

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Putting the Femme in Feminist: Trans Feminism and the 'Male Lesbian' in the American Second Wave

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**Received:** 15 April 2024 | **Revised:** 3 November 2024 | **Accepted:** 9 January 2025

## ABSTRACT

A slur, a joke or a post-structuralist case of mistaken identity. To the extent that the male lesbian has been discussed, she has figured dismissively. Yet throughout the period historicised as American feminism's second wave, potentially thousands of trans femmes organised under this identity. Despite being entirely overlooked in scholarship, the lesbian feminism articulated by a community of femme-for-femme trans femmes in the 1970s constitutes one of the most enduring and intellectually significant subsets of lesbian feminism to come out of the second wave. That they have yet to be historicised and theorised represents an injustice at the level of epistemology itself, wherein trans women are able to speak as trans, but not as lesbians. Reconstructing the archive of trans lesbian feminism that was developed by Sally Douglas in 1970 and then popularised through her organisation the Salmacis Society the year after, this article proposes that the existence of Salmacis disrupts dominant ideas of necessary antagonisms between 'trans' and 'lesbian' in the 1970s, and we highlight how the distinctly trans, sex-positive, lesbian femme-inism of the organisation can reanimate lesbian feminism today.

If you want to tell the history of how trans femmes and cis lesbians in America explosively broke up, 1973 is an easy place to start. The *annus mirabilis* for trans misogyny in the name of feminism, it is the year that a minority of radical feminists at the West Coast Lesbian Conference protested the involvement of transsexual lesbian Beth Elliot at the event which motivated Robin Morgan to include vitriolic trans misogynistic tropes in her conference keynote the next day. That same year, trans misogynistic lesbian feminist Jean O'Leary forced trans feminine revolutionary icon Sylvia Rivera off the stage of a Christopher Street Liberation Day rally.<sup>1</sup> But 1973 was also the year that a social club specialising in bringing 'she-males openly together with bisexual and feminist women' hosted another popular Gala Spring Ball.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps hundreds of trans femmes and their admirers from amongst the broader feminist community attended this San Francisco Bay Area extravaganza, and across the country, hundreds more were members of this social society made up of 'all those feminine persons, of whatever genetic sex or sexual persuasion, who desire to meet other feminine individuals.'<sup>3</sup>

The Salmacis Society was the name of this organisation, and throughout its decades of existence (1971–1984, 1986–circa. 2000s), a distinctly sex-positive utopic feminist ethos underpinned this nationwide organisation by and for lesbian and bisexual trans femmes.

Both the Salmacis Society itself, and the 'male lesbian' identity formation it mobilised (Fig. 1), are a significant contribution to recent scholarly histories which have taken up Finn Enke's injunction to offer more 'mixed-up' accounts of 1970s feminism in place of well-worn narratives of trans-exclusion.<sup>4</sup> The intellectual and epistemic ruptures envisaged within communities in this era, and typically documented and theorised in newsletters, remain overlooked yet vital sites of feminist knowledge production.<sup>5</sup> As an earnestly embodied though historically undocumented vernacular identity, the 'male lesbian' is a fascinating example of 1970s trans lesbian feminist political-intellectual theorisation. Moreover, the literature and lifestyles which accompany this onto-epistemology suggest that the organisation and its mem-

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**FIGURE 1** | Salmacis Stamp. C1986. Salmacis Male Lesbians? Society. From Flyer in Carton 2, Folder 1. Francine Logandice Collection, 2002–04, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society.

bers advanced some of the most explicitly sex-positive, trans femme-centric feminist philosophies to have found their way into print in the second half of the twentieth century.

The organisation's flyers define their understandings of 'lesbian' and 'feminism' that would qualify one for being a Salmacis girl as follows: 'If you feel feminine, appear feminine, act feminine; if you are interested in being feminine with another femme; if you believe in the basic freedom of the feminine individual', then Salmacis is the organisation for you.<sup>6</sup> As 'the only national, social and educational organization in the country that is totally equalitarian regardless of apparent genetic sexuality', Salmacis established flourishing social spaces where cis and trans lesbians could come together for social and sexual intercourse.<sup>7</sup> In creating these spaces, and establishing new ways for its members to live and love in their bodies, the organisation upended hegemonic distinctions between sex, gender, and sexuality and it advanced – to adapt Emma Heaney's phrase – a femme-inism against cisness, wherein femme self-stylisation and identification are the basis for political and social organisation.<sup>8</sup> The Salmacis' glossary defined a feminist as 'Pro-feminine. Organized activity on behalf of women's interests. The theory of social equality of the sexes.'<sup>9</sup> That to be a feminist is to be 'pro-feminine', and this is inseparable from feminism's activist and theoretical dimensions, offers a distinct political vision according to which femme is the theory and the practice.

In what follows, we historicise and theorise Salmacis and highlight the philosophical significance of its vernacular identity formation: the 'male lesbian'. Focusing on the 'second wave' – rather than a decade or specific period – enables our intervention to speak to the overlapping second waves of trans liberation and women's liberation that were taking place in this moment, and through doing so to signal a corrective to the association of 'second wave feminism' with trans-exclusionarity.<sup>10</sup> Our specific scholastic reconstruction of the organisation and its ethos raise broader political and methodological questions around the 'making' of trans histories. Though there has been increasing scholastic attention on the presence of trans women in second-wave feminism, the 'male lesbian' as a historically specific trans feminine identity formation remains curiously absent from these

discussions.<sup>11</sup> For queer scholars, the category might conjure up the interlinked histories of butchness and trans masculinity. Elsewhere, to the extent that there has been any academic writing on a 'male lesbian', scholars have instrumentally evoked the category as a mode of nineteenth-century literary analysis, or as an allegorised post-structuralist thought experiment intended to demonstrate the ontological impossibility of transsexual womanhood.<sup>12</sup> Though there are fleeting asides to Salmacis in discussions of mid-century trans social organisations by Nicholas Matte and Ms Bob Davis, and brief anecdotes within larger trans feminine oral histories, the significance of the organisation has been elided in scholarship, and the male lesbian herself is nowhere to be seen.<sup>13</sup> To the extent that she has made an imprint on queer historical memory, it is as the joke character Lisa in season 1 of *The L-Word*, a stereotypical crunchy-granola lesbian played by a cis man.<sup>14</sup>

