by Western gender binaries, such as some nonbinary people. Throughout this work, I use trans to refer to all gender modalities that are *not* cisgender, while recognizing that this terminology includes, but does not specifically name, indigenous or non-colonial constructions of gender identities.

Transition refers to "the process or experience of changing gender" (Carter 2014). Originally, transition was used to describe the prescribed path towards "sex reassignment" determined by North American medical professionals in the late twentieth century (ibid). Today, transition broadly refers to the social, medical, psychological, aesthetic, and other changes a trans or gender expansive person may make to alter their gender presentation and/or affirm their gender identity.

Transnormativity: Coined by Evan Vipond, transnormativity refers to "the normalization of trans bodies and identities through the adoption of cisgender institutions by trans persons [including] gender normativity, the medical establishment, government institutions, identification documents, and historical narratives" (2015, 24). Noting that social definitions of normativity generally refer to people who are "white, middle class, mentally and physically able, heterosexual, cisgender and, typically, male," Vipond argues that transnormative practices attempt to embody characteristics ascribed to these categories as closely as possible (2015, 23).

Top surgery: Surgical modifications to someone's chest area as part of a gender transition. This broad term can refer to a wide range of procedures, including breast augmentation, mastectomy, and body contouring.

I. Introduction

> "Feminist care ethics assert the absolute centrality of care to our human lives: we are all in need of care and of emotional connection to others. We all receive care, and throughout our lives, many of us will also give care. In short, care is society's work in the sense that care is absolutely central to our individual and collective survival… Marginalizing care furthers the myth that our successes are achieved as autonomous individuals, and as such, we have no responsibility to share the fruits of our success with others or to dedicate public resources to the work of care." (Lawson 2007, 210)

For decades, feminist geographers have emphasized care's role as a basic necessity for the continuation of humankind. This work has largely been shouldered by those who are most marginalized, especially women, people of color, and immigrants, and has, as such, been devalued as a result (Lawson 2007). Within this literature, however, little attention has yet been granted to transgender subjectivities or the gendering of care beyond a feminine/masculine binary. This Master's thesis bridges these gaps by exploring how trans people have engaged with care as intra-community practices during the last half-century in the United States. Using a grounded theory method, I draw from 25 interviews from the New York City Trans Oral History Project to build theory about the relationship between trans subjectivities and spaces of care.

Thesis Roadmap

I begin with an overview of multiple relevant literatures. First, I consider a history of care ethics within the academy, particularly focusing on the works of Joan Tronto, which constitute a major part of my theoretical framework. I then trace a genealogy of work within feminist geographies on care, which include a rich and storied array of both theoretical and empirical works. Next, I turn to the emergent field of trans studies and consider how it has most frequently explored care as a medicalized phenomenon. I end with an evaluation of the small amount of

literature on the specific subject of trans care practices and introduce my research questions: Q1) How have US-based trans and gender nonconforming people engaged with care practices from the mid-twentieth century to 2019? How are these practices spatialized? Q2) How do trans subjectivities transform theorizations of care?

My next chapter covers the research methods used for this work. My data for this project were 25 oral history interviews from the New York City Trans Oral History Project, an open-source archive with audio and transcriptions of over 150 life history interviews with trans current or former residents of New York (NYC Trans Oral History Project 2019). Because little theoretical work yet exists on trans care, I used a Grounded Theory Method for coding and conducting my data analysis in order to build empirically-rich theories of trans care. This began with open coding of concepts related to care. Codes were then refined through an iterative process and were finally consolidated into core concepts. This process was completed using NVivo 12, a qualitative coding software.

My data analysis chapters draw from Joan Tronto's conception of care politics to evaluate care-related codes from my data collection. This framework emphasizes how care consists of practices that *maintain*, *continue*, and *repair* our world. Following the examples of Bartos (2012; 2018), I operationalize this definition and organize my coded passages based on whether they best represent maintaining, continuing, or repairing our world. I then explore themes within these grouped codings.

My first data analysis chapter focuses on the myriad ways that trans people *maintain* their worlds, or protect them from outside dangers. Digital spaces proved particularly important for care practices of maintenance. In particular, digital spaces often allowed trans sex workers to

maintain relative economic stability, reduced contact with law enforcement, and an improved ability to screen clients. However, tightening legal restrictions around the digital facilitation of sex work has negatively impacted sex workers' ability to advertise services and maintain stable income. Next, interviewees consider the conceptual and lived complexities of families of choice. For many, these connections were deeply important and worth protecting even to their personal detriment. Finally, trans people in this interview set discuss how physical trans support groups can be important sources of solidarity and understanding. However, these spaces are not *inherently* caring, and active maintenance practices are necessarily in cultivating care-oriented support groups.

In contrast to maintenance care practices, which are acts of care that seek to protect one's world against external threats, care practices of *continuing* involve determining and preserving the most important elements within one's world.[1] Within digital spaces, trans people engaged—and argued—with others about their personal struggles between choosing to be out, being stealth, and/or delaying aspects of transition. Online forum members attempted to ascertain the most important characteristics for defining belonging in identity-based digital spaces (e.g., threads for people of color). Activist organizations often struggled to determine and carry out their original core values. Several interviewees noted how participating in activism was a double-edged sword, and many avoided trans-specific activism to prevent being outed so that they could continue to live as best as possible. Finally, interviewees described complex feelings towards both families of origin and families of choice, particularly centering the roles of inheritance and familial acceptance of trans identity (or lack thereof).

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[1] As later detailed, "maintenance" and "continuation" are synonyms in the vernacular. I draw from Bartos (2012; 2018) to differentiate these terms depending on whether they reference external or internal struggles, respectively.

Repairing care practices played an extremely important role in interviewees' lives, easily making up over half of the coded passages in my analysis. I speculate that this disproportionate focus on world repair stems from astonishingly high levels of injustice and discrimination against trans people. Digital spaces once again made up a significant proportion of repair-oriented caring spaces. Multiple interviewees consider how the internet helped them to learn about and discuss trans identities, processes of medically and socially transitioning, and information about surgery outcomes. Even those who considered the start of their transition to long precede the popularization of the internet emphasized how the internet shifted trans cultural awareness. Activism was another way that trans interviewees creative reparative spaces and communities of care. Participating in public demonstrations and policy activism were particularly important ways that interviewees responded to the failure of governing bodies to properly care for queer and trans people, shown through diverse examples such as participating in funeral marches for Queer Nation and working to improve municipal regulation of trans policies at homeless shelter in Philadelphia. Turning towards the local scale, I consider how the murder of Black transgender woman Islan Nettles in 2013 situated New York's local transgender activist scene within the greater national context of the Black Lives Matter movement. However, interviewees frankly noted how queer and trans activist organizations often needed repair themselves as a result of competing priorities, limited funding and personnel capacity, and—in the case of cisgender-led organizations—transphobia. Lastly, trans interviewees considered a plethora of issues regarding housing stability, including being kicked out as a youth for being trans, experiencing rental application discrimination, and navigating transphobia in homeless

shelters. Interviewees discussed their individual solutions to these issues but expressed frustration at the lack of systemic solutions.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis discusses the theoretical implications of these findings. I return to my research questions, which are explicated in Chapter II, and consider how the care practices found in my research connect with existing literatures on trans subjectivities and care geographies. I discuss the potential theoretical implications that these findings may have for understandings of the gendering of care. I wrap up this thesis by considering future research directions and connecting this work to current care crises related to both the coronavirus pandemic and police murders of people of color in the US.

Practical Benefits

My thesis project has transformed dramatically over the course of its development. My initial plan focused on the spatialization of rhetorical strategies used by Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (more commonly known by the acronym "TERFs") to argue against legal protections for transgender people. I was particularly interested in one specific argument TERFs often deployed for explaining the increasing number of children (and, to a lesser extent, adults) identifying as trans: "social contagion." In essence, this argument suggests that proximity to transgender people can cause cisgender people to falsely believe that they, too, are trans. Ergo, social contagion is used as a spatial and biopolitical metaphor positing trans bodies as a vector for the "disease" of trans subjectivity.

Over time, however, I began to shift away from that project. Unsurprisingly, it is immensely emotionally draining to research those who hate trans people when you yourself are a

trans person. I found it much more fruitful to instead center how trans people navigate the ubiquitous hostility of a cis-sexist world, rather than focusing on the strategies of their enemies. As such, while this research project is no longer explicitly about trans social contagion rhetoric, it does demonstrate the importance of geographically proximate caring communities for trans people.

While this work may have originally been spurred in response to social contagion rhetoric, its insights for general audiences span well beyond these roots. This thesis considers how a diverse array of trans-centered spaces—including activist circles, online forums, and in-person support groups— are essential for the well-being of trans communities and individuals. I also find, as Bartos (2018) emphasizes, that these spaces of care are not without fault, and they require active, internal care practices to avoid producing harm. Finally, this project contextualizes trans care practices within larger systemic issues, such as housing affordability, economic discrimination, and anti-Blackness. By connecting care with these political issues, I consider how trans care is deeply tied to racial and economic justice agendas.

Intellectual Benefits

As discussed in Chapter II, trans care is an undertheorized area. Feminist geographers have led intellectual conversations on the political, cultural, and economic roles that care plays in our world. There now exists a wealth of literature within this subfield, a small sample of which includes caring labor (K. England and Henry 2013), harmful care (Bartos 2018), postcolonial care (Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009), and the commodification of care (Green and Lawson 2011). While care geographies have expanded the role of gender in care to consider

masculinities (Brown et al. 2014), nearly all work in geographies has overlooked how trans subjectivities transform care (and vice versa). This paper explores how feminist geographies could benefit from further theorizing the gendering of care by drawing from trans studies.

This thesis also contributes to the resurgence of trans geography through a spatio-temporal analysis of trans care that draws from oral history as a queer methodology. Much of trans geography's foundational work is from a 2010 special edition of *Gender, Place & Culture* (Browne, Nash, and Hines 2010), although a new wave of trans geographic scholarship has begun to emerge in the last five years (see March 2020). Given the small size and young age of trans geographies as a field of study, there still exist myriad methodological and empirical gaps within this subfield. By drawing from an oral history archive, this project challenges the methodological ubiquity of semi-structured interviewing within trans geographies (and, as Hitchings and Latham 2020 argue, human geography broadly). This body of work has also yet to seriously engage with care. Just as I argue that feminist care geographies could benefit from considering trans subjectivities, trans geographies similarly may similarly benefit from considering the intellectual possibilities of care theory. Similarly, trans studies largely only consider care ethics in relation to the medicalization of trans bodies which, while important, ignores the political significance of other kinds of caring practices and relations (Malatino 2019). As such, this project adds to the small but growing scholarship within trans studies on care outside of medicalized frameworks (Aizura 2017; Marvin 2019b; 2019a; Malatino 2020).

Personal Connections to Research

Attachment psychologist Beatrice Beebe once said that "most research is me-search" (quoted in Van der Kolk 2015, 111), and this thesis project is no exception. Community care has been foundational to my experiences exploring my trans identity, navigating transphobia, and accessing gender-affirming resources. Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, care geographies provided me with a framework to better understand the complex relationships between emotional labor, capital, and space within my own life. This research project is particularly important to me because, in some ways, it reflects parts of my own life that I have not previously seen represented in feminist geographies or trans studies.

One of the more challenging aspects of this project, however, was resisting projecting my own care experiences onto those whose life histories I was analyzing. In particular, my experiences as a white person who often "passes" as a cisgender man affiliated with an academic institution provide me with a large amount of systemic privilege compared to others in my research project. As Raghuram (2019) reminds us, racialization is an essential component of caring, influencing factors such as who is allowed to give/receive care, how risky care might be, and whose paid care labor is considered valuable. Throughout this research project, I remained attentive to both Raghuram's work and England's (1994) work highlighting the importance of reflexivity when conducting feminist geographic research. An acute awareness of my positionality was key to understanding how these 25 interviewees experienced care, even when (or perhaps, *especially* when) those experiences were different than how I understand care in my own life. As such, rather than claiming to put forward a singular, cohesive narrative of trans care,

this work seeks to highlight the diversity of ways that trans people experience and engage with care.

II. Care in Feminist Geographies and Trans Studies

Introduction

Care has long been underappreciated within the Western academy. The gradual inclusion of women into universities and the subsequent emergence of women's studies resulted in growing scholarship in many areas that were previously ignored by white, male academics, including care ethics. However, care scholarship's roots in women's studies create some familiar conundrums for care scholars interested in transgender subjectivities and/or theorizations. Many women's studies programs have not historically taken well to trans subjectivities or scholarship (although, Enke (2018) contests the mainstream portrayal of all branches of 1970s feminism as overwhelmingly transphobic). For many women's studies programs, the existence of trans subjects historically threatened to undercut the theoretical underpinnings of the category of "woman" (and therefore eliminate women's studies's *raison d'etre*) altogether (Keegan 2018).

In light of these historical and theoretical tensions, what could trans studies possibly bring to scholarship on care, or vice versa? Although "women's" issues are frequently pitted against trans issues in popular discourse, the projects of addressing the gendered inequities of care and of disentangling the very foundations of gender are not mutually exclusive. That is, it is possible to recognize that care work is mainly undertaken by women and gendered as feminine *at the same time that modern, hegemonic conceptions of gender desperately require critical theoretical intervention* (Lawson 2007, 2). In fact, if gender equity remains a goal of care ethics, then theorizations of gender outside of a cisgender binary present immense possibilities for creating caring worlds beyond the normatively feminine.

Feminist geography provides a potential space to conceptualize these other-gendered caring worlds. For several decades, feminist geographers have theorized care using the lens of spatiality. They have explored care through diverse topics, such as racialized labor, commodification, the environment, childhood, the court system, and colonialism (Raghuram 2019; Green and Lawson 2011; Bartos 2012; 2018; Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009). By understanding care through space rather than traditional gender roles, feminist geographers have already opened possibilities for theorizing care beyond its initial deployment in the early 1980s. While feminist care geographies have yet to explicitly engage with trans subjectivities or theorization, trans studies similarly suffers from a dearth of spatially-oriented or care-related literature. I argue that considering trans theorizations and subjectivities alongside feminist care geographies creates immense possibilities to engage with recent calls within geography to "trouble care" (Bartos 2018). Further, feminist care geographies could add deeper understandings of works within trans studies that already engage with questions around medical ethics and care labor.

Care Scholarship Canon

Academic scholarship on care ethics grew within multiple disciplines alongside the development of academic feminism and women's studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Psychologist Carol Gilligan's work on women's moral judgement marks one of the first explicit explorations of care within the Western academy (Gilligan 1977; 1982). Her early work challenges Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, whose final stage relied on disembodied universalist ethics which often resulted in classifying women as morally deficient

(1977, 489). Gilligan argues that because women's lives are more interpersonally based, Kohlberg's psychoanalytic theory relied on sexist understandings of what *should* constitute morality. Other significant foundational care theorists include education scholar Nel Noddings (1984), who argues that care ethics should center relationality and empathizing with someone in need of care, and Sara Ruddick, who draws from autobiography to theorize care using the lens of motherhood (1989).

Although scholars such Gilligan, Noddings, and Ruddick built the foundation of care ethics, their works are (perhaps rightly) criticized for their reliance on essentialist conceptions of gender roles, whether intentional or not. These critiques were launched by both positivists and by fellow feminists, who during this time were trying to distance themselves from society's expectations that they perform care work. During the 1990s, scholars began to tease apart care from essentialist gender roles. In one of the foundational modern works on care ethics, Fisher and Tronto famously define care as:

> "… a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (1990, 40)

Fisher and Tronto further break down care into four phases: *caring about* (the practice of and emotions around paying attention to world-building), *taking care of* (taking responsibility in response to "caring about"), *caregiving* (the actionable tasks of world-building), *care-receiving* (the responses of those to whom/what care is directed). These phases are alternatively conceptualized by Tronto's later work as *attentiveness*, *responsibility*, *competence*, and *responsiveness* (1993, 126–36). While Fisher and Tronto still consider more traditional aspects of feminist womanhood in their work on care (e.g., in their analyses of motherhood, sisterhood,

and friendship), they particularly focus on care's potential as a political concept with the potential to challenge liberal discourses of justice and rights.

Feminist Care Geographies: Theoretical Contributions

Building from this scholarship on care ethics, feminist geographers have pushed theorizations of care in new and exciting directions. In her presidential address to the Association of American Geographers, Victoria Lawson argues that care is central both to the discipline of geography and to everyone's personal lives, as we will all need care at some point in our lives (2007). Lawson furthers this line of thinking in later work, arguing that radical geographies often espouse masculinist research ideals and could benefit from considering care (2009). Milligan and Wiles draw connections between care ethics and health geographies, calling for attentiveness in conceptualizing "landscapes of care" beyond metaphorical geographies (2010). They further challenge the axiom that one's caring capacity linearly regresses over space; rather, Milligan and Wiles understand both spatiality and affect as important factors in care. Finally, Green and Lawson historicize care within European industrialization to understand how Western society has come to valorize care that centers the *homo economicus* (2011). Through this historical framework, they challenge how care is increasingly commodified and, as a result, displaced from caring state actors onto overburdened families for those who cannot afford the market rates of care. These interventions emphasize the interdependence of all human beings and the importance of geographic and historical scales when considering care. In contrast with early work on care ethics, this geographic scholarship emphasizes the gendered inequity of care work while also

conceptualizing possibilities for a caring world beyond the situated knowledges of cisgender women initially centered in care scholarship.

Feminist Care Geographies: Empirical Contributions

In addition to these important theoretical contributions, feminist geographers have also led the way in empirical research on care work. One such area that geographers have focused on is the transnational politics of healthcare. England and Henry (2013) utilize a feminist care ethics framework to evaluate the scalar politics of international nurse migration to the UK. Their quantitative analysis found an increasing number of nurses migrating from the Global South to the UK during 1994-2012. Further, while the UK is allegedly experiencing a "care crisis," nurses (particularly of color) who emigrate to the UK experience racism/xenophobia and find that their skills are devalued compared to their local, white peers. Finally, this "import" of nurses from countries in the Global South was potentially linked to care work shortages in countries of origin. Bastia similarly evaluates transnational care labor through care ethics using the case study of Bolivian migrants who care for elderly family members in Spain (2015). Bastia's interviewees articulate how their unique care challenges are embodied; that is, they suffer both physical consequences from intensive labor and psychological challenges from developing deep emotional connections with the very families who cultivate poor employment conditions for them. The interviewees further connect their economic migrations to Spain to care deficits back in Bolivia, demonstrating an embodied, first-hand understanding of the effects of global care chains in their own lives.

Feminist geographers have understood care work as essential to sustaining human life, or what Joan Tronto might understand as the *maintenance* of our worlds. The breadth of scholarship on care within geography allows for unique theoretical and empirical approaches that blend analyses on care ethics and care work. Such work recognizes that the empirics and theories of care are mutually constitutive. However, care geography inherits some theoretical and empirical shortcomings derived from its genealogies in both geography and gender/feminist studies. Such issues have been addressed by current scholars working within care geographies, as discussed in the subsequent section.

Pushing Care Geographies

Recent work within feminist care geographies has problematized how care is conceptualized within and outside of the discipline. For one, care geographies have undertheorized care in relation to race and colonialism. Raghuram et al (2009) call for care geographies to specifically engage more with postcolonial thought. In particular, the authors note how care geographies often assume a linear temporality that postcolonial frameworks tend to challenge, pointing to economic development as a prominent example. Further, postcolonialism provides new frameworks to better understand 1) the relationship between care and spatial distance and 2) how centering care ethics scholarship around the Global North overshadows other geographic centers of care. Raghuram (2016) later challenges the alleged universality of care ethics altogether. She calls for more scholarly engagement with the Global South (while taking care to recognize how diverse this constructed geohistorical “region” is) and for theorizations of care ethics that explicitly consider the past and present roles of colonialism in

understanding caring worlds. Finally, Raghuram (2019) argues that feminist geographers' conceptions of care tend to arise from (and thus privilege) the experiences of white women. Drawing from Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Raghuram shows how care is completely transformed at the intersection of race, particularly Blackness. This shift transforms care into forms of risk-taking that are "unrecognizable across [axes of] difference" (Raghuram 2019, 625).

Scholars have also noted how care practices do not necessitate a net "good." Rose (2009) draws from Mbembe's (2003) conceptualization of necropolitics to understand how the deservingness of care is produced through the same state agencies that distribute life and death. Using newspaper visuals and texts produced in the aftermath of the 2005 London bombings, Rose articulates how the discourses around which dead deserved care fell along racialized, classed, and gendered lines. Bartos (2018) directly invokes Raghuram's call to trouble care by evaluating a high-profile sexual assault case using Joan Tronto's care framework. Bartos notes that throughout the court documents, care practices were used to maintain and continue the world of the accused rapist at the expense of repairing the survivor's world. Her paper ultimately calls for better theorizations of power relations within care frameworks and a caution to trouble care as an unproblematized good.

New Caring Worlds

Out of these critiques, feminist geographers have conceptualized new ways of understanding care. Bartos (2012) explores how a group of New Zealander children engage in care practices in relation to their families, environments, and selves. Her robust analysis shows how care ethics are practiced in everyday lives. In considering how children care, Bartos expands

the empirical realm of care ethics to consider subjects beyond paid caretakers, who had previously constituted the focus of most empirical work within care geographies. Other work has explicitly understood gendered caring practices beyond the feminine. Meah (2017) finds that the fathers from her ethnographic work in Northern England engage in care practices with their children through food. By deploying an embodied critique of care's gendering, Meah shows both how men engage in unique care practices and how masculinity and care may be mutually transformed. These papers reveal caring subjects who have been underexplored in the literature, again shifting care away from its bioessentialist past and towards a politic that everyone undertakes, including children and men.

The joint twenty-fifth anniversary of the feminist geography journal *Gender, Place & Culture* and of Tronto's *Moral Boundaries* led to a special issue of GPC seeking to extend care geographies in a number of ways (Bartos 2019). This issue explores areas as diverse as emotional labor undertaken by female teaching assistants in the academy (Bartos and Ives 2019); mundane care relations between Finland's asylum seekers, their transnational families, and the state (Kallio and Häkli 2019); state violence and Black feminist praxis (Dowler and Christian 2019); and the uncaring politics of the US Congress's attempts to eliminate the Affordable Care Act (Lopez 2019).

These newer works within feminist geographies have pushed care in exciting directions, well beyond their initial roots in Tronto's work. Prominent scholars like Ann Bartos and Parvati Raghuram constantly challenge norms of care in ways that push feminist geographers to consider its normative (and particularly white) conceptions of care ethics. However, feminist geographic scholarship has yet to explicitly explore the relationships between care and transgender

subjectivities. An intervention into trans studies could potentially shift both the empirical conversations within care geographies and theoretical understandings about the gendering of care.

Trans Studies

Trans studies emerged as something resembling an academic discipline in the 1990s, roughly following the publication of Sandy Stone's essay "The Empire Strikes Back" (1992), which was a response to Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*. Even several decades later, trans studies today consist of a very broad array of work across multiple disciplines and even outside of the academy. When trans studies is housed within a university (versus sprawled across multiple disciplines), it is typically within what is now called gender studies, where it maintains shaky relations with a discipline whose scholars once decried the existence of trans women as misogynistic (Keegan 2018). Recent work within this disciplinary formation (i.e., trans studies housed within gender studies) has focused on a broad array of topics, many of which work to historicize and critique the systems that pathologize and gatekeep medical care from trans people.

Medical Ethics

Although very little trans-specific scholarship directly engages with scholarship on care ethics, medical ethics have long constituted a large role in the field. C. Riley Snorton draws from diverse archival research for *Black on Both Sides*, which considers the theoretical and material possibilities at the intersections of Black and trans studies (2017). Part of Snorton's analysis

focuses on American physician J.M. Sims, the “father of modern gynecology” who performed medical experiments on chattel slave women for three and a half years to discover a cure for vesicovaginal fistula (2017, 20). Understanding Sim’s laboratory as a “medical plantation” for the “refinement of biopolitical and necropolitical techniques in the production of medical knowledge,” Snorton argues that Sims viewed his search for a vesicovaginal fistula cure as a civilizing project of modernity geared towards alleviating the suffering of white women (2017, 53). As such, the ungendered and racialized flesh of Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy, and other unnamed Black slave women on whom Sims experimented served as gynecology’s “raw materials” towards a larger project of creating the field of (white) women’s medicine. At the same time, these chattel women were themselves excluded from the category of womanhood under the logics of plantation sexual economics. Snorton emphasizes that this historical moment underlines how the ungendering of Black flesh created a medical genealogy that allowed for gender itself to become fungible. Thus, the histories of Black medical suffering and somatechnologies for gender modification are intertwined.

Scholars within trans studies and related disciplines have also explored the ethics of medical experimentation on children in service of exploring the bounds of gender and sex. Hil Malatino’s *Queer Embodiment* does such work within the emergent field of critical intersex studies by drawing from archival research and autobiography to historicize binary sex categorization as a spatio-temporally situated social construct (2019). Their own experiences with questionable intersex medical practices as a teenager are woven with their analyses of medical archives and memoirs. This blend of personal narrative with their research makes *Queer Embodiment* feel more emotional, allowing the reader to step into the shoes of both Malatino and

the subjects of their book. Jules Gill-Peterson's *Histories of the Transgender Child* tackles the pervasive idea in popular and academic discourses that the existence of transgender children constitutes a new phenomenon (2018). Drawing from a trans of color critique of medicine, Gill-Peterson explores histories of animal and child medical experimentation in developing Western endocrinology as a medical field. Similar to Malatino's approach, Gill-Peterson insists on understanding intersex and trans histories as intertwined.

These works on (the lack of) medical ethics described by Snorton, Malatino, and Gill-Peterson are certainly troubling. Yet, these too can be evaluated through the lens of care theory. As an important reminder, Bartos (2018) argues that caring relations and care practices do not necessarily result in care that provides a net benefit to society. Many of the doctors implicated in these works engaged in care practices, yet as Bartos reminds us, power relations remain an important and undertheorized area in care studies.

Care Labor

While not extensively drawing from feminist geographies, numerous works within trans studies consider care labor. Aren Aizura's *Mobile Subjects* (2018) draws from a mixed method framework to understand trans travel narratives. In a chapter exploring trans documentaries, Aizura analyzes the film *Bubot Niyar*, which focuses on a group of gay/trans Filipino care workers arriving in Tel Aviv in the early 2000s who perform in a drag group together called Paper Dolls. This documentary is directed by Tommer Heymann, a cisgender gay Israeli man who also serves as the Paper Dolls's problematic manager. Aizura notes that Israel has a long history of recruiting Filipinx care workers on temporary visas; this is so prevalent that the

Hebrew word *Filipini* also translates to “caregiver.” Aizura argues that the framing of *Bubot Niyar* fails to challenge the “regime of global imperialism that sustains these chains of care” (2018, 116). Aizura’s work challenges the hegemonic portrayal of caretakers as cisgender women and the bioessentialism of work evaluating care chains as exclusively femininized labor. Further, this chapter serves as part of a growing intervention conceptualizing how care can be gendered beyond cis feminine norms.

Aizura (2018) also considers the role of transnational care work in the commodification of gender affirming surgeries. He draws from ethnographic methods to understand how transfeminine people obtaining transition-related surgeries in Thailand are entwined with transnational mobilities, transnormativity, and racialized travel narratives. Following the emergence of online trans cultures in the late 1990s, Thai surgeons who originally performed gender affirming surgeries locally began to market to non-Thai trans people, mainly from Europe or North America. Because this new clientele had a higher income than most Thai people, these clinics substantially raised their prices to profit more off of surgeries, making GRS unaffordable for all but the wealthiest Thais. Thus began the transnational market for Thai gender reassignment clinics.

Aizura shows how both affective and medical care at his site, Suporn Clinic, are entangled with racialized and gendered logics. Suporn Clinic markets itself both on its vaginoplasty surgical skill but also its “entire care package,” which means carefully attending to patients from the time they enter the airport until boarding back home (2018, 175). Nurses, care workers, and staff members are typically (but, importantly, not always) cisgender Thai women who are expected to model femininity and engage in emotional labor as part of their jobs.

Thailand itself becomes enfolded into this care package as an exoticized place to undergo a magical and orientalizing journey (2018, 204). Finally, Aizura, draws from *Spiderteeth*, a 2013 zine created by ellie june navidson about her experiences getting vaginoplasty at Suporn Clinic. navidson is critical of the normative femininity that she saw in other patients and the clinic's staff, in contrast to her "punkish high femme" (2018, 201). However, Aizura argues that navidson's account fails to move beyond critique towards considering other caring possibilities. Aizura then calls for transnational solidarities in creating clinics where:

> "...care is reciprocal, distributed, and detached from gender assignment; where surgical modification and medical intervention do not confer "real" gender confirmation but that we (that is, a general, populationwide "we") readily affirm someone else's stated gender identity whenever we are requested to; and where trans and gender nonconforming people rather than surgeons and medical professionals are the inventors of trans genders." (2018, 203–4)

Here, Aizura's theorization of transnational care labor futures briefly begins to meld with care ethics. Like many feminist geographers, Aizura understands care to "[foreground] social relationships of mutuality and trust" (Lawson 2007, 3). This mirrors Aizura's earlier work calling for the "communization of care," or the reappropriation of care within radical coalitions that supersede existing, alienating stratifications along race, gender, and class lines (2017). A closer attentiveness to care ethics may assist in understanding the gaps between today's current neoliberal state of care and Aizura's utopian vision for a more caring future.