If the male lesbian is effectively absent from scholarship, the historiography of trans lesbians is little better. This is despite the historical prominence of many second-wave transsexual lesbian women. Though in the UK context, Nat Raha has highlighted the role of trans lesbians in the Gay Liberation Front, the lesbian identity of transsexual figures active in the American women's liberation movement like Beth Elliot and Margo Schuller remains remarkably underexplored in the historiographic record.<sup>15</sup>

Instead, recent scholarship has typically treated the 'lesbian transsexual' as largely hypothetical despite robust contrary evidence. Jules Gill-Peterson notes the 'ample evidence that desire between femmes played a central role in trans social life' prior to the 1970s, but due to many of these relationships being between transvestites assigned male at birth and non-trans women, they are often simplistically reduced to heterosexuality.<sup>16</sup> Gill-Peterson proposes a reading strategy that refuses a rigid separation of gender identity from sexual orientation, which if followed can attune historians to the many historical trans femmes who were involved in tacitly lesbian relationships. While a valuable counter to lesbian trans femme opacity in the historical record, such an intervention overlooks the presence of the *many* self-described lesbians who were not cis that were active in the mid-twentieth century.

In another theoretical intervention, Andrea Long Chu in her essay *On Liking Women* makes the provocation that 'it's a supreme irony of feminist history that there is no woman more woman-identified than a gay trans girl like me, and that Beth Elliott and her sisters were the OG political lesbians.'<sup>17</sup> Chu satirically engages with trans exclusionary feminism's contradictory logics as she proposes that if a political lesbian is one who walks away from men and masculinity, then trans women are political lesbians par excellence. Like Gill-Peterson, Chu's argument is not primarily a historiographic intervention, and the enduring invisibility of Salmacis, male lesbians and trans lesbians to historical memory leads Chu to hesitate after her intervention, as she cautions: 'now I really am overreading' and 'that trans lesbians should be pedestaled as some kind of feminist vanguard is a notion as untenable as it is attractive'.<sup>18</sup> Such a caveat once again misses the very real existence of trans lesbian feminists in the 1970s, many of whom *did* conceptualise themselves as, if not the vanguard, part of the advancement of lesbian feminism.

In revisiting Salmacis and the 'male lesbian' identity formation, this paper departs from Andrea Long Chu's deceptively straightforward contention that 'trans women want things too', as we recognise and reconstruct the enduring epistemological significance of these structures of wanting. Reinstalling the visions of trans lesbians as central to discussions of feminist theorising in the present, the history of Salmacis also complicates historiographies of transvestite organising in the second half of the twentieth century – currently governed by the binarised documented existences of liberal closeted cross-dressers and/versus revolutionary street queens. At the intersection of histories of sex-positive feminism, lesbian feminism and liberal transvestite/transsexual organising, Salmacis reminds us of the overlapping investments in world-building epistemologies that characterised much of 1970s trans organising, and it offers insights into the prefigurative projects and intellectual demands that trans social organisations advanced in this era.<sup>19</sup>

As just one instance of trans lesbian feminism articulated in the 1970s, we neither seek to idealise Salmacis nor present the organisation as representative of an entire tradition. While definitive demographics of the organisation's members are unknown, there are enough plausible indicators that most male lesbians were white and middle class. As an identity that centred on an imbricated sexuality and gender, the absence of explicit reference to race reflects an unmarked whiteness. These demographic elisions were likely built into Salmacis members' conceptualisation of femininity and are actualised via the organisation's thinly veiled racist and classist centring of 'sophistication' and 'stature' among its members. In addition, the money needed to participate in the society's costly social events and its focus on femmes would have constituted a further barrier for even those working-class drag queens who felt themselves interpellated within its ideals.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as an archivally driven history, the availability of Salmacis sources, though scant relative to similarly affluent trans feminine organisations, reflects the white supremacy of the archive as contemporaneous Black and brown street-based subcultures and groups lack even Salmacis' uneven record base. Such material realities shape the conditions of trans historiography and knowledge production, and academic works which are derived from sources that have made it to the archive must foreground the structuring conditions which occlude other trans

past.<sup>21</sup> At minimum, the 'male lesbian' was a highly significant, pre-internet, trans femme identity formation which indexed a proto queer, sex-positive, femme-celebratory and radical presence in a period of feminism that is rarely historicised as *any* of these things. As a community that developed a vital philosophy of femme-inism, Salmacis is politically and theoretically valuable today.

## 1 | The Salmacis Society

Sally Douglas, herself a San Francisco Bay Area 'male lesbian', started the Salmacis Society in 1971. She did so after years of developing and lecturing to queer audiences on her philosophy of male lesbianism, a term that avoided associations with 'trans', which some gender non-conforming people of the time regarded as an 'unfortunate medical prefix'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, many also preferred the term 'male woman' over trans woman.<sup>23</sup> Douglas moved through the area's queer, feminist, countercultural, swinger and trans feminine circles and the Society reflected these diverse milieus. Douglas established the group out of frustration that despite the 'almost endless list of existing organizations' for transvestites, there were none that facilitated romantic and/or sexual connections between trans feminine people and femme-loving non-trans women.<sup>24</sup> A year later, in 1972, Sally Douglas chose to introduce the now one-year-old Salmacis to the trans feminine world in an issue of the radical gay-trans-liberationist periodical *Drag*. In a bombastic article, Douglas trumpeted how Salmacis provided an atmosphere 'where any feminine person (male or female) could feel comfortable meeting other feminine people (male or female)'.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding a two-year interruption, for at least the next thirty years, the Society exemplified this ethos.