Trans Care: Practices and Ethics

While sparse, some significant scholarship directly ties care ethics and trans subjectivities together. In the recent past, sociologist Sally Hines (2007b) has led social science research on

trans care practices in the UK. Her book *TransForming Gender* argues that trans care practices are unique and warrant further exploration (2007a). Hines challenges existing theorizations of the relationships between transgender people and their families of origin, noting uneven support within families and a lack of actual correlation between a family member's age and their likeliness to support their trans kin. Within a family of origin, transgender people are expected to provide emotional care to their family members, or "putting the dominant at ease" (2007a, 153). Outside of families of origin, chosen families and friendships with other trans people play an essential role in her participants' lives. Hines also explores how support groups serve as a foundation of trans community care. These trans relationships provide valuable knowledge and care in lieu of existing structural support.

While Hines's work is an essential foundational text in trans care practices, there is further work yet to be done. Raghuram (2016) argues that social scientists' work on care practices should consider how their work is geographically situated. As such, *TransForming Gender* presents several challenges. For one, while her work is situated in the United Kingdom, Hines does not speak to important historical geographies that likely affect trans care practices, such as the UK's role in producing certain gendered logics, or the presence of the National Health Service (NHS) in allocating care. Further, Hines universalizes her claims regarding these care practices when, in reality, these practices likely dramatically shift across geographies, including within the Global North.

More recently, philosopher Amy Marvin has begun evaluating the potential intersections of transgender studies and feminist care ethics. Marvin both draws from and critiques Sara Ruddick's philosophy of maternal care (briefly discussed earlier) to understand the unique needs

of trans youth, who are dependent on their caregivers for shelter, food, and means to express their gender (2019b). While emphasizing the importance of these caregivers, Marvin argues that mutual caregiving within queer and trans (QT) communities plays an equally important role in many trans children's lives. Marvin turns towards Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson to conceptualize the connections between trans solidarity and trans dependency. Marvin's other work on trans care ethics draws from short stories written by trans women as sources of knowledge about *assumptive care* — or, "a short-circuited form of caring… closed off by transphobic assumptions" — and *futurebound care* — or, caregiving that "allows [someone] to flourish on their own terms" (2019a, 3). Marvin's work attends to power relations within care and speaks to US histories of caring practices by trans women of color, creating possibilities for future work connecting trans histories of solidarity to the present.

New Possibilities of Gendering Care

My thesis project draws from literature within care ethics, care geographies, and trans studies to build a theoretical framework that reconceptualizes the relationship between gender and care. This work is guided by the following research questions:

> Q1. How have US-based trans and gender nonconforming people engaged with care practices from the mid-twentieth century to 2019? How are these practices spatialized?
>
> Q2. How do trans subjectivities transform theorizations of care?

While research within trans studies often centers questions around medical ethics and caring labor, surprisingly little work within this emergent field has explored care ethics. As such, trans studies could greatly benefit from how care geographies consider scale, relationality, and specific

theorizations of care within the context of a social science discipline. Likewise, little geographic scholarship (including work on care) addresses or explores trans existence. Considering trans subjectivities within care geographies does more than just broaden its empirical horizons; it troubles how care itself is gendered within the discipline. In conversation with these literatures, I ask these research questions in order to explore the complex relationships between gender, space, and care within my empirical data, the background of which is discussed in the following chapter.

III. Researching Caring Spaces through Oral History

Overview of Research Design

This exploratory research project is based in grounded theory, as it used empirical data to build theory around how trans people engage in care practices. My mode of observation was archival research; my units of observation were the transcripts of 25 randomly selected oral histories from the NYC Trans Oral History Project. I conducted multiple rounds of coding using the constant comparison method created by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 13–15). Finally, I analyzed my coded excerpts using Bartos's method for operationalizing Tronto's care ethics framework, later discussed in this chapter (Bartos 2012; 2018).

Oral History Data

Data for this project were obtained from the New York City Trans Oral History Project, abbreviated as the NYC TOHP (NYC Trans Oral History Project 2019a). This community archive was created in partnership with the New York Public Library, and it contains over 100 life history interviews with self-identified trans people who are current or former residents of New York City. Volunteers first began conducting these histories in 2016. This is one of the largest trans oral history community archives in the United States with open, online access to interviews, although minimal academic work has yet drawn from this data (E. H. Brown 2015). This archive uniquely includes both audio recordings and transcripts. This collection was selected for its online accessibility, large number of interviews, focus on everyday lived experiences of transgender people, and availability of existing transcripts.

Archival Sampling

The NYC TOHP is an ongoing project that is continuously updated with new oral histories and their transcripts. I selected the first 25 English language oral history transcripts starting from interview #001 that were conducted in two parts or fewer. Due to time constraints, I chose to evaluate transcripts rather than audio data, although I listened to the audio of every fifth interview within my sample set to control for interview tone. Interviews conducted in languages other than English (largely Spanish) only had transcripts available in the original language, and I did not have capacity for translating multiple sets of interviews. I also eliminated interviews that were conducted in more than two parts, as these interviews tended to have quality control issues due to different sets of narrators and transcribers over time. Because interviews are numbered in the order that they are processed, my set of transcripts tended to have been conducted earlier than others in the archive. In summary, I sought to collect a nonrandom sample of convenience that captured a diverse array of identities and perspectives, rather than a generalizable sample of trans people at any particular geographic scale.

Why Oral History?

Oral history owes much of its legitimacy as a scholarly method to feminist scholarship (Yow 2005). Drawing from this tradition, queer theorists have long used oral history as a form of inquiry, and Boyd (2008) in fact notes that nearly all LGBT historical projects have utilized oral history as a method. Queer oral history allows for “body-based knowing” because of the physical intimacy of its practice, the blurring of the narrator/researcher divide, and its attentiveness to the

everyday (Boyd and Ramírez 2012, 1). While Podmore and Brown (2015) argue the field of queer geography as a whole could benefit from a deeper engagement with historical methods, several notable works within this field have used oral history methods. As one example, Brown et al (2014) offer a historical-geographic analysis of how gay bars have served as caring spaces for men, drawing in part from the Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project's oral history archive.

Whereas many previous queer oral history projects have focused on cisgender gay and lesbian experiences, we are now in an "unprecedented boom of trans oral history and archives projects in North America" (E. H. Brown 2015, 666). Yet, the emergent field of trans geography maintains strong relations with queer geography, including some of its methodological shortcomings. Early work within this subfield was particularly shaped by Petra Doan's work utilizing surveys and autoethnography (2007; 2010). More recent work in the subfield has focused on the carceral state (Rosenberg and Oswin 2015), rural spaces (Abelson 2016), genderqueer geographies (Johnston 2016), youth and social media (Jenzen 2017), experiences using public transit (Lubitow et al. 2017), and everyday geographies (Andrucki and Kaplan 2018). These newer works have utilized a large range of methods, including participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys. However, historical topics are notably missing from this body of literature, as are historical methods such as oral history.

Victoria Lawson argues that care geography "challenges [geographers] to carefully design methodologically rigorous research that addresses the nexus of emotions, power, and geographic processes" (2007, 5). Because this research project heavily emphasizes how care is

spatialized, the research study required a methodology that would emphasize emotions, everyday experiences, and social relations. I decided to draw from an oral history archive, given its propensity for these characteristics and its suitability for evaluating how caring practices change over time.

Ethics

The NYC TOHP is a publicly available community archive under a Creative Commons license. All narrators have given informed consent to contribute to the archive with the explicit understanding that their data may be used in a wide variety of contexts, including research projects. Because these are public data from participants who have agreed to have their oral history publicly available under these circumstances, I have not anonymized names of narrators or details within their oral histories. Should I be made aware of any requests from participants to take down their data in either my project or the NYC TOHP, I will honor these requests to the best of my ability.

Grounded Theory Method

This project utilized a grounded theory approach. Originating as a systematic methodology for conducting qualitative social science research, grounded theory's purpose is to build new theory through an iterative empirical data collection and analysis process (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I drew from the Corbin and Strauss (1990) school of grounded theory method (GTM) which, unlike the Glaserian approach, espouses a pragmatic relativist ontological approach to data; encourages the researcher to acknowledge and consider their own partiality

towards the research subject(s); and recommends conducting a light review of available literature prior to beginning research activities (Howard-Payne 2016). Following Olesen (2007), who argues that GTM lends itself well to feminist research, I attempted to maintain awareness of my situatedness as a researcher and embrace the importance of reflexivity throughout the project.

Coding

The coding process took place from June 2019 to November 2019 and was facilitated by qualitative coding software NVivo 12. Drawing from grounded theory method (GTM), I analyzed these 25 oral history transcripts using the constant comparative method developed by Corbin and Strauss' GTM paradigm (1990). The constant comparative method consists of four phases: 1) cross-case analysis, 2) categorization, 3) theory delimitation, and 4) writing theory. For this project, stage one consisted of open coding, or descriptive classification of all concepts discovered during an initial round of analysis. Each coding unit consisted of a singular concept. This stage included both etic and emic codes, as GTM relies on both for theory-building (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Stage two, or axial coding, involved regrouping open codes and identifying core concepts. This stage began shortly after the start of stage one coding, as individual codes naturally began to fall into particular groups and categories. Open and axial coding resulted in a total of 153 codes, 36 groupings, and 1436 references.

Stage three, or selective coding, involved identifying central codes that encompassed core concepts. To begin this stage, I used Microsoft Excel to sort the grouping results of stages one and two both by the total number of excerpts within each grouping and by the total number of interviews in which each grouping was found. I selected the top ten groups for each sorting

method which, after eliminating duplicates between the two sorting types, resulted in a total of nine unique core concepts. I exported the codes from these core concepts into a new folder in NVivo and conducted a final round of coding using only these nine concepts.

Data Analysis

The final step in my data analysis was to evaluate my final coded excerpts as they related to my research questions, particularly Q1. Lempert (2007) argues that diagramming plays an essential role in GTM, as displaying data in a visual format allows a researcher to make connections between data, form categorical hierarchies, and determine what is not yet known. Drawing from this line of thinking, I diagrammed my coded excerpts using a template that drew from feminist geographer Ann Bartos' scholarship on care. See Appendix I for an example of this template. In several of her works, Bartos has operationalized Tronto's definition of care to analyze how her data *maintain, continue, and/or repair our world* (2012; 2018). She provides the following definitions for each:

- *Maintain*: "[care] practices that aim to… sustain against opposition or danger" (2018, 68)
- *Continue*: "determining what is of value and trying to continue their legacy" (2012, 161)
- *Repair*: "caring [practices] to make a better world" (2012, 163)

After completion of my coding, I drew from these definitions to categorize my coded excerpts based on whether they appeared to maintain, continue, or repair our world (along with a justification), which I labeled as its *care aspect*. Concomitantly, I also categorized excerpts based on which care phase(s) they seemed to capture; as detailed in Chapter II, Tronto understands these to be *attentiveness, responsibility, competence,* and *responsiveness* (1993, 126–36). Finally, I noted spatial elements in coded excerpts wherever relevant. Drawing from Tuan

(1977), these included both spaces, such as city or country names, and senses of place, such as home or neighborhood. I conducted theoretical memoing—or the process of recording personal notes while conducting one's research—throughout both coding and data analysis, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 10–11).

Methodological Limitations

One limitation of this project's methodology is that its data are all drawn from a single city, New York. The NYC TOHP requires that interviewees are current or former residents of NYC. Further, queer geography has faced criticism for focusing heavily on specific urban spaces, especially New York City and San Francisco (M. Brown 2014). However, I anticipated and later confirmed that these oral histories were not exclusively focused on NYC. While several participants were born and raised in NYC or the state of New York, numerous others had deep connections to other cities, states, and countries. Although NYC was a significant component of most interviews, interviewees also discussed at length their sense of place and belonging in other spaces. Finally, while historical projects focusing on cisgender gay men in NYC are plentiful, very few projects focus on other aspects of NYC's LGBTQ+ community, and as previously discussed, little if any academic work has yet drawn from this specific archive.

Other limitations are related to the archive itself. As with many archival projects, the inability to personally interview people or to follow up with interviewees from the archive constrained how much specific information about care practices I could gather. This was especially true with mundane care practices that interviewees only mentioned in passing. As previously discussed, some oral histories in the NYC TOHP were conducted in other languages,

particularly Spanish. Without translated transcripts or a working grasp of Spanish, I was unable to include these interviews in my study, which I consider to be a major limitation. Trans studies have specifically been criticized for Anglocentrism (Stryker and Bettcher 2016), which this project does little to alleviate. Finally, those who decided to be interviewed for the NYC TOHP may not be representative of all trans people, particularly those who are stealth, or are not out as trans in their everyday life. As such, this research project is based on nonprobability sampling that allows me to begin building a substantive theory that does not necessarily generalize to a larger population of trans people.

In the next chapter, I discuss my data findings using the care framework laid out in this section. In line with Bartos (2012; 2018), I begin through an exploration of care practices that aim to maintain our worlds. Here, maintenance is understood as care practices that "sustain against [external] opposition or danger" (Bartos 2018, 68).

IV. Trans Experiences of Care: Maintaining Our Worlds

Practices that *maintain* our worlds seek to protect them from harms or dangers that might significantly alter their current course. Interviewees considered a large number of maintenance care practices to be important within the broad context of their trans identities. First, interviewees displayed care practices of maintenance in trans-centered digital spaces. Interviewees also described their protective attitudes towards queer and trans families of choice, both personally and conceptually. Finally, interviewees found local trans support groups - while contested in many aspects - to be essential in building connections with other trans people.

Protection in Digital Spaces

Online spaces served a number of protective roles for interviewees. While discussing her experiences as a sex worker, Paris Milane describes major differences in safety precautions within her personal community of trans sex workers, particularly between what she calls "street girls" - or those who mainly pick up clients in physical red-light districts - and "internet girls," who build up a clientele using an online platform. Although critical of how this distinction produces perceived status differences (with internet girls seen as having a higher socio-economic class), Milane notes that there are important material differences in how different strata of trans sex workers experience safety. Whereas every street girl she knew went to jail for a related charge such as loitering or prostitution at some point, internet girls were generally able to screen potential clients, avoid heavily policed spaces, and maintain a steadier clientele. Milane also notes how succeeding at online sex work depends on performing high-class status. She argues that internet girls often maintain a more discreet and higher-class clientele than street girls.