Attending to the discourses and motifs that Salmacis engaged in clarifies the intellectual depth of the male lesbian onto-epistemology. The group's very name refers to 'the nymph who became joined in one body with the son of Hermes and Aphrodite' and Sally explicitly chose this Greek mythological figure because the 'dual person represented the essence of transsexuality and bi-sexuality'.<sup>26</sup> Myths and literary figures were often appealed to as part of the architecture of early trans community identity formation as they offered historical validation for one's gendered subjectivity. The use of the Salmacis story reflected one of many acts of semiotic theorisation carried out by trans femmes for their specific organisations' self-stylisation.

Salmacis had a documented organisational presence until *at least* the mid-2000s, making it one of the longest-running lesbian social organisations in the Global North. It was also the most geographically widespread lesbian feminist organisation of the period commonly historicised as 'the second wave', with more chapters than the venerable Daughters of Bilitis.<sup>27</sup> Whilst originating in the Bay Area, the organisation followed the successful strategy of upper middle class transvestite community leader Virginia Prince's Tri-Ess network, to have chapters and affiliated groups nationally and internationally. The largest San Francisco Bay chapter contained four sections: the Peninsula section, the San Jose section, the San Francisco Proper section and the East Bay section. There was a 'Northern California' chapter based out of Sacramento-Stockton, a joint Glendale-Los Angeles chapter, potentially Canadian chapters and confirmed chapters in Detroit, Boston, Chicago, Hartford, New

York City, Albany and Cleveland.<sup>28</sup> In addition to formal chapters, there were trans groups that Douglas claimed as Salmacis affiliates. These included a Honolulu TV-TS group, the New Jersey-based United Transvestite and Transsexual Society, and the Baltimore–Washington DC-based International Alliance for Male Feminism.<sup>29</sup> Lacking either the ideological desire or communication infrastructure to permit a controlling centralised structure, local chapters varied widely in their fervour to the male lesbian ideal, organisational structure and social calendar of group events. Commonly, however, male lesbians or those who attended Salmacis events could look to find community, information sharing, along with romantic and sexual possibilities at meetings, galas, balls or through engagement with the personal ads found in the organisation's publications. Though we lack robust sources on these chapters to speak to how closely they matched the 'mother-chapter' and its ideals, at minimum people in these cities knew of the Society, and their opinion on it was enough to desire formal affiliation. This suggests that perhaps thousands of trans femmes across the country engaged with this organisation, and many of them potentially subscribed to the 'male lesbian' onto-epistemology.

In the early 1970s, many trans femmes looked to the groups that formed within and around the liberation movements and separatist organisations of the period for communities in which they could be and become themselves. Whilst remarkably unhistoricised, feminist and frequently lesbian feminist organisations in the early 1970s drew many openly trans women and femmes to them. Commenting on this in 1970, Transsexual Action Organization founder Angela Douglas wrote: 'There have been and may be many transvestites and transsexuals active in Women's Liberation, usually unknown to the other females', and Douglas advised feminist organisations to accommodate for this increasing presence: 'It would be best if the various feminist groups make clear policies concerning active participation by transvestites and transsexuals, as there will be many thousands more in a few years, and many will want to become active in Women's Lib'.<sup>30</sup> Sandy Stone describes being drawn to lesbian feminist organisations after she transitioned, as they offered an escape from gender stereotypes. Before her more famous work with the lesbian separatist recording label Olivia Records, Stone was a member of the Santa Cruz lesbian organisation Amazon 9. Stone, who identified for many years as a lesbian separatist, fondly remembered her time with the group as she noted: 'I discovered – of course as everybody knows now, but it was such a revelation then – that you could be a woman without stereotyping anything, without encountering traditional cis female culture at all'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, whilst the San Francisco chapter of Daughters of Bilitis famously ousted their Vice-President Beth Elliot in 1972 for being trans, Marsha P. Johnson, though not a lesbian, was repeatedly invited to meetings of the New York chapter where members always warmly received her.<sup>32</sup>

Salmacis was distinct, however, in being a lesbian feminist organisation that was run *by and for* trans femmes. The organization is of particular critical utility to scholars of the imbricated histories of twentieth-century feminisms, lesbianisms and transness as Salmacis is an example of the many trans people of countless gender embodiments who organised as feminists and lesbian feminists *on their own terms*. Trans femmes *joined* lesbian feminist organisations, yes, but they also engaged with lesbian feminist

discourses as part of trans-femme *led* sociopolitical organising projects. Looking beyond the presence of trans women in predominantly cis lesbian feminist activist communities, Salmacis evidences how distinct socio-intellectual milieus of non-trans lesbian feminism, gay and lesbian organising and trans feminine subcultures informed how lesbian trans femmes developed vital, sustaining, trans lesbian feminist networks, communities and solidarities.

The Bay Area chapter hosted two open socials each month backed by a 'regular and aggressive advertising campaign' that was 'designed to encourage new, interested, femmes to come and get acquainted with members and their guests'.<sup>33</sup> By 1975, the chapter's extravagant galas boasted around 200 attendees.<sup>34</sup> The rapid growth in popularity of these events potentially reflected members' dedication to spreading the gospel of Salmacis or their desire for trans-affirming romantic/sexual liaisons with other femmes.

To reach geographically dispersed male lesbians, including those not living in urban centres, Sally Douglas and other members frequently authored columns and placed advertisements for the group in a dizzying array of ideologically and geographically disparate publications.<sup>35</sup> As befit Douglas' love of swinging and the male lesbian's sexually rambunctious nature, Douglas wrote in the swinger publications *Single's Press* and *The Players* magazine.<sup>36</sup> She appeared in *Drag* and Cathy Slavik's many trans feminine periodicals, and the Society appeared in trans masculine publications in America (Jude Patton's *Renaissance*) and Canada (Rupert Raj's *Gender Review*).<sup>37</sup> Within the feminist-lesbian press, Salmacis members, though primarily Douglas, wrote letters and placed ads in newspapers like *The Lesbian Tide* and *The Lavender Woman*, along with the early bisexual work *The Equalitarian Feminist: A Journal for the Bi-Sexual Liberated Woman*.<sup>38</sup> Members and those influenced by Salmacis also placed ads, letters and essays in radical newspapers like the *Los Angeles Free Press*, *Berkley Barb* and *San Francisco Bay Guardian* along with predominantly gay male periodicals like *The Gay Liberator* and *Gay Community News (GCN)*.<sup>39</sup> Periodical networks were a central mechanism for community formation in this pre-internet era, and a small group of Salmacis members led by Douglas passionately trumpeted the concept of the male lesbian to catalyse and convert trans femmes across North America.

The outgoing *organisational* nature of Salmacis extended to an amorous ethos of *interpersonal* outreach. Douglas and other Salmacis writers consistently advised other trans femmes across the country to put themselves out there, for both sexual liaisons and to raise the visibility of 'feminized males'. In the case of the former, Salmacis newsletters advised trans femmes in areas currently not served by a chapter that women likely attracted to trans femmes are those 'who are active in the fem lib movement, women who are bi-sexual, and women who think of themselves as gay or lesbian' and the best way to be approached by them, besides cruising lesbian bars, would be to place personal ads in 'feminist, gay or underground papers'.<sup>40</sup> This understanding, based on experience in San Francisco, that cis women who were queer and/or in the feminist liberation movement would be the most obvious friends and lovers of Salmacis trans femmes, evidences a history of trans and cis lesbian feminist organising



currently undocumented yet which extended beyond solidarity to deeply shared communities and romantic relationships.

Salmacis' investment in feminist world-making included its enmeshment in the gay and lesbian bar scene of 1970s San Francisco. In a widely printed 1972 flyer, the Society trumpeted that the venues where it hosted events were 'all members of the Tavern Guild; so there is very little likelihood that any femme will be harassed by any straight person'.<sup>41</sup> The embrace of gender non-normativity and the disparaging of the 'straight' world mark an important contrast to the 'straight' transvestite culture of demographically similar organisations which keenly distanced themselves from any hint of queerness. More closely resembling the bar culture of butch-fem working-class lesbians in the preceding decades than the discrete private worlds of middle-class transvestite societies, Salmacis' lesbianism was lived as a sexually open, public and unapologetically non-normative identity.<sup>42</sup> As a testament to this, in 1975, amidst the supposed blossoming of trans misogyny in lesbian milieus, the San Francisco chapter began to host all but its largest galas in Le Cave: a lesbian bar in the area.<sup>43</sup>

In 1981, when then radical lesbian feminist Patrick Califia asked one of the founders of Daughters of Bilitis, Phyllis Lyon, for the information of a Bay Area trans group, Lyon responded, 'I understand Salmacis is not functioning'.<sup>44</sup> Whilst Lyon was in fact mistaken as the chapter's hiatus came a year or so later, this one line, penned in a short letter, is a revelation. That one of the original founders of Daughters of Bilitis explicitly references the Salmacis Society and knew enough of its workings to believe that it had closed demonstrates a surprising level of reciprocal awareness across supposedly separate milieus.<sup>45</sup> Despite the frustrating opacity of the archive, what has survived shows the remarkable connectivity, visibility and organisational depth of the effectively invisible Salmacis Society.

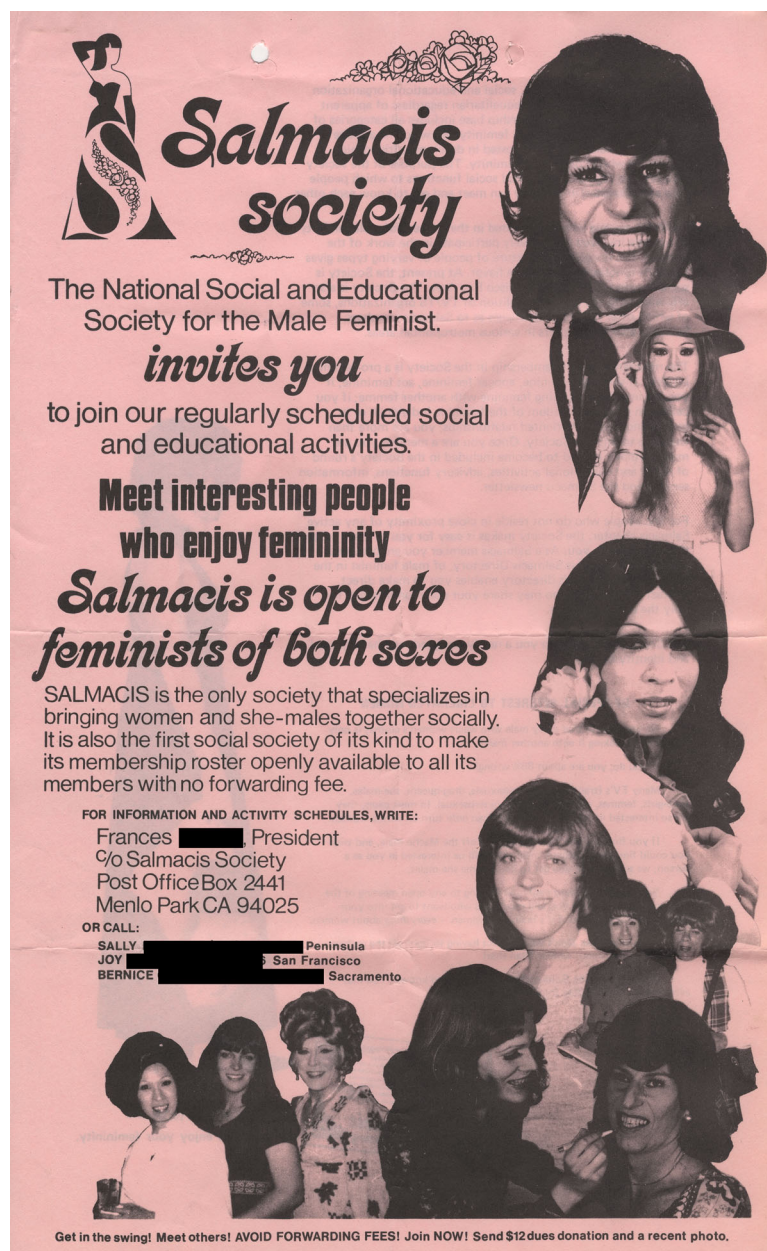
## 2 | Fem, Femme and Feminism: Salmacis' Lesbian trans Feminism