Milane notes how, when she first began doing online sex work, a friend advised her to be *less* nice to clients in order to create a sense of aloofness and perform a higher class status:

> "Milane: It was a huge difference between the lives, I imagine, of the online girls, the internet girls, and the other… [It's best if you're] poised and a little refined and a kind of conserved [sic], yet at the same time showing that you're not too eager to see him… You have to be like, 'Hmm, well if you come, you come, and if not…,' you know?
>
> O'Brien [Interviewer]: So, performing a sort of class status.
>
> Milane: Of course… I remember when I first started doing it one of my girlfriends says, 'Oh you're too nice to them… on the phone. You're to treat them accordingly.'"

However, Milane also speaks to the higher precarity of relying on online spaces as a means of gaining clients. Milane describes a safe online girl as one who incorporates failsafes to maintain a steady source of clients in the event that advertising services shut down, such as Craigslist personals and Backpage. Further, Milane also argues that in some cases, internet girls must work harder to protect themselves and their livelihoods than street girls. In particular, she emphasizes how internet girls are more easily traceable than street girls. Whereas street girls could "vanish overnight," internet girls often must provide clients with more personal information to build and maintain a clientele, such as their phone number or even personal residence. Thus, Milane's conception of safe sex for internet girls incorporates practices to protect against particular harms from clients.

Several interviewees spoke to their efforts around protecting precarious digital spaces. Throughout her oral history interview, Naomi Clark discusses the role of a forum called Strap-On in her trans identity formation. Strap-On originated as a message board for independent record label Chainsaw Records. The board was started in opposition to transphobia in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival; for this reason, it transformed into what Clark describes as

an online “gathering place” that particularly attracted queer and trans people who considered themselves to be anti-assimilationist. After spending several years on Strap-On as a user, Clark became a board moderator. One of the main strategies she implemented to defuse conflict was succinctly breaking down points of contention within arguments, a skill she developed during her experiences running an online magazine in college. However, Clark argues that this mode of protectionism has changed as the internet has evolved: no more are the days where you could “[get] people to listen to you… [just] by saying smart things online.” Thus, she initially maintained Strap-On as a productive community space by ensuring that arguments within this “gathering place” were able to be resolved in a swift manner, using a rationalist approach. However, as the internet itself shifted over time, Clark found that members tended to spend less time reading and writing long responses, and her tactics for moderating this board had to shift in response to these changes.

Critiques of Online Spaces

Several people provided excellent critiques of how digital spaces intended for trans people often *fail* to effectively maintain their worlds. In 2002, Spade was arrested for using a men’s restroom during the World Economic Forum protests in NYC. While many people supported Spade in the aftermath of his arrest, he notes that a sizable number of trans people criticized him online for using the men’s room at all. They argued that, because he was arrested, he must not have passed for a cisgender man and therefore should have avoided that bathroom in the first place. While Spade plainly criticizes this as “typical horizontal internalized transphobic bullshit,” he also emphasizes how deeply this hurt him. Shifting the blame onto Spade for not

passing allows those who criticized him to continue believing that, if they try hard enough to pass, they will be protected from similar situations. However, this came at the expense of Dean's trust in his own community, thereby diminishing his ability to feel safe with other trans people online.

Depending on the internet for human connections can have dire consequences for situations that necessitate in-person interventions. In a separate analysis of organizing in the face of natural disasters, Spade argues that one of the major lessons from Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy was how essential local, in-person connections were to saving lives: "...it's those [in-person] relationships that actually relate to people's lives being sustainable or not, in the face of all the crises in the coming months, or the ones that we're already in." As such, the potentially large amount of physical distance between online friends can be disastrous if relying on them in crisis situations.

Governance of the internet poses several problems for activists, particularly if their causes or organizing tactics are particularly controversial. Although acknowledging the utility of using the internet as a space for discussion and cultivating informal trans communities, Michelle O'Brien remains skeptical of digital communications for activism for several reasons. First, she notes the risk of privacy issues in online political work. The inability to be completely anonymous online poses an enormous risk to sensitive organizing projects that rely on secrecy. For her, avoiding digital spaces is a way of protecting her activist spaces from outside harm. Second, O'Brien highlights how digital communication can be ineffective when discussing sensitive subjects. In her university-based union organizing, O'Brien notes how easily small misunderstandings escalate into anger and internal strife. She argues that face-to-face

communication is a better way to form and maintain relationships built on solidarity because it provides more space for pausing, explanations, and nonverbal communications. Here, the purposeful avoidance of the digital serves as a means to protect both caring activities (such as activist work) and maintain meaningful relationships.

Protecting the Queer and Trans Family of Choice

Several interviewees discussed the role of queer and trans (QT) friendships as constituting families of choice. Topher Gross aspires to be an "old [trans] grandpa" who paves the way for "little trans and queer babies" to live as well as possible. Octavia Kohner describes her relationships with trans communities in NYC as extremely positive. She depicts a fierce loyalty especially to other trans women, whom she considers to be sisters:

> "And the same way things with family can be strained… I would literally put my life on the line for a sister, even if I didn't agree with her politically, because no one else is going to do that. And I have more love in my body for trans women than I could ever have animosity… I could never find myself hating a trans woman. I could find myself not wanting to be around a particular trans girl, but I would really only ever wish her to be alive at the very least, and to be happy. Like, I just don't want to see any - I don't want to go to any more funerals."

Both Kohner and Gross particularly highlight the precariousness of trans existence - above all else, Gross and Kohner both hope for their friends and young mentees to grow up happy and healthy. Even people who do not explicitly describe their QT friendships through the lens of kinship exhibit family-like attitudes, such as Cecilia Gentili, who lost numerous jobs at bars for challenging bar owners who refused to allow her trans friends entry. Such protectiveness goes well above what might be expected for a "normal" friendship.

However, the challenges of QT kinship did not go unnoticed. Jamie Bauer and their interviewer Michelle Esther O'Brien express concern that QT kinship had the potential to insulate younger trans people from the harsh realities of the rest of the cissexist world. They were particularly concerned that such trans-only friendship groups set up those who use non-conventional pronouns[2] for disappointment if (or, according to O'Brien and Bauer, when) others outside of their group misgender them. Articulated through a "tough love" attitude, Bauer and O'Brien worry that young trans people will not know how to cope with a world full of transphobia if their only other friends are trans. This is perhaps a strawman argument, given that only around 4% of respondents of the 2015 US Transgender Survey report using pronouns other than he/him, she/her, or they/them; meanwhile, 90% of total respondents in the same survey report having some level of socialization with other trans people (James et al. 2016, 49, 51). However, this friction potentially points to age differences in articulations of identity and friendship groups that merit further investigation.

Other challenges of QT kinship came from blurred boundaries between friendship, kinship, and romance. Similar to other interviewees, Naomi Clark describes her queer friend group as family. However, Clark also notes that this group was where she felt most comfortable dating:

> "… [the radical queer scene] is where I actually know that when I meet queer people, they're not going to immediately, like, be freaked out by the fact that I'm trans and not know what to do with it or be flailing around or you know, yeah, be uncertain and maybe be like, 'I guess I could try that experimentally' which is kind of the default if you're sort of trying to date people that you don't already know in the in the rest of the world, or even the rest of the gay world of New York City."

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[2] I define this as any third-person pronouns outside of he/him or she/her in the English language. Some examples include: ze/hir, fae/faer, no pronoun usage, or it/its.They/them pronouns are currently being somewhat normalized but may also fit into this category.

Here, Clark highlights the challenges of having limited pools of people to befriend and date while trans. For Clark, these groups tended to be the same people, and this tight-knit community therefore was kin. However, Clark also differentiates between different sections of the LGBTQ community in NYC. In contrast to what Clark understands to be the "mainstream" gay community, she articulates her radical queer friends as more likely to be open to dating a trans person without judgement or fetishization and therefore safer.

Physical Trans Support Groups

Many interviewees considered trans-focused physical spaces to be essential to forming, contesting, and maintaining intra-community connections. Pauline Park articulates that trans-specific spaces can be empowering; Tanya Asapansa-Johnson Walker similarly argues that trans people need identity-based spaces for activist organizing. Interviewees who discussed specific places most often brought up trans support groups.

Cecilia Gentili's experiences with her trans support group exemplify several care practices. When Cecilia Gentili first connected with a trans women's group at her local LGBTQ center after moving to NYC, she was overjoyed to meet new people who shared similar identities as her. By participating in this space, Gentili felt more supported in staying sober, and she met trans women in occupations other than sex work for the first time in her life. Gentili was also able to use the connections from this space to get an internship with the LGBTQ center that hosted the group. Gentili's internship supervisors were able to help her make a resumé by using strategies such as listing her background in sex work as "entertaining." This resumé work was specifically intended to protect Gentili from future employers who might consider her unhireable

because of her background in sex work. This “translation” work allowed Gentili to transition into an office job where she felt more stable and like she was making a larger impact in her new chosen field of trans health policy.

However, experiences with physical trans spaces are not universally positive. While Renee Imperato generally enjoys the connections she feels within her support group, she discusses how even one person can cause strife felt throughout the group:

> “I try to tell this [white trans woman], you should read about Stonewall. [She said], ‘I come from a little town, that’s got nothing to do with me.’ It’s got nothing to do with you? Really? You’re sitting here in The Center, which would not exist without Stonewall, in a group, you’re in a dress, talking in their group which would not exist [except] because of Stonewall, but you have nothing to do with it? … the fight against racism and bigotry is applicable in every community, including this one.”

Imperato stresses how this member of her support group is attempting to protect herself from accusations of bigotry by feigning ignorance about her own white privilege. Thus, Imperato underscores that, while trans spaces can be extremely beneficial for political organizing and community building, these spaces are also not inherently liberatory, feminist, or intersectional. Rather, they require active maintenance to create an environment that does not reproduce oppression.

Maintaining Contested Worlds: Digital Spaces, Families, and Support Groups

Maintenance care practices served a wide array of roles in interviewees’ lives. For Paris Milane, digital platforms for advertising sex services provided a buffer to protect online sex workers from the police targeting that “street girls” frequently experienced. This resulted in “internet girls” being perceived as having a higher class and social status than street girls. Here,

care and capitalism intermingle in multiple, disparate ways. Milane's friend teaching her how to perform class status in order to attract and successfully maintain clients shows care by attempting to better Milane's livelihood - and therefore her world. Milane's calculated distance and perceived lack of care for her clients constituted a carefully orchestrated role reversal in relation to her wealthier clients. Finally, Milane's detachment and nonchalance allowed her to form stricter professional boundaries, which were necessary for self-advocacy and self-care.

Sex work, whether online or in-person, faces a large number of barriers and challenges as a result of its criminalization, particularly in the US. Because of her community connections with other trans women who were online sex workers, Milane learned about utilizing sites such as Craigslist and Backpage to advertise her services. However, such platforms were frequently shut down due to constantly changing laws and platform policies. In particular, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) legislation passed in 2018 hold online businesses legally accountable for illegal practices coordinated through their websites, which has had an enormous impact on sex workers' ability to advertise services and maintain stable income.

(Figure 1: Front page of Backpage.com after US government seizure as a result of SESTA/FOSTA)

SESTA and FOSTA's stated intentions to protect sex workers fly directly in the face of Milane's assertion that the increased availability of online sex work had made it *safer* for her to conduct this work that let her continue her livelihood. Valentina Mia (2020), a trans woman and former porn performer, argues that sex work is one of few income options available to trans women after transitioning because of a dearth of legal protections from transmisogyny in most workplaces. As such, Mia argues that the passage of SESTA/FOSTA infantalizes sex workers as victims in need of saving while simultaneously trapping trans women who are sex workers in a cycle of poverty by cutting off their main income source. While sex work can potentially serve as a creative outlet, steady source of income, means for gender exploration, and source of

personal fulfillment (Adams 2020), it is also a form of survival work for many trans women, particularly those who are women of color. For internet girls such as Milane, changing legislation around the availability of online spaces in which to advertise or perform sex work constitutes an attack on one of very few stable income sources regularly available to trans women. Maintenance for Milane's former community of online trans sex workers therefore involves quick and collective solutions to the challenges of internet governance.

However, the internet was not unanimously perceived as safer than its alternatives. Because internet girls must provide more information in order to start and maintain services, they are much easier to trace than street girls. In order to maintain their livelihoods and selves, Milane and other members in her community needed to stay well-informed on a complex legal landscape and utilize best privacy practices when advertising and providing services to clients in order to prevent stalking, harassment, doxxing, and other potential harms. Jones (2015) notes that academic work on trans sex workers' safety overwhelmingly medicalizes their bodies by portraying them as potential STI vectors rather than considering other safety aspects of trans sex work. As such, there is a greater need for work considering how trans sex workers themselves understand safety within the context of their work.

Naomi Clark speaks to the rapidly-shifting landscape of how the internet is used and what that means for protecting internet users. From her perspective as a moderator for a leftist, QT-centered forum, she has noticed that, over the past two decades, users of her forum have become less interested in reading and writing long posts, which was previously how conflict was resolved on her subforums. While this shift is not necessarily good or bad, it does indicate that Clark has had to change her tactics to protect her users from online abuse in this particular digital

space. More corroboration with digital geographies and digital media studies could ascertain whether this is indicative of widespread changes in internet use culture over time.

Online spaces can also serve to actively challenge the safety of trans people's worlds. When Dean Spade was arrested for using a men's restroom in the early 2000s, many online trans spaces actually became unsafe for him. Other trans people began targeting him online in order to chastise him for using the men's restroom. Such targeting plays into transnormative respectability politics, which serve an enormously complex role in trans communities that is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V. Raghuram (2016) and Bartos (2018) emphasize that caring relationships are not evenly distributed, nor are they uniformly positive for all parties. Rather, understanding practices of world maintenance (as well as continuation and repair) requires an analysis of whose world is being maintained, for what reason(s), and, potentially, at whose cost? The maintenance of these trans people's worlds relied on the belief that doing everything in one's power to pass as cisgender was a reliable way to protect oneself and avoid harm as a result of being trans. Here, protecting one type of trans worldview comes at the cost of undermining Spade's world.

Others note that sole reliance on online connections with others can have disastrous effects for marginalized communities. Dean Spade argues that natural disasters can quickly sever digital communications; drawing from Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, he argues that local connections are necessary for survival during these catastrophic events. Given their economic precariousness, trans people are at a particularly high risk of disastrous consequences as a result of natural disasters and experienced differences in government and private relief, resulting in a greater need for in-person support systems. Digital and online technologies can also present

multiple privacy issues for activist organizations. Legal and corporate actors have increased online surveillance in order to create a façade of online and in-person security. Because of the increasing erosion of internet privacy, O'Brien's political activism work has shied away from the internet so as to limit traceability from actors invested in preventing their organizing. In both of these cases, maintenance of the interviewees' worlds depends on reducing their dependency on digital spaces.