At first glance, there appears to be nothing liberatory about the 'male lesbian' which, as an identity, reads as a humiliating submission to the dictates of the medical establishment. However, when explored in its historical and subcultural context, the male lesbian takes on a far more radical, visionary significance. How, then, does centring the category of male lesbian in histories of the feminist movement modify our understandings of lesbian feminism? And are we now overreading in historicising Salmacis as a second-wave feminist organisation? As was common with transvestite organisations catering to evolving taxonomies and newly articulated self-definitions, the Society's full name went through a number of different iterations: Salmacis; The Equalitarian Feminist Social Society; Salmacis Male Lesbians Society; Salmacis the Fem-Femme Social Society of San Francisco; Salmacis The Shemale-Lesbian Social Society.<sup>46</sup> Yet, within these transvestite subcultures, 'feminism' also signified an affiliation with femininity that need not entail any political commitments.<sup>47</sup> In an oral history with Regina Elizabeth McQueen, Susan Stryker asked the same question: 'was it *really* a feminist organization like their flyer (Fig. 2) said, or more just another crossdresser club?' (italics added).<sup>48</sup> McQueen, a member of the Bay Area counter-cultural scene in the 1970s, reassures Stryker that it was a feminist

organisation. Building on and epistemically transforming second-wave feminist rhetorics, the male lesbian's femme-inism rewrites cissexism and femmephobia as essential ingredients of sexism.<sup>49</sup>

Salmacis clarifies its organisational ethos as follows: 'we are a society of femmes who are personally drawn to other feminine people. We enjoy being feminine, yet we prefer to socialize with other femmes. Salmacis raises no sexual, color or religious barriers to this goal'.<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact that, as Douglas asserts, 'almost every liberated male, and quite a few females, tends towards some cross-gender fantasy or another', in a femmephobic world, those defined from the outside as men will be rewarded for not participating in femininity and stigmatised if they do. This mobilisation of 'femme' as a distinct gender category, signifying both lesbian and feminist commitments, built on Douglas' critique of the notion that gender identity is something separable from sexuality. Salmacis was early to mobilise femme as 'a radical invocation of queer femininity' and to highlight that 'doing femininity' is equally available to lesbians assigned male at birth.<sup>51</sup> Salmacis authors theorised femme as 'a girl who feels feminine; as contrasted with one who feels masculine. A girl who enjoys the look and feel of long hair, cosmetic make-up and feminine apparel. A girl who prefers the affectionate, non-aggressive role. A male-girl'.<sup>52</sup> This 1972 definition anticipates 1990s queer conceptualisations of femme as a somatic self-stylisation that corresponds to one's subjectivity by well over a decade.<sup>53</sup> Femme according to Salmacis literature is an art, an aesthetic, a politic and a sexuality. A queering of gender, as well as sexuality, 'femme' here replaces ontologies of differentiation with an ontology of desire.

Douglas' femme philosophy led her to an early recognition that 'heteronormativity constructs not only sexual identity but gender identity: in order properly to regulate desire it must divide the human world unambiguously into males and females'.<sup>54</sup> In a 1978 article for *GCN*, Douglas chastises the gay and bi movements for their focus on 'the question of who we are having sex with', as if this could be separated from who we are having sex as. In this letter's broader lamentation over society and the counter-cultures' lack of understanding on sexuality, gender-expression and the sexed body, Douglas explains that 'the real question should be; Am I a masculine female or a feminine female... (or even - a middle ground female)' as she further contends that 'until one comes to grips with this kind of question', there is no hope for the kind of self-knowledge needed in order to be able to even begin to understand one's sexual orientation.<sup>55</sup> In such theorisations, Douglas challenges cisnormative gender binaries which uphold heteronormative ideas of sexuality. She also implicitly critiques the middle-class lesbian feminist turn to androgyny as the preferred style, in response to radical feminist critiques of butch/fem roles. If gender cannot be neatly contained and separated from all the other aspects of oneself (especially who and how one desires and fucks), then reckoning with gender involves, as Susan Stryker explains, 'the realization [that] transgender phenomena constitute an axis of difference that cannot be subsumed to an object-choice model of anti-heteronormativity'.<sup>56</sup> Douglas' theorising here offers an early instance of a trans feminism which invites 'queer studies, and gay and lesbian communities, to take another look at the many ways bodies, identities, and desires can be interwoven'.<sup>57</sup> Femme-inism becomes about embodiment and identity to the fullest.



**FIGURE 2** | Flyer. C1975. Salmacis Society Flyer, Carton 2, Folder 1. Francine Logandice, Collection, 2002–04, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

In its early years, Salmacis had described itself as a ‘fem-femme’ social organisation with ‘fem’ indexing cis lesbians, and ‘femme’ indexing trans lesbians.<sup>58</sup> The group likely borrowed ‘fem’ from the butch/fem working class and bar culture of the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>59</sup> At a time when white middle-class feminists critiqued butch/fem dynamics for ‘aping’ heterosexuality, Salmacis refused, nominally at least, the classist and femme-phobic logics of such an imperative.<sup>60</sup> Over time, as the group perhaps cared less about the cis/trans distinction (with desire replacing differentiation), Salmacis literature stopped its use of fem in favour of femme as an umbrella term for all feminine-identified people. While much of the women’s movement moved through various positions on ‘politically correct’ sexuality, for *Salmacis* it is precisely from desire that politics follows. Feminism is constituted as and through desire and embracing femininity. Far from an expression

of patriarchal conditioning, femininity is precisely what feminism looked and felt like for members.