The family of choice plays a particularly important role in many interviewees' lives. Families of choice were conceptualized in multiple ways. While Topher Gross understands his close queer friends (who are both cis and trans) to be his family of choice, Octavia Kohner considers all trans women to be her sisters. Cecilia Gentili does not explicitly describe her trans women friends as family. However, her willingness to lose jobs at bars by challenging her employers on why they would not allow her friends inside their venues speaks to a deep sense of obligation that is familial in nature. These indicate vastly differing levels of friendship, solidarity, and protectiveness. However, others noted that conceptualizing queer and trans friendship groups as families of choice presented multiple challenges. For one, some interviewees were concerned by how insular these groups could be, particularly when these groups skewed younger. Others indicate that QT families of choice can also result in messy boundaries when that family is also the best or only local source for friendship or dating.

Finally, interviewees considered trans support groups to be essential spaces for building and maintaining relationships with local trans community members, a finding corroborated by Sally Hines' work on trans social belonging (2007a). Often, groups were described as empowering places of solidarity that were particularly fruitful for activist purposes. However,

Renee Imperato notes the immense variation in the cohesion of trans support groups. Her particular group faces issues with a white trans woman who is insensitive to particular issues affecting trans people of color. Like any other space, trans support groups require active maintenance in order to avoid replicating other axes of oppression. Next, I shift towards care practices of continuation, or measures that seek to "prolong something the way it [currently] is" (Bartos 2018, 70).

V. Trans Experiences of Care: Continuing Our Worlds

Care practices that *continue* our worlds attempt to prolong things as they currently are. Because *maintain* and *continue* are synonymous verbs in the vernacular, I would like to make the subtle differences between them more explicit here. While *maintenance* underscores a need to protect one's world from outside forces, *continuation* describes the process of deciding which elements are most important in one's world and prolonging them as they currently are. Continuation does not necessitate protective measures against outside forces. My operationalization therefore considers continuation practices to be those that choose and prolong the most valuable elements in one's life.

Within this project, discussions of the continuation of trans worlds were fraught with concerns over which elements are most worth preserving. Naomi Clark explains the unique and challenging role that transnormativity and passing advice play in trans online spaces. In addition, several interviewees note the difficulties of deciding who belongs in spaces, particularly within the context of identity-based online spaces and cisnormative workspaces. Further, activism played a large role in many interviewees' lives. They highlight the consequences of continuing traditions, policies, and institutional knowledge in activist organizations. Others discuss how activism could be at odds with continuing their personal worlds. Next, interviewees struggled with both families of origin and of choice in relation to being trans. Finally, interviewees consider times when they have continued a loved one's world at the expense of affirming their own autonomy or identity.

Transnormativity in Online Spaces

Several online spaces served as sources and perpetrators of transnormative values. One such space was Andrea James' TSRoadmap website, which Naomi Clark describes as a "practical guide on being a trans woman" that recommended a specific path towards transition. She recalls how TSRoadmap included items such as immediately beginning electrolysis hair removal in order to pass sooner as cisgender and saving up $300,000 to cover all transition expenses. Clark also remembers how other online resources made by trans people highlighted the difficulties of transition: "There's a website that used to be on Geocities that had like, giant flashing skulls and was basically like, 'Do not - do not transition unless you absolutely have to, because you will lose everything and your life will be terrible… so only do it if you are going to die.'" By portraying the consequences of transitioning as so dire, these sites sought to capture how life-changing - and violent - transition can be. Further, such websites ponder what livability means when one is trans. For Andrea James and other owners of similar websites, transitioning is positioned against life itself. Although this dichotomy is certainly more complex than how they are often portrayed on these sites, warnings of the unliveable trans life force website viewers to consider which aspects of their ideal life are most important to them - and therefore worth continuing.

http://www.tsroadmap.com/start/timetable.html Go APR JUN AUG
163 captures
3 Mar 2000 - 5 Oct 2019
07
2003 2004 2
About this capture

Search
Transsexual Road Map > Transition timetable
Google Transsexual Road Map

Customizing your transition timetable

Rushing into living full-time is probably the greatest cause of potential unhappiness in transition. Most of us want to do it quickly, but you have to be realistic. I believe the more preparation you make for living full-time, the more likely you'll have a smooth transition. Those who want to be accepted as female by others have to be adjusted to their new role both mentally, physically, and financially.

Transition will probably take several years. Generally speaking, young people go full-time sooner, but take longer to get finished (usually due to money issues). Older women usually take more time getting ready to go full-time, then get everything else done more quickly.

The focus should be going full-time, not vaginoplasty

I recommend thinking of transition in three stages:

1. going full-time
2. getting done with all the physical things
3. adjusting to your new role

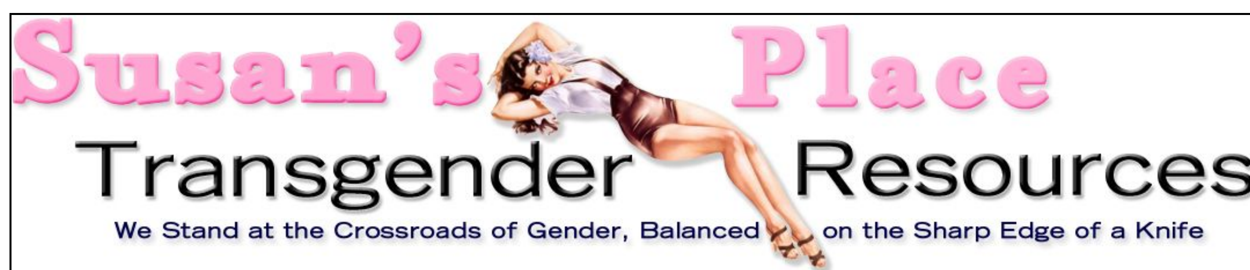
You should make going full-time your primary goal. I also recommend getting as much of the physical things you plan to do finished before going full-time. It's sad, but your physical presentation will have an enormous effect on the level of acceptance you'll have.

(Figure 2. TSRoadmap Website, June 2004)

Naomi Clark describes her experiences with Susan's Place, an online forum mostly geared towards trans women.[3] Before meeting trans people in physical spaces, Clark discusses how Susan's Place was the only place where she had access to other trans people. She describes Susan's Place as a source of "conservative transition advice" intended to help members readily pass as cisgender women. While Clark criticizes how Susan's Place failed to engage with critical trans politics, she readily recognizes the importance of these practices for members of this online community. Clark argues that most of this advice was intended to help members "get by" and "figure out some way to… get people to tolerate [them]." However, in a world where survival as

[3] Although Susan's Place is ostensibly intended for all trans people, my personal experience suggests that it is mostly aimed at and frequented by trans women.

a trans person (and especially as a trans woman) often depends on being perceived as cisgender, exchanging advice to “pass” serves as a mode of care intended to continue one’s world. While passing advice itself is often fraught with transnormative ideals, the actual *exchanging* of advice constitutes an important form of community care within online spaces like Susan’s Place because it conveys an intent to help others persist with living while trans. However, as Clark and many other trans people argue, following passing advice does not necessarily translate to *actually* passing and therefore the successful continuation of trans worlds. As a result, such advice is hotly contested due to its reification of cisgender ideals and questionable outcomes, regardless of its original intent.



(Figure 3. Logo for Susan’s Place, 2020)

Although Clark acknowledges and is critical of Susan’s Place’s respectability politics, she considers her own relationship with this online place to be quite complex: “I chafed against [Susan’s Place] a lot, but I was also just trying to figure out how - how I could actually survive and get by and they were like, the only trans people I knew.” While Clark herself disagreed with the politics of Susan’s Place, it still played an extremely important role in helping her understand how to continue living while beginning to transition. Clark’s need for community support during

this outweighed the specific pitfalls of Susan's Place until she later organically found somewhere else that was a better fit. Here, the continuation of Clark's world relied on access to a consistent space of support rather than waiting to find a trans space that better matched her more radical approaches to passing and transnormativity.

Who Belongs Where?

The creation or proposed creation of identity-based spaces, such as those intended for trans people, often raise questions about the boundaries of who is allowed in them. Naomi Clark wrestled with this during her time as a moderator for the online forum Strap-On, which was created in response to transphobia at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Users were able to request the creation of new subforums in Strap-On, which often resulted in arguments about who exactly belonged in them. This was particularly true for new subforums that were intended to serve as spaces for marginalized communities. As one example, Clark recalls conversations around the people of color forum: "what about the Romani people from Europe? ...or [those] who have been told by their parents that they're 1/8th Cherokee?" Considering which characteristics most mattered to participate in particular spaces demonstrates an intention to continue the existence of the space as best as possible. However, these efforts are highly contested, as belonging within these subforums ultimately relies on a collectively determined set of characteristics that define a particular identity. Further, although the space's most important defining parameters are decided by its members, this does not necessarily result in a space that is thoughtful, inclusive, or welcoming. For a hypothetical example, an online space that says it is intended for trans men could potentially: restrict membership to binary-identifying trans men

who experience gender dysphoria; allow participation from all trans, nonbinary, and questioning people who were assigned female at birth (AFAB); limit membership to AFAB trans people who are pursuing gender affirming surgery; keep participation open to everyone regardless of gender identity or modality; or otherwise limit the space. Each type of place would reflect vastly different criteria for belonging. Because the internet does not exist in a vacuum separate from in-person relationships, the determination of identity in digital spaces has important ramifications for material consequences related to belonging.

Cis-centric environments are also rife with issues around which trans people are welcomed and therefore able to participate in that space. For example, trans people face widespread workplace discrimination that makes obtaining and keeping a job difficult (James et al. 2016, 148). For this reason, many rely on their trans friends both to learn about which organizations are trans-friendly and to vouch for them during the job process. After moving to NYC, Paris Milane reunited with a friend, who was another trans woman who formerly did online sex work. Milane was surprised to find that this friend had transitioned into an office job at a nonprofit called Housing Works, an organization that focuses on housing accessibility for people living with HIV/AIDS through both advocacy and direct services. This friend used her position at Housing Works to recommend Milane for a position as a caseworker, for which she was hired. Further, having a friend to guide Milane through the job process was particularly important because her background in sex work could make her seem undesirable to hiring agencies. Being able to discuss these challenges frankly with her friend made Milane feel better supported during the hiring process, and her friend’s help with obtaining the job with Housing Works made it possible for Milane to continue earning a wage. Multiple interviewees discuss

similar experiences with vetting companies and getting hired through other trans friends in an organization. This highlights the importance that maintaining local connections with other trans people can have when navigating searches for trans resources (such as non-discriminatory employment) on a finer-scale.

Activism and Continuing our Worlds

Several interviewees discussed how activist organizations in which they were involved struggled over what it meant to continue one's world. To the surprise of Paris Milane's interviewer, clients who are receiving services through Housing Works were often much more hesitant to become involved in the organization's advocacy efforts. Milane speculates that clients do not become involved for a number of reasons:

> "The ones [who] are receiving services are not as open and willing to be engaged in political actions, usually… it's the fear of, 'Oh, if I go and I do this then, you know, maybe this will cause me financial—or, an effect to my benefits...' I mean, everyone's afraid of some kind of retaliation, you know? Or also … I know a lot of girls [who] say, 'Oh, I'm living in stealth. No one knows,' and they go to like, a political action, they'll say, 'Oh, now I'm outed as being a trans woman. I have a T on my chest.'"

Being outed as trans can result in a broad array of dire material consequences as a result of discrimination, particularly loss of housing or employment, increased risk of interpersonal violence, and state violence. As such, a refusal to participate in trans advocacy work marks an important attempt to mitigate these possibilities in order to continue our worlds.

Several interviewees discussed the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), a law clinic founded by Dean Spade. Disparate experiences within SRLP show just how contested the importance of different values can be even within a single organization. Naomi Clark, who has

been with SRLP since the early 2000s, discusses her current role as the board chair of the organization. Clark notes that in the SRLP's early years, she was very involved in both its activist and social roles. Clark's capacity to stay involved in both of these roles dwindled as a result of her busier full-time job, lower energy level, and - as she frankly notes - her lower levels of familiarity with SRLP's current staff. While she shows some ambivalence towards her lower involvement in the organization, she is happy to help current members in this capacity. Clark describes herself as an "elder member… [who tries] to provide a sense of institutional memory" for the organization. As such, Clark's role in SRLP is explicitly centered around her ability to help the current leadership of SRLP continue the world of the organization.

Michelle Esther O'Brien's experiences with the SRLP strongly contrasts with those of Naomi Clark. While Clark found that she was valued for her vast institutional knowledge as one of the oldest members of the collective, O'Brien was troubled by the gendered dynamics within SRLP during her time as a board member. Specifically, O'Brien describes:

> "… I ran into a lot of conflict with some of the people in SRLP. There were some weird dynamics at that point between transmasculine people and transfeminine people that were very hard for me to negotiate, and I got shamed around a lot. Um, and that was hard and weird. I felt—uh, I got, at one point, shamed around writing that I had done and lost a lot of confidence in my writing."

This quote reveals a large amount of tension within SRLP about which organizational operations and traditions are worth continuing. Here, O'Brien implies that the transmasculine members of SRLP created a culture that was unfriendly and even toxic to transfeminine members. In her own oral history, Naomi Clark discusses SRLP's dearth of trans women in its early years. This early history potentially contributed to an organizational dynamic based on the needs, interests, and ideas of transmasculine early members. As such, SRLP's foundations might have relied on this

framework. O'Brien's difficulty navigating the dynamics of this shows how attempts to continue the organization based on this framework ultimately failed transfeminine people. For O'Brien, continuity of SRLP meant the exclusion of her ideas, to the point that she was shamed over her work. As such, continuation of SRLP's organizational politics is fraught, contested, and uneven across its members.

Suneela Mubayi, a recent PhD in Arabic from New York University, describes their experiences as a trans person navigating activist spaces while caring for one's self. Mubayi notes that organizations often consider their activist work to be urgent. However, as a result, this culture of urgency encourages overworking and therefore burnout. Mubayi argues that high levels of burnout strongly affect organizational continuity, as members become unable to consistently contribute to activist efforts. They therefore suggest that activist organizations and collectives cultivate a caring culture that prioritizes the well-being of their members to ensure that a group is able to continue existing sustainably.

Contested Families (of Origin and of Choice)

Many interviewees wrestled with deciding which aspects related to family concerns were most important and therefore worth continuing. When Genevieve Tatum first came out as a trans woman, her cisgender wife was not initially accepting, and she took a long time to understand that Tatum was, as she puts it, "the same person [with] just a different covering." While Tatum's wife was coming to terms with her being trans, Tatum decided that the most important thing to preserve was her own happiness and mental health. She turned to her LGBT friends for the

support that she could not get from her wife during this transitional period; as such, Tatum now considers the broad LGBTQ community to also be her family.

Whereas Tatum credits her LGBTQ friends with continuing her emotional wellbeing while her wife took time to process her transition, Topher Gross did not feel comfortable coming out to his trans friends or even himself when first considering that he might be trans. This was in large part because Gross felt the need to suppress his gender identity in order to preserve his relationship with his family of origin:

> "… I was like, 'I'm a butch dyke. This is how it is and I'm not gonna transition… I can't become this man because I will lose my family. They're okay with me being a dyke. It took a while. They're fine with it, but like, I don't think I can,' you know? Even living out of their house, you know, I felt like it wasn't something that I could do because I have like, a fear of being rejected by my family."

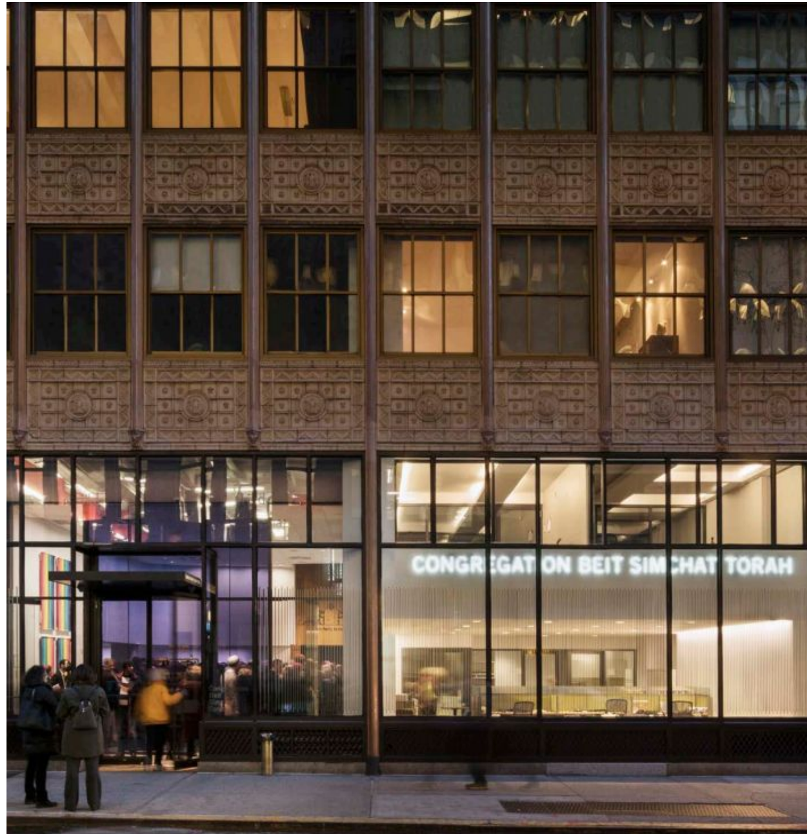
Gross particularly highlights that his family was cautiously okay with him being a butch dyke - although noting that it took a long time for them to accept him as such. Gross feared that coming out as transgender would be yet another large adjustment and maybe even a step too far for them. This self-denial was born out of a need to prolong a relatively stable relationship with his family of origin. Although noting that his trans friends caught on that Gross might be trans and openly made a comfortable environment for him to come out to them, Gross' decision to initially prioritize his family of origin speaks to the difficulty of choosing which aspects of life are most important and worth continuing.

Other interviewees took part in creating a chosen family based on the need to continue particular aspects of their lives. Shannon Harrington describes how, when first arriving in NYC as a young adult, several older gay men took her under their wings and taught her essential life skills, taking on the roles of parents in lieu of her non-accepting family of origin. Rafaela Anshel

discusses her own role as a maternal figure in her local synagogue. In the early 1980s, Rafaela Anshel joined Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, an LGBTQ synagogue founded in NYC in 1974. She considers the significance of this maternal role within the synagogue prior to coming out as a trans woman:

> "I was really involved with the synagogue after [I turned 30], and yet they were my family too, and… I was treated as female more than male.
>
> Tennenbaum [interviewer]: How so?
>
> Anshel: I was the mother. They called me 'Mom' and they were my daughters. You know, it was common for gay men to talk that way, but I was definitely - I was right away the mother. You know, I was treated as female… I did everything there… before we had a rabbi, I led services singing and doing the rabbi part at least five times a year…"

Anshel's role as the synagogue's "mother" in lieu of a rabbi shows a family-like dedication to the space and community. Anshel considers her job as mothering the synagogue to involve completing essential tasks needed to continue the existence and well-being of the synagogue. For Anshel, these experiences running the synagogue through an explicitly maternal role gave her the opportunity to explore her own feelings around gender, womanhood, and caring, which later had a large impact on her gender identity.



(Figure 4. Congregation Beit Simchat Torah)

J. Soto abstractly considers the differences between families of origin and those of choice. He explicitly contemplates what the "heirlooms of a queer lineage" are within the context of the queer and trans chosen family and shares what he considers to be an unpopular criticism of the queer chosen family's attempts at continuation:

> "… Many of the people that I had met in Chicago, I still know and are really, really special to me as family. But I will say this… I do not think that chosen family is a replacement for blood relatives… I don't feel like, 'Oh because now I have a chosen family, it's okay,' or like I'm not missing anything. I [also] don't long for a familiarity of somebody who shares my own DNA or my own way of talking or moving… I'm not saying that one is more important than the other but I'm just saying they're different…
>
> Milks [interviewer]: Well, one involves various kinds of inheritance, right? You're focusing on genetic inheritance, but there are other kinds of inheritance too that don't really come with chosen family.

> Soto: Yeah… Here we are, all of us little queer butterflies, loving each other. With and without our own blood relatives, and are we passing anything on? I guess with [the Trans Oral History Project], it's part of that."

Whereas families of origin often have material lineages by default, socio-legal systems do not grant chosen families the same rights. Further, Soto notes intangible emotional differences between families of origin and of choice. Soto posits that many queer chosen families chose continue their legacy through different means than a family of origin might, citing the Trans Oral History Project itself as a potential example. Yet, Soto's frank discussion of the family of choice ultimately contemplates the meaning of family itself and what this meaning says about continuing a family's legacy.

Continuing at Someone Else's Expense

Continuation of one's world often comes at another's expense. When Jamie Bauer came out as nonbinary and began pursuing top surgery, their partner was "really freaked out," specifying that she wanted to process what she considered to be a major shift by speaking to other people about it, including their mutual friends. Bauer told their partner that was okay, and she found a lot of comfort in talking with her friends about Bauer's transition. They note, "[It] was great for [my partner] but it became confusing for me because she talked to people before I did so no one knew what pronouns to use for me or what kind of transition I was doing. So it got a little complicated; it's still complicated for people." As such, the continuation of Bauer's partner's world depended on their willingness to forgo both privacy and the chance to publicly transition at their own pace.

When Fainan Lakha began to figure out her gender identity in college, she experienced a significant amount of pushback from a close, cisgender lesbian friend. Lakha notes that this friend began aggressively gendering Lakha as male (her assigned gender at birth) and policing Lakha's sexuality. She recalls, "if I was to be queer, basically, for her, it was like I had to see boys, which was not something I was particularly interested in at that time… there'd be times when like, you know, she'd have like, friends over, and it'd be like—they'd be like, 'Oh, this is girls' time now.'" For this friend, Lakha's gender identity served as a threat to her understanding of both queer identity and womanhood. Thus, misgendering Lakha served to protect, or maintain, this friend's understanding of the world. In contrast, Lakha had to decide whether this friendship or the exploration of her gender was more important and therefore worth preserving.

What is Worth Continuing? Transnormativity, Belonging, and Livelihoods

Continuing trans worlds involves a number of disparate and sometimes competing caring practices. Trans creators of online material providing advice on techniques for transitioning highlight the tensions and stakes behind passing politics. While such advice often perpetuates transnormative ideals, it is often posted and shared with the intention of helping other trans people survive in cissexist worlds. Trans people might consider attempts to pass as a survival mechanism to mitigate material harms as a result of being out as trans. At the same time, many trans people consider transnormativity and passing politics to be overall harmful to the community, as they perpetuate oppression for trans people who do not pass or who do not desire to pass. These competing values can be and frequently are held simultaneously, and this

contention represents struggles around the decisions of which values are most important for trans communities to continue.

Several interviewees describe the difficulty of navigating belongingness as trans people or members of other marginalized groups. Naomi Clark discusses the difficulties in defining which characteristics of a community are most important to preserve within the context of online forums. Through a media analysis of both racial and trans passing, Squires and Brouwer (2002) show how arguments over the delineations of identities have direct material consequences for marginalized groups. An important example to which they point is the categorization of race in the US Census, which impacts a wide, multi-scalar array of funding allocations, identity-based policies, and social services. As such, both racial and trans passing pose challenges to identity cohesion for many actors:

> "Thus, when a person is accused of performing the 'wrong' identity, it prompts commentary and action not only from the state and dominant groups who feel 'duped,' but also from marginal in-groups who see a need to assert their identity and re-define the passer for their own agendas. In the aftermath of discovery, passers do not seem to fit in either community" (2002, 304).

Clark's experiences with moderating Strap-On while users struggled to decide how to define a community space similarly suggest that belonging and identity itself is often contested within and outside of such spaces, resulting in questions around which aspects are most important for best "preserving" an identity. Given the shifting and liminal ontologies of trans identities, any answers to such questions are unlikely to be definitive.

Many trans people also struggle with belonging in cis-centric spaces. Paris Milane highlights how her trans friend helped her to determine an organization's level of trans-friendliness and vouched for Milane during the interviewing process. James et al note that

trans people face extraordinarily high levels of workplace discrimination, and their findings suggest that 39% of US-based trans jobseekers were not hired for a job explicitly because of their gender identity in 2015 (2016, 151). Further, 43% report being fired because of their gender identity during the same time period (ibid). Milane's example emphasizes how knowing and being friends with other trans people can literally be life-sustaining when attempting to find and retain jobs, particularly for trans women of color, who shoulder the largest burden of workplace discrimination.

For many interviewees, activism played a large role in ensuring their worlds were continued. However, these attempts to continue worlds were also highly contested, and organizations and their constituents often struggled to determine which elements were most worth preserving. Paris Milane noticed that trans women receiving services at the nonprofit where she worked would often feel hesitant to become involved in the organization's advocacy work. Milane notes how clients were often afraid that becoming involved in trans advocacy work would either negatively affect their benefits or would out them as trans, which would highly disrupt their capacity to continue their worlds. Others describe how continuing organizational policies and traditions can be both beneficial and detrimental to their activist work, as Naomi Clark and Michelle O'Brien discuss within the context of their contrasting experiences with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project's organizational culture. Suneela Mubayi notes that many activist groups stress the urgency of their own work to such a high degree that it deters a group's continuation because of high burnout. All three stress how wide the range of consequences can be for different choices around world continuation.

The subject of family elicited a wide range of feelings for interviewees. Many seamlessly weaved together their experiences with chosen families and families of origin, such as Genevieve Tatum and Shannon Harrington, who note that their relationships with chosen families grew stronger while their families of origin struggled to come to terms with them being trans. Rafaela Anshel notes that her synagogue explicitly considered her to be a maternal figure even prior to coming out as a trans woman, and Anshel considered this perception to play an important role in how she later understood her gender. However, J. Soto questions the reification of families of choice within the queer and trans communities, particularly highlighting the challenges of continuing the legacy of a chosen family.

Finally, some interviewees sacrificed important aspects of their personal lives in order to facilitate the continuation of loved ones' worlds. Interviewees note how they would allow partners and friends to cross important boundaries related to being trans. While Jamie Bauer was happy for their partner to discuss her concerns about their transition with mutual friends, this resulted in Bauer having a lower amount of autonomy in deciding when and to whom to come out as trans. Fainan Lakha eventually came to a crossroads with a friend who insisted on misgendering her while Lakha was exploring her identity, forcing her to decide whether this friendship or her gender exploration was more important to her. In the following chapter, I examine the role of care practices that seek to repair trans worlds against the background of systemic transphobia.

VI. Trans Experiences of Care: Repairing Our Worlds

Repairing means "to put into good order something that is injured, damaged, or defective" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). While *maintaining* refers to protecting aspects of our worlds that currently function properly, repairing specifically implies fixing portions of our worlds that are currently inadequate or not functioning properly. Because of widespread discrimination against trans people, interviewees were acutely aware of many aspects of their worlds that necessitated repair. Several people discussed the role of the internet as a source of information about transitioning in order to better their worlds. Activist efforts also often served to repair trans worlds, with interviewees particularly highlighting demonstrating and policy advocacy. Because activist organizations are themselves imperfect, interviewees noted different ways that organizations important to them needed repair. Finally, many interviewees discussed coping with housing insecurity as a result of being trans.

Learning "How to Be Trans" Online

For several people, online spaces were a way to learn about trans identity and to navigate gender transition. Naomi Clark articulates, in a tongue-in-cheek way, that after years of struggling with her gender identity, she finally "researched how to be trans on the Internet" during the early 2000s. Despite her experiences with these websites' transnormativity, described in Chapter V, Clark's relief at learning about resources such as TSRoadmap is palpable in her oral history. Such websites provided specific advice on social and medical transitioning that would otherwise be very difficult to access. Older trans interviewees who began transitioning prior to the existence of the internet, such as Chelsea Goodwin and Rusty Mae Moore, consider

the birth of the internet to mark a dramatic increase in the accessibility of information on trans existence, even if they had not personally benefited from the internet in relation to their trans identity. Websites such as TSRoadmap, while problematic, function in part as a means to repair the worlds of trans people and those questioning their gender identities who otherwise might not be able to readily access information on trans-related subjects.

Topher Gross' experiences choosing a surgeon to perform masculinizing top surgery relied on information available via trans online spaces. Gross discusses how he learned about his top surgeon through a website called Transster, one of the first photo-sharing websites where transgender men could submit personal pictures of transition-related surgery outcomes. After learning about other trans people's negative experiences with the only top surgeon who performed this surgery in his local community, Gross used Transster to learn about other top surgeons around the US. When Gross saw "grainy cell phone pictures" of others' surgeries with a prominent Bay-area surgeon, he decided to travel to San Francisco for top surgery. For Gross, photo-sharing on Transster served as a way for trans men to better each others' worlds by creating a community database in lieu of surgeon-provided information on outcomes, complications, and aesthetics.

Repairing our Worlds through Activism

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many types of activism discussed by interviewees directly focused on repairing the worlds of trans people. First, public demonstrations were a major way that trans people highlighted aspects of the world that needed addressing, changing, or fixing. For some, demonstrations were a means of mourning and processing trauma inflicted on queer

and trans community members. Chelsea Goodwin discusses the impact of funeral marches she took part in:

> "I remember a lot of [public demonstrations] were funerals for people who were—political funerals for people who had been murdered for being queer. Then [later] we had black armbands with our Queer Nation[4] t-shirts and somebody banging a drum like they do in the Westerns, you know, a funeral march thing. As I said, it was one every week."