Salmacis also borrowed distinctly second-wave feminist motifs in its construction of a trans lesbian feminism. Drawing on the typographical reimagining advanced within 1970s radical and lesbian separatist feminism, Salmacis refers to ‘genetic’ lesbians as ‘wimmin’ and ‘womyn’. These spellings are presumably chosen for their reconceptualisation of *all* womanhood outside of patriarchal, cisnormative, overdeterminations. Within lesbian separatist discourses, for one to dispense with the element ‘man’ was a way to reclaim the attributes of humanity that had been overlooked by the historic elevation of masculinity. ‘Womyn’ and ‘wimmin’ became open, contested signifiers wherein femininity and womanhood could be reconfigured outside of their overdetermination

by patriarchal society. Salmacis' mobilisation of categories such as 'womyn' demonstrates a resignification of womanhood as a potentially affective, aesthetic and erotic category to be occupied by those with a shared commitment to femme sexuality. As one flyer makes clear, the goal is to 'bring together other lesbians, bisexual feminist womyn, and feminine shemales (fellows who seek to become as feminine as possible... and who are interested in relationships with feminine people), so that compatible people can get to know each other and expand their horizons'.<sup>61</sup> Here the author advances a shared identification with and attraction to femininity as the basis for a new order of becoming, outside of and in excess of, preexisting hegemonic cis-het sex/gender classifications.

There are radical *and* conservative dimensions to the male lesbian's foregrounding of sexuality as part of its commitment to envisioning a new ontology of gender. For one, to foreground the erotics of femme self-fashioning would have flown in the face of widely held conservative taboos, prevalent in both respectability-minded transvestite subcultures and pathologising medical discourses which linked 'cross-dressing' with fetishism. Despite all dressing involving decisions about how you will appear as a gendered person, and therefore an element of eroticism, to downplay this was central to the pursuit of respectability amongst many respectability-minded trans feminine organisations. Salmacis' centring of sex also challenged increasingly prevalent radical feminist interpretations of power dynamics in sex as necessarily patriarchal and anti-feminist.<sup>62</sup> The very existence of male lesbian discourses further challenges historicisations of lesbian feminism according to which the tradition, in Biddy Martin's words, 'threw out the baby of erotic and gendered specificities along with the bath water of limiting and polarized sex roles'.<sup>63</sup> By contrast, Salmacis claimed to be the leader in facilitating 'Lesbian Connection'. In an undated flyer, most likely from the 1980s, Salmacis promises those who join the society 'more names and addresses of transvestites, transsexuals, bisexual women, and dominatrixes than any other Society .... We start you out with more than 500 names and addresses of people that you can write to immediately'.<sup>64</sup>

The reference to dominatrixes as part of Salmacis' offering reflects the centrality of sexual submissiveness to the male lesbian's femme subjectivity, and many of the Society's publications put forth this discourse. In *Sally Douglas' Shemale Courtesan*, the eponymous author expands on the equation between femininity and submissiveness. In this 1986 text, the author advised a trans femme on the dating scene to, 'Be feminine. Be demure. Be sexy. Be attractive'.<sup>65</sup> In a captioned image that accompanied this advice, the author commends a trans femme named Linda who 'sits quietly in drag until a female approaches her. Small talk ensues and Linda never shows her male side. She is truly femme and never makes the first move!'.<sup>66</sup> Despite appealing to outmoded gender stereotypes and associating the 'proper' performance of femininity with passivity, in foregrounding the significance of role play for both one's gendered *and* sexual identity, and centralising the enmeshment of ideology, identity and desire, there are prominent transgressive elements built into the male lesbian formation.

There is an idealised understanding of lesbian sexuality embedded within the community of male lesbians which parallels what

would become the increasingly conservative, anti-S/M wing of the (non-trans) lesbian feminist movement that regarded egalitarianism and tenderness as representative of women's distinct and superior approach to loving.<sup>67</sup> In the same 1986 *Courtesan* text, Douglas assures readers who do not, for understandable reasons of gendered congruity, want to engage in penetrative sex, that 'a lesbian lover does not really expect to be fucked'.<sup>68</sup> Writing in the *Journal of Male Feminism*, Cathy Roberts articulates a similarly idealistic investment in having sex in a 'lesbian way': 'Having just received my Journal, I was pleased to read about Sally's *Gemini-Register* and the Seahorse Collective. I consider myself to be bi-sexually oriented, and as a male woman I prefer male lesbians to homosexuality from a man who loves me as a woman. A woman, I've found, has a much greater capacity to give and receive love and affection'.<sup>69</sup> Three years earlier, in 1976, former male lesbian Greg Turner explained their one-time identification with lesbianism as they note, 'the emphasis on emotions without everything being orgasm and sex, as in male homosexuality, was something for me to identify with. "Women Loving Women," "Sisterhood," and putting energy into other women to overcome sexism and to improve personal relationships has no counterparts in male homosexuality'.<sup>70</sup> These expressions deserve to be taken at face value as reflective of the deeply felt and meaningful, even if unduly idealistically utopian, difference in experience that came from being loved as a woman by a woman. Roberts' comments in particular represent an early articulation of t4t relationalities, longings and desires. But they also reflect a reification and gender-essentialist hagiographic view of lesbian sexuality. In the broader movement, these 'revisionist celebrations of femininity' became the basis for anti-sex work, carceral and even anti-trans discourses during the infamous feminist sex wars.<sup>71</sup>

The feminism of Salmacis and Sally Douglas has overtones to what some pejoratively term 'cultural feminism' (which emphasises the differences between men and women and encourages building a women's culture) and 'lifestyle feminism' (the supposedly individualistic, depoliticised idea that changes in lifestyle constitute politics).<sup>72</sup> In some ways, 'cultural feminism', 'lifestyle feminism' and 'lesbian separatism' in the 1970s bled into one another, and certainly, ideas associated with lifestyle feminism – the notion that feminism is about an orientation to the world and entails a complete psychic, even spiritual set of sexual commitments – can be read into the Salmacis literature, where embracing femme-inism was an embodied, aesthetic and entirely relational practice.

Yet the depth of personal transformations sought by many Salmacis members who transitioned to live full time as trans femmes either before, during or after their involvement with the organisation gestures towards the profound materiality of lifestyle politics. These histories speak to the 'militant spirit of lesbian feminism' according to which 'crafting a life is political work'.<sup>73</sup> Through being and becoming lesbians, Salmacis members are allowing dominant categories to dissolve, thereby putting in motion a revolution at the level of epistemology which has profoundly transformative potential. Finding new ways of living, loving, desiring, relating and flourishing in their bodies, the onto-epistemology espoused in and through the 'male lesbian' identity formation, then, and now, urges a remapping of some of the categories of experience we hold most closely.



The community that formed around Salmacis were early amongst feminist activists and theorists to de-essentialise lesbianism, for they recognised that what is politically significant about lesbian feminism is the relationalities and affinities that lesbianism makes possible.<sup>74</sup> Yearning for a world of femme appreciation and embodiment, Salmacis girls refused to be hailed by reference to the ontological and ultimately futile question of what one *is*, but via the more thoroughly embodied and potentially insurrectory question of what one *desires*. They embodied and took to their logical conclusion calls to action that did not have them in mind: 'The Personal Is Political' and 'Feminism is the Theory, Lesbianism is the Practice'.<sup>75</sup> In doing so, they made possible a vision of lesbian separatism which no longer imagines an essentialised mythical 'man' as the source and site of gendered oppression. In moving away from an attachment to injury or identity as the precondition for world-building, and towards affects, longings and pleasures that exist in excess of signification but not in excess of embodiment, they created seemingly transformative spaces that enabled members to exist outside the confines of the present, and to engage in the prefigurative politics of relating anew.

Perhaps, for some attendees, these spaces were just that. Social events which, in exchange for a fee, offered safe environments for experimentation in dress or identity, but which members could discard the next day for 'real lives'. If Salmacis attendees reflected the milieu of similar trans feminine subcultures, the middle-class white attendees may have centred their possession of office jobs, ostensibly cisheteronormative marriages to non-trans women, and the various attendant privileges their positions within racial capitalism afforded them, over full-time trans feminine existence. What, then, might it mean to historicise as politically significant spaces that permitted individual self-exploration and discovery, yet which offered no straightforward vision for establishing more liveable lives outside of their purview? We admit to not knowing when self-transformation gives way to social transformation, although surely the latter cannot take place without a deep understanding of the possibility of the former. The question of when and how engaging with and beginning to undo the violence of one's own traumatic gendering might be part of a broader politics of non-violence is surely a vital question for trans feminist histories and politics. As such, the history of Salmacis also opens up a series of questions about the relationship between survival, self-transformation, and broader social transformation. In the meantime, if 'the work of imagining a different (if not better) trans future also requires us to ask about how do we survive *until then*, while knowing that there are no guarantees as to when, if ever, this *then* is going to manifest' then the existence of Salmacis, as one life-sustaining and durable social world that existed, might be part of an evidential fabric whereby what Hil Malatino calls 'surviving the interregnum' becomes imaginable.<sup>76</sup>

### 3 | 'Drags', Transvestite Organising and the White Liberal Politics of Respectability

For all the gregarious and world-crossing qualities of Salmacis, it is this very sociality that sharply highlights the subcultures that it seemingly *did not* engage with. To our contemporary eyes, the most prominent example must be those of San Francisco's Tenderloin district. Now immortalised by Susan Stryker's *Screaming*

*Queens*, and a robust number of academic texts, mid-century San Francisco contained a robust and politically engaged community of trans feminine street-based sex workers.<sup>77</sup> This working-class assemblage of trans women, hair fairies, drag/street/hormone queens and other avowedly trans feminine persons often was part of, or otherwise socialised with, gay (ef)feminate social worlds. They had sex with men for money and/or pleasure, engaged in spontaneous political actions like the now oft-celebrated 1966 Compton's Cafeteria Riot, and many were members of the economically radical gay liberationist group Vanguard, and its eventual successor the San Francisco Gay Liberation Front (SFGFLF).

The former group mixed demands for economic revitalisation in the Tenderloin neighbourhood, where most members lived, with opposition to the whorephobia, homophobia and trans misogyny experienced by their overwhelmingly street-based membership base.<sup>78</sup> Though Vanguard dissolved before the formation of Salmacis, its former members remained in the area, and the fact that Vanguard members joined its successor group SFGFLF could lead one to presume that they influenced Salmacis.

Yet the archive is silent. Given the lack of sources, this conclusion can only be partial. However, it is difficult to detect the influence of street queens within Salmacis. It is plausible that some of the gay-identified trans femmes of the Tenderloin joined Salmacis chapters, but the overall lack of sources around membership makes it effectively impossible to plausibly demonstrate *any* cross-pollination. The imbrications of class with sexuality further incline us to presume a contingent lack of engagement.

In a 1967 issue of Vanguard's eponymous newsletter, an author notes that the main difference between the middle-class homophile group the 'Society for Individual Rights' (SIR) and their own is that 'Vanguard's people are basically concerned with the essentials. SIR members reflect a more financially secure crowd'.<sup>79</sup> Given the seemingly middle-class nature of Salmacis members in contrast to the working-class nature of the queens of the Tenderloin, it is likely the latter lacked both the economic resources to engage with Salmacis' paid events, in addition to a desire to avoid classist chauvinism. Indeed, for drag queens and related gay trans feminine identities, their perceived poverty, lack of access to private spaces, sexual liaisons with cis men, and engagement with sex work led them to be excluded from most femme-focused trans feminine circles.<sup>80</sup> Though many trans femmes embodied terms like 'drag queen' with pride, amongst the more femme-focused and respectability-minded trans femmes, gay trans feminine identities like 'street queens' were used as whorephobic implicitly racist insults by the middle-class, femme-focused trans femmes who likely constituted much of Salmacis' membership base. On the point of implicit racism, given that 'drag queen' frequently referred to a Black or brown street-based trans feminine sex worker, seemingly race-neutral critiques of this figure contained implicit trans misogynoir and racism.<sup>81</sup> In addition, given that queens were part of or otherwise moved through gay male worlds, and Salmacis' membership base was seemingly more interested in non-penetrative sex with femmes, there would have been at minimum a further incongruity between social worlds. But it is unfortunately highly plausible that this dissonance in sexuality manifested in more acerbic homophobic behaviour and actions.



Yet the strongest indicator of the absence of street queens comes from the content, or more accurately lack of content, in Salmacis' political texts. Across decades, Salmacis' affiliated authors articulated a novel feminist programme, but one that centred an ultimately liberal individualistic politic that seemingly never mentioned *any* economic issues, much less the precarious destitution often faced by street queens. Indeed, despite the lustful prose and invocation of sex-worker aesthetics and figures like courtesans in organisational texts, none of Salmacis' extant literature makes any mention of the amelioration of sex workers' precarity, decriminalisation or any acknowledgement of sex work as labour. Douglas-authored publications like the *Gemini Social Register* do include ads for sex workers (primarily dominatrixes) which can perhaps be interpreted as a certain level of assumed support. However, this seemingly did not ever manifest in any published acknowledgement of the conditions of deprivation faced by the overwhelming majority of trans feminine peoples in the twentieth century. The lack of engagement between the more middle-class, white and female sexual partner-focused trans femininity of those like Douglas and the precarious, racialised, male sexual partner-focused trans femininity epitomised by those like the now revered Marsha P. Johnson, emphasises both how formations of racial capitalism potentially fostered/constituted divergent paths of trans femininity, and these divergences reflect the imbrications of class position and sexuality within differing trans feminine formations in the twentieth century. Like countless other topics in trans history, the historicisation of these divergent paths demands additional scholastic analysis, but as in the case of the source base for Salmacis, much remains opaque.

#### 4 | Piecing Together trans History: Towards a Fragmentary-Scavenger Approach

The absence of literature on trans lesbians partially reflects the difficulties of doing trans history and the relatively recent development of this identity category in the Global North. For our research, we took a 'fragmentary scavenger approach' with the use of references, mentions, listings and anecdotes across trans, gay, lesbian, swinger, feminist and underground print cultures to historicise Salmacis. Though we will never recover it all, to feel around and with the gaps leaves one with the undeniable impression of this social world's affective, emotional and life-sustaining impact upon those part of it. Despite having a verifiable presence across America and Canada, the organisation leaves few traces within the already fleeting archive of trans feminine periodicals. Estimates of its membership size and chapter locations come from the Society's few extant print sources or through accounts by members who wrote in other periodicals. One example of the difficulty of reconstruction is our twofold verification of the Eugene era of Salmacis that existed from 1986 into the 2000s. We located a number of archived Salmacis works released during that time, but the only *consistent* marker of its existence is in *The TV/TS Tapestry's* list of organisations and events near the back of every issue. From 1986 until the elimination of community listings in the now *Transgender Tapestry's* Winter 2002 issue, the magazine lists Salmacis as an active organisation. Despite its lack of robust archival presence in comparison to more well-known and self-consciously historic lesbian feminist organisations like

the Daughters of Bilitis or The Furies Collective, our scavenging through the fragments in the extant archive paints a remarkable picture of Salmacis' intellectual and organisational reach.

The subterranean and fragmented nature of trans feminine subcultures, now-obtuse lexicons and material archival constraints all exacerbate the recovery of Salmacis' legacy, and these factors inform its near-complete scholastic opacity. It was not until the 1990s that 'trans' as a standalone term became more widely adopted by mostly white gender non-conforming people as an umbrella category. In addition, the 'feminine' in trans feminine reflects an ahistorical imposition on subcultures that more commonly referred to themselves as 'the gender community', 'drags', 'transes' or understood themselves under an umbrella of 'transvestites and transsexuals'. Notwithstanding homophobic and whorephobic definitional borders between some trans femmes, most mid-century trans feminine people commonly blurred gender-variant identities and behaviours under a shared spectrum of affinity to femininity.<sup>82</sup> Though now considered offensive, in the context of Global North's twentieth-century trans feminine subcultures, one cannot minimise the comfortable social organising between now-siloed categories of sexuality and gender embodied by subcultural mainstays like the heterosexual cross-dresser and transsexual woman. As such, for one to recover a specifically trans feminine historical lineage requires careful mediation across often-blurred social worlds.

The methodological difficulties do not end once one understands the porous borders of historical trans femininity. Donations to archives and private collections dating back to the 1970s are almost exclusively confined to white trans femmes who 'had the privileges and resources that allowed them to organize their communities, document their activities, preserve their records, and later donate their records to archives'.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, even within the existing records of trans feminine subcultural institutions like periodicals or social clubs, their often precarious and understandably obscurantist nature prevents a precise measure of either. Subscribers or club members were often closeted, or they were only out to members of their group. They frequently used PO boxes for periodical and apparel deliveries in addition to only engaging with their trans femininity at secure times. For one example, a trans feminine periodical reader named Tekla began her 1964 letter to the editor by wondering, 'how much of your mail is composed in this way. I am away from home in a strange hotel room (locked, of course!) completely dressed