Others emphasize how public mourning additionally serves as an avenue for change. Paris Milane considers how the murder of Islan Nettles served as a turning point for trans community organizing in New York. In 2013, Islan Nettles, a 21-year-old Black trans woman, was approached in Harlem by a man attempting to flirt with her (Lang 2016). After learning that Nettles was trans, he beat her, and she died several days later from her injuries. Her killer accepted a plea deal and pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter a year and a half later, and he was sentenced to 12 years in prison. In the aftermath of this event, Milane notes that NYC's trans community was in a "huge uproar." This translated to substantially more street demonstrations, organizing efforts, and public meetings centering on trans rights than she had previously seen. For Milane, the demonstrations around Nettles' murder sought to highlight the larger need for increased accountability for violence towards trans women of color. However, what Milane considered most surprising was seeing previously-stealth trans women come out as trans and become more vocal about trans injustice in the wake of demonstrations for Nettles, a

[4] Queer Nation: "A direct-action movement focusing on LGBT visibility and sexual freedom, Queer Nation first met in New York in April 1990… a core group from the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) declared that it was time to challenge the liberal LGBT rights movement's strategies of assimilation. At that year's gay pride march, anonymous activists distributed a confrontational manifesto titled 'Queers Read This,' which exhorted queers to take revolutionary action against heterosexism and included the rant 'I Hate Straights.' By 1991 there were sixty chapters of Queer Nation across North America. The last of these disbanded in Seattle in 1995" (Freeman and Thompson 2004, 478).

shift that likely correlates with the rise of Black Lives Matter, a political movement and activist organization created in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murder in 2013 (Black Lives Matter n.d.).

Octavia Leon Kohner describes more-lighthearted experiences around first becoming involved in activism as a high schooler. Kohner assumed that, when she first joined her high school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), she assumed that the group would center queer organizing efforts. To her surprise, the GSA was more a social organization, but Kohner felt determined to transform it into "the next ACT UP." While the GSA mostly stayed what she considered to be more social, she was able to organize a few events that drew attention to aspects of the world that needed repairing:

> "I turned the Day of Silence into the Day of Screaming, and, uh, I remember learning that we were having a blood drive and my first response wasn't, oh, great, save people's lives, it was, why can't the gays give blood? [Laughter]. And we actually sent a petition outside the blood drive so every person participating would be like, 'Hi, will you let gay people give blood? Do you want to sign this thing?' And almost everyone did. It was really nice. Uh, the Day of Screaming was a bit of a surprise. We told everyone it was the Day of Silence and then the GSA was just like, okay, let's just walk around screaming."

Repair-oriented trans activism also centered policy advocacy. Tanya Asapansa-Johnson Walker speaks to multiple motivations for co-founding New York Transgender Advocacy Group (NYTAG) with fellow activists Kiara St. James and Armani Taylor in 2014.[5] She describes their conversations around suffering in the trans community - and how they wanted to show up for people who did not have the capacity to organize. Although Walker herself was not always able to be consistently involved in NYTAG due to health issues, she explicitly notes that her main motivation for co-founding the organization was to help fellow members of the trans community.

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[5] While Walker does not list a start date for NYTAG, Kiara St. James' oral history with the NYC TOHP places it as October 2014.

Michelle Esther O'Brien's experiences around trans organizing in Philadelphia highlight the benefits of connecting with trans communities across geographies. As part of her work planning the Philadelphia Trans Wellness Conference,[6] O'Brien became involved in meetings about trans people's experiences with homelessness, which resulted in her co-chairing a city task force on homelessness. She was then able to make connections with trans organizers doing similar work in Toronto, who had successfully implemented trans-inclusive policies in their shelters. With their help, O'Brien was able to convince the city of Philadelphia to adopt some of the most trans-inclusive shelter policies in the United States.

Fixing Activism

Several people noted the need for repair *within* queer and trans activist circles. Chelsea Goodwin bitterly recalls her experiences organizing to include gender identity as a protected category in New York state's proposed Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA) during the 1990s. Goodwin found that her largest opponent to this change was the Empire State Pride Agenda - the same organization that was lobbying for SONDA to be passed in the first place. Goodwin's frank conversations about this exclusion with the then-director of Empire State Pride Agenda, whom she knew from when they were both in Queer Nation, caused him to leave the organization after SONDA was passed in 2002. Goodwin ties this historical moment with her broader feelings on the historiography of trans activism:

> "I feel like a myth developed, starting in the 1990s, that the world was without form and void, and neither trans activism nor trans people exist[ed] until the miraculous,

[6] The Philadelphia Trans Wellness Conference is one of the largest conferences in the world on trans wellness. It was originally created by Black trans activist Charlene Arcila in 2000 and is now run by the Mazzoni Center, an organization that focuses on LGBTQ health in Philadelphia (Mazzoni Center n.d.; n.d.).

> spontaneously generated appearance of the great and powerful Riki Anne Wilchins,[7] and before that there was nothing. And that's malarkey. A lot of us were out there having rocks thrown at us and working really hard at trans activism between Sylvia [Rivera][8] and Riki Wilchins in this dark age, lost period of history that's not documented because it doesn't suit the agenda from Riki forward in gay academia to slant everything a certain way that fits certain theories...That shouldn't be overshadowed and lost to history because it was when we were still primarily doing street activism, and before it all became about lobbying and legislative action."

In stark contrast, Melissa Sklarz notes the importance of people such as Riki Wilchins in calling out transphobia and transnormativity in queer groups. As part of their work together in a trans-centered organization, Sklarz, Wilchins, and others petitioned the Federation of Gay Games to change their policy regarding trans athletes during the 1994 Gay Games in NYC. First held in 1982 in San Francisco, the Gay Games are "the largest gay and lesbian multi-cultural sporting event in the world" (The Federation of Gay Games n.d.). Prior to 1994, the Gay Games only allowed trans athletes to compete if they had undergone bottom surgery, which Sklarz notes was even stricter than the Olympics during that time. Through their organizing efforts, Sklarz and Wilchins were able to get the Gay Games to change their policy to include any athelete who identifies as trans. Immediately after the policy was changed, however, Wilchins began directly questioning the Federation as to why they had not hired any trans people. Sklarz then applied for and was hired onto the Federation, where she was able to continue advocating for trans athletes.

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[7] Riki Anne Wilchins is a trans activist who in 1996 founded the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC), a "national organization whose mission entailed ending discrimination on the basis of gender identification and stereotypes" (Theophano 2004, 1). During its 15-year existence, GenderPAC particularly focused on legal efforts to pass federal hate crime legislation and workplace education on gender issues. Importantly, Wilchins formed GenderPAC as a "post-identity form of organizing" that did not exclusively focus on transgender rights, raising criticism from trans activists (Theophano 2004, 2).

[8]"Rivera achieved legendary status in the LGBT community as one of the street queens who fought in the riot at the Stonewall Inn that helped launch the modern gay and transgender liberation movements… Rivera and [Marsha P.] Johnson founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), to help young street queens make a better life for themselves… STAR was committed to multi-issue political activism and revolutionary politics, drawing connections between homophobia, sexism, race, class, poverty, and police violence in the analyses of its members" (Stryker 2004a, 42).

Using an anecdote from her time there, Sklarz shares her perspective on identity-based organizing as a means for change:

> "[in response to a proposed policy] Mmm no. [I] raise my hand, stand up, 'How does this new policy affect transgender people?' Silence. Directors all look at one another, whisper… 'I don't know Melissa, we'll get back to you.' And I learned then, you know, if not me, then who? If not now, then when? And all I did was stand up and represent a point of view of a community."

For some organizations, organizational tensions come about as a result of competing priorities, such as with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP). Naomi Clark notes that one of the largest challenges within SRLP is balancing the urgency of direct legal services to trans people with the organization's desire to be a leader in trans political organizing. Because SRLP was initially founded to fill a gap in direct services (with activism as a secondary goal), Clark notes that "it's been a struggle for the entire history of the organization to try and… hold both of those things at once and try to make sure that… they're in balance with each other and both managing to be funded." Here, organizational repair is a constant process of refining SRLP's purpose in line with the tensions of competing needs.

Others stress the potential ramifications that the internet might have on activist efforts to repair trans worlds. For example, Dean Spade discusses how social media platforms provide easy avenues to become "gay famous" by critiquing existing organizing efforts, a status which can result in material benefits such as speaking tours. Spade describes the results of such efforts that fail to move beyond critique:

> "...all that's happened is enough people have liked [the post]… It's just making a lot of people feel radical, and definitely, I'm sure, a good analysis was created, but the dilemma is like, the kind of tear-down culture, where we tear down other activists, and tear down [organizations] so that we can promote ourselves as the most radical on social media, and appear the most right, you know? [It] just really is like, not likely to build relationships, which is the basis of social movement transformation."

Spade remains skeptical of even positive relationships that are built through social media platforms. In particular, Spade is fearful of how corporations such as Facebook and Twitter increasingly mediate social connections under the guise of a liberatory framework. Spade makes a clear distinction between what social media corporations *say* they do (i.e., build and maintain connections) and what they *actually* do (i.e., sell personal information for profit). He argues that a caring world, especially for those most marginalized by capitalism, should address systemic issues surrounding the inaccessibility of care rather than individual connections. Thus, Spade's conception of repairing our world *excludes* corporations mediating our sense of human connection and facilitating activist efforts.

Housing as Care

Housing insecurity played a large role in many interviewees' lives. Many discussed how their difficulties securing housing - and the different ways they attempted to repair their worlds as a result of these difficulties. For several interviewees, offering to share their housing served as a way that trans people could care for their friends. Cecilia Gentili decided to move away from her small hometown in Argentina at the age of 17 due to her family's lack of support for her gender identity. After arriving in Rosario, one of the largest cities in Argentina, Gentili met another trans person for the first time in her life. They became very close, and when Gentili lost access to secure housing, her friend took her in, along with many other trans friends over the years. Paris Milane experienced similar issues with housing insecurity as a youth in Atlanta, Georgia. At age 14, Milane's mother suspected her of cross-dressing, and she kicked Milane out after a pair of her red lace panties went missing. Milane slept on late night trains for three days

until a stealth trans woman named Chantelle noticed her and insisted Milane stay with her. Chantelle then gave her a place to live for year, and took care of her for several years:

> "She took me in, and I stayed with her for literally maybe like two years. She got me on hormones, she made sure I went to school, and she would let me dress—in the house, I could dress as a girl, but then when I went out she was like, 'Oh, you're not ready to dress,' you know, yeah. And then when I reached a certain point she was like, 'Okay, now you're ready to go out in public." … she always found a way to have food and stuff, you know? She was just a great person."

While data about trans experiences in Argentina are difficult to access for a non-Spanish speaker such as myself, approximately 9% of trans people in the US lived temporarily with friends or family as a result of not being able to afford or find their own housing in 2015, suggesting that the experiences of Gentili and Milane are relatively common within and outside of the US (James et al. 2016, 177).

Tanya Asapansa-Johnson Walker connects her experiences as a trans woman to those of homelessness. After Walker left her family of origin's home because of their transphobia, she became homeless and would stay in abandoned buildings near the ferry terminal on Staten Island with other homeless trans women, who soon became her friends. She even notes with pride that these friends named her Tanya. However, as alluded to in the earlier section on activism as repair, most municipalities in the US rely on sex assigned at birth to determine eligibility for gendered homeless shelters, including those in NYC at the time. Walker argues that these policies place trans women at a particularly high risk, as they were frequently required to use men's shelters. For this reason, Walker considers sharing informal shelter with other trans women to be an essential form of care, as it allows trans women to circumvent cissexist shelter policies:

> "Community would be one of the girls, a trans girl that had an apartment, she would let like five other trans girls stay with her. That's community. And they were homeless. That's community."

Walker's mistrust of homeless shelters is well-founded. Around 52% of US-based trans people who stayed in homeless shelters in 2015 were verbally, sexually, and/or physically assaulted as a direct result of their gender identity, and trans people are often subject to transphobic shelter policies, such as being required to present as a different gender (James et al. 2016, 182). As such, sharing formal or informal housing is an extremely important tool for avoiding literal violence within homeless shelters.

Chelsea Goodwin and Rusty Mae Moore, a couple who are both trans, similarly connect with issues around housing and homelessness. After moving to Brooklyn, they bought a house together. Although they did not intended for their house to serve as a refuge for trans people needing housing, word quickly spread that they had room and the ability to provide space for trans people in need:

> "...we sort of took it as a mission to help younger people especially to find some place to live if they didn't have any support. A lot of young people, there are stories where people just load their kid in a car in Texas, drive them to New York City, dump them out in the street and say have a good life. And they'd go back to Texas and that's it, they're supposed to survive as a trans person in New York City. So you know, there's a lot of people who need help in terms of the housing."

(Figure 5. Transy House)

As a white, middle-upper class household, Goodwin and Moore had the capital to own what came to be known as the "Transy House." However, many of the people they housed had found themselves abandoned by a number of ostensibly caring agents, including families of origin, social workers (who would leave trans youth at their doorstep with no warning), housing authorities, or other state actors. The Transy House served as a stop-gap measure in order to fix unhoused trans people's lives in lieu of formal support.

Elements of Repair in Digital Spaces, Activism, and Housing

Several interviewees highlighted the role of the internet as an essential hub of information on transitioning and trans identities. For one, various websites on transitioning were helpful for people who were questioning their gender identity and who wanted to learn more about what being trans meant. Such was the case for Naomi Clark, who was not able to meet other trans people in person until several years into transitioning, which made the internet one of very few sources of information on trans life. Several older interviewees who had not directly benefited from the internet when beginning to transition even discussed its enormous broader impact on the availability of information about trans existence and the ability to easily access trans social networks.

Similarly, trans people used the internet to learn more information about specific doctors who worked with trans patients, particularly surgeons. Topher Gross' decision to eschew a local surgeon in favor of another thousands of miles away based on online photos and reviews from other trans people shows both the complex geographies of transition and the importance of the internet as a meeting ground for trans communities. However, the need to create such a community database is deeply tied to the marketization of health care systems. Irvine (2002) posits that the modern patient is an autonomous liberal subject who is self-educated on health procedures and advocates on their own behalf. It follows, then, that the patient as a health consumer now considers medical professionals to be "self-interested vendors of services… [and] legitimate objects of suspicion," rather than their previous role as "disinterested experts dedicated to serving patient need [sic]" (Irvine 2002, 34). Countless scholars have demonstrated how Western medical professionals were *never* benevolent harbingers of health in the first place

(see Stone 1992; Namaste 2000; Snorton 2017; and Gill-Peterson 2018, for a small sample within trans studies alone). The normative patient,[9] by contrast, is encouraged to advocate for and educate himself using the autonomy granted to him by neoliberal health systems. However, trans patients in the US have long been *required* to engage and identify with medical designations of gender in hostile medical environments, and noncompliance comes at the risk of withholding access to medical gender transition technologies. While websites like Transster and its successor Transbucket engage with medical consumer discourses in that they facilitate the autonomy of trans people to "shop around" for particular surgeons, they also allow trans people to engage in caring, intra-community social relations to navigate hostility within a coercive, marketized medical landscape.

Activism played a very strong role in fixing trans people's worlds. For many interviewees, demonstrations were practices to process grief and express outrage, such as Chelsea Goodwin's attendance of funeral marches during her time in Queer Nation. Similarly, Milane's experiences around the murder of Islan Nettles highlight changes in trans care practices over time. Many trans people (and particularly women of color) remain stealth in order to mitigate transphobia and therefore continue their worlds. However, the murder to Nettles marked a local shift in trans care practices, as many stealth trans women of color in New York began to consider coming out as a potential avenue to better their worlds. This coincides with broader shifts in Black political organizing tactics and paradigms, as the emergent queer and

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[9] Irvine (2002) understands the health consumer through the lens of *homo economicus*, which many feminist scholars understand as masculine. For example, Green and Lawson (2011) consider the discursive gendered dynamic between female/caregiving and male/autonomy. Further scholarship highlights how medical institutes re/produce sexism, racism, ableism, and other axes of oppression (Lopez 2019). As such, I define the "normative patient" implied by Irvine's health consumer as one who is male, white, able-bodied, heterosexual, and cisgender (within the geographic context of the US and other parts of the Anglosphere).

trans-founded Black Lives Matter movement utilized "bold irruptions of corporeal, unapologetic blackness" (Bey 2017). Octavia Kohner's Day of Screaming, where she and her fellow GSA members protested gay blood bans, subverted the Day of Silence as a tactic to draw attention to aspects of our worlds that are explicitly discriminatory. Trans activists also centered policy-making as an activist strategy for world repairing on multiple scales, from Tanya Walker's founding of NYTAG to Michelle O'Brien collaborating with trans activists in Canada to create policies fixing the worlds of trans homeless people.

No organization is perfect, however, and queer and trans activist groups often had problematic elements in need of repair. In underfunded trans-centered organizations, such as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, determining which repairs are the most needed is particularly challenging. Chelsea Goodwin and Melissa Sklarz also discuss experiences with queer-centered organizations ignoring or even actively working against the needs of trans people. They emphasize the importance of work that focuses on specifically bettering trans worlds, given their unique needs in comparison to cis LGBQ people. These findings are particularly relevant in the light of recent news about the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)'s mass staff exodus in response to union-busting tactics and organizational racism (Ortiz 2019). In response to these allegations, NCTE's executive director deflected by arguing that it was "time to rebuild [and] get back to the work that trans people, really, desperately, need us to do" (ibid). As one of the largest trans advocacy organizations in the US, NCTE's identity-first politics highlight how needs for organizational repairs often fall along other axes of oppression - particularly, in this case, race and class. NCTE, Empire City Pride Agenda (with whom Goodwin argued over the exclusion of gender identity as a protected class in SONDA), and the Gay Games (who

ultimately hired Sklarz) all represent the dangers of privileging a single optic of at the expense of all others in identity-based organizing. Rather, as Raghuram argues, repairing as care "requires dislocating from the normative white body" (2019, 629).

Finally, interviewees highlighted how trans networks were essential in preventing homelessness and improving housing security. Housing discrimination was noted in many avenues, including approval for apartment applications, homeless shelter policies, and social work efforts to find trans-appropriate housing for clients. In lieu of existing social supports, interviewees had to find creative fixes to housing difficulties, such as running an informal shelter for other trans people in need of housing. While such workarounds showcase the resiliency of interviewees in the face of housing discrimination, they also reveal how trans people are particularly affected by economic injustice, housing discrimination, and administrative violence. Approximately 23% of US-based trans people experienced housing discrimination such as eviction or rental application denial in 2015 (James et al. 2016, 176). Further, progress in trans housing discrimination legislation in the US runs parallel to new technologies of trans oppression in housing markets. In one prominent example, Mackenzie (2017) argues that increasing reliance on credit reporting in the evaluation of rental housing applications has immense consequences for trans tenants, as credit reporting relies on the widespread collection of consumer-based Big Data which, as such, makes changes in one's name or gender marker appear fraudulent, a dynamic also discussed by other scholars of trans data surveillance (Beauchamp 2018). Unlike typical applications of credit reports, landlords have immense power over the spaces in which people live, which makes being outed to a potential landlord a terrifying and dangerous prospect for trans tenants. These findings suggest that trans experiences of housing inequality, an

under-researched area within both trans studies and housing geographies, merit further analysis.

The following (and final) chapter will explore the theoretical implications of my data findings.

VII. Conclusions: Linking Care, Space, and Trans Worlds

In this work, I have highlighted how trans people in the US have engaged with care practices in complex ways over the last seventy years. These care practices do not merely happen in or through space; rather, space and care are inextricably linked. I conclude this thesis by returning to my original research questions:

> Q1. How have US-based trans and gender nonconforming people engaged with care practices from the mid-twentieth century to 2019? How are these practices spatialized?
>
> Q2. How do trans subjectivities transform theorizations of care?

Trans Engagement with Caring Spaces

Geographic and emotional proximity are essential aspects of trans care practices. Paris Milane noted how transgender clients at the housing nonprofit where she works were hesitant to become involved with the organization's activist efforts out of fear for being outed as trans—and therefore subject to increased risk of violence. Yet, Milane also emphasized how emotional kinship with other trans people has been essential to her survival as a trans woman. However, as Milligan and Wiles (2010) note, geography is not merely a metaphor for caring relations. Interviewees also spoke to the literal ways that trans care involved distance—such as the Sylvia Rivera Rights Project's difficulty in moving beyond local scale legal advocacy, or the benefits that Michelle O'Brien found in cultivating an international collective of trans advocacy during her work crafting Philadelphia's policies on trans rights in homeless shelters. Rather than arguing that care linearly regresses over time and/or distance, I suggest that trans care practices occur over varying distances that link subjects in what Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) calls complex, sprawling "care webs."

Space is not merely where trans care happens. Rather, the processes of creating and claiming trans space can be direct responses to the built environment's lack of care for trans bodies or needs. This was especially evident in discussions of housing, where trans people face ample discrimination. Particular responses to such hostility included Rusty Mae Moore and Chelsea Goodwin's Transy House, where social workers would drop off homeless trans people with no warning; Tanya Walker's informal collective of trans women who used an abandoned building as a homeless shelter; and the collective of stealth trans women who took in and raised Paris Milane as a youth. Here, building unthinkable alternatives to transphobic homeless shelters and unaffordable housing markets was necessary for trans people who had been abandoned by traditional housing institutions to survive.

Of course, trans spaces are not exclusively created in reaction to systematic transphobia. Identity-based partitions within online forums like Strap On provided insight into the kinds of community formations and conversations that were possible outside the ciscentric gaze. Online surgical photo repository Transster (now called Transbucket) provides trans community members with a wealth of detailed, crowdsourced information about different surgeons, transition procedures, healing outcomes, and potential complications. Users can post numerous updates, write extensive text accompanying their photos, and even comment on other users' posts. This allows people seeking surgery as a part of gender transition to be well-informed and well-connected with others who have undergone similar procedures, regardless of geographic proximity to local trans communities. While these spaces of course touch on issues of transphobia, they also represent how trans people can imagine new worlds of care and relationality outside of systems of transphobia.

Access to queer and trans spaces is often heavily regulated, which simultaneously represents attentiveness to a space's well-being and struggle over criteria for inclusion. Transnormativity in online spaces well encapsulated this accessibility struggle by listing specific criteria needed to identify as "actually" transgender, which excluded many TGNC people who did not meet these requirements. Interviewees involved in cis-centric LGB organizing noted similar frustrations around being excluded in what might be considered "gay spaces." A prominent example was Melissa Sklarz's frustration with the requirement (at the time) that transgender athletes must undergo gender confirmation surgery in order to compete in the Gay Games—which she noted was *more* stringent that the policy of the Olympics at that time. The existence of such exclusionary measures belies traditional discourses of linear LGBTQ+ social progress in the United States. Indeed, criteria for inclusion and exclusion are often built into the fabric of a space, with queer and trans spaces being no exceptions.

A key question throughout these interviews was what constituted a trans space. Natalie Oswin (2008) urges geographers to consider the concept of "queer space" more carefully, particularly by engaging more closely with queer theory while avoiding straight/queer binaries or falling into disembodied traps of subjectless critiques. Drawing from this research, I similarly contest the conceptual boundaries of trans space. Is trans space simply somewhere that trans people gather? Or is a space only considered trans if it engages with radical trans theories or politics? Naomi Clark's experiences with websites such as Susan's Place and TSRoadmap well showcased how interviewees struggled with the concept of trans space. Clark noted that her engagement with these websites was essential particularly at the start of her transition when she did not have either in-person or online access to trans communities that aligned with her radical

political values. Although Clark unquestionably considered Susan's Place and TSRoadmap to be trans online spaces, she also emphasized how they provided transnormative advice that runs counter to what might be considered radical trans politics. Others noted similarities elsewhere, such as Dean Spade's experiences with other trans men cyberbullying him after his arrest for using the men's restroom, or Renee Imperato's issues with a racist trans woman in her local trans support group. As such, the exact meaning of trans space is conceptually heterogeneous, influenced by other axes of oppression, and hotly contested.

Trans Subjectivities and Care

While transgender people do not experience or enact care practices in universally homogenous, positive, or uncritical ways, there are several important takeaways about the role of trans subjectivities in the theorization of care. Findings from this project demonstrate how the gendering of care goes beyond a male/female binary or even a (cis) male / (cis) female / trans divide. While interviewees often drew from similar caring spaces, such as using the internet as a hub for trans-related resources and community, lived experiences of care were inextricably woven with interviewees' other intersecting identities. Echoing Raghuram (2016) and Bartos' (2018) calls to trouble care, I have shown how trans people engage with care practices that have multiple, conflicting impacts on individual and community well-beings.

Raghuram (2016; 2019) argues that, while gender has long been the privileged optic through which care ethics have been evaluated in feminist geographies, race plays an extraordinarily large role in how care is enacted and understood. Indeed, one of the broad findings in my thesis is that trans people experienced and enacted care practices differently along

racial lines. Trans interviewees of color (particularly those who identify as Black) were significantly more likely than their white counterparts to experience homelessness and extreme poverty or to engage in underground economic markets such as sex work. As such, their care practices were more likely to seem “unrecognizable across [axes of] difference,” whereas white trans people were more likely to engage in practices more readily recognized under dominant understandings of care (Raghuram 2019, 625). A consideration of trans subjectivities in care ethics therefore cannot merely supplant the currently-privileged optic of (white) womanhood.[10] Rather, future scholarship on trans care must consider how other intersections of identity, especially race, transform the caring experiences within trans and gender nonconforming populations.

One question that this thesis evoked was whether Tronto’s framework of care ethics adequately captures care practices of marginalized groups such as trans people. Tronto’s framework assumes a relatively stable world onto which various human agents enact particular care practices. Out of care practices that *maintain*, *continue*, or *repair* our world, only repairing practices assume a state of change. I argue that Tronto’s framework could better implement the myriad other ways that people attempt acts of *world-changing* as care. For example, repairing practices that fix our worlds as they currently are might be quite different from those that build new elements. As such, an updated framework might include *world-building*, or care practices that seek to better our worlds by creating new structures of support; *destruction* of broken aspects of our worlds; or other ways of modifying our current worlds.

[10]See Bartos’ (2019) overview of the current state of care geographies.

The consideration of different aspects of world-changing is particularly necessary for trans spaces, which are absent from many mainstream caring structures and could benefit from such changes in order to function better. Queer approaches to space and time may be key to retooling care because they often conceptualize our worlds as unstable, always-changing, and non-linear. Such phenomenologies could potentially lend themselves well to understanding care through "a complex network of actors and actions involving multidirectional flows and connections," as Milligan and Wiles (2010) and other care geographers have stressed over the last decade.

Looking Forward: Future Directions

This thesis has led to several insights into what trans people consider to be important spatial care practices. Based on my analysis, these include (but are certainly not limited to) digital spaces, shared housing, activist spaces, and spaces for in-person connections with other trans people. A thorough literature review of all topics discussed by interviewees was not logistically possible for this work, given the nature of the analysis and the breadth of subjects ultimately included in the thesis. As such, future projects on trans care may explore subsets of these themes in greater detail. This future work will likely utilize a different methodology than Grounded Theory and engage with more topically-specific literatures, as I now have preliminary data from which to draw about theories and practices of trans care practices.

As I finish writing this thesis about half a year into the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and at the start of widespread national protests sparked by the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others, my relationship to care

scholarship has shifted from one of fascination to one of necessity. I find myself thinking more lately about the necropolitics of care and how the effects of neoliberal policies dismantling social safety networks, labor protections, and healthcare accessibility have had increasingly catastrophic and deadly consequences for society's most vulnerable populations. Particularly within my geographic context of the United States, workers deemed essential have found themselves under-cared for and abandoned by corporate and state actors, who often refuse to provide personal protective equipment, hazard pay, sick leave, or health insurance. And in times when many people have had extremely limited in-person connections with friends and family, the necessity for emotional care and support has become extremely palpable. As a marginalized population, trans people are more likely than their cisgender counterparts to be economically disadvantaged, lack access to healthcare, experience low levels of social connectivity, and face police violence, with trans women of color most likely to shoulder the brunt of these inequalities (James et al. 2016). As such, continued work on care scholarship is essential for theorizing new worlds that might decouple care from state-sanctioned violence and the necropolitics of contemporary capitalism.

Appendix I: Example Data Analysis Chart Template

This appendix contains one sample row of data.

Interviewee	Quote	Care Aspect(s)	Care Phase(s)	Spatial	Comments
Dean Spade	"But what came out of that was that basically I applied for money to start SRLP. The Sylvia Rivera Law Project. Because I was just inundated with information about how trans people were, like—just so many different experiences that people were sharing with me. Some of them, historical experiences, like, people being like, that's just what used to happen to us at gay bars in the 1960's in New York City, and some people being like, all these things just happened to me, or it happened to my friend, or whatever, and just realizing—I'd already, I was basically putting the pieces together about like—I'd already been doing work with poverty-based organizations, AIDS organizations, organizations that serve people who are drug users, all these poverty-based organizations where there are trans people, you know? And then just realizing, like, trans people—there was no legal services for trans people, trans people can't get services at most places"	Repair - acknowledging that trans people don't have access to legal services and trying to fix it	Responsibility - Spade noticing the need for trans legal services and taking responsibility for it in turn	Creating a physical space for trans people to receive legal services	

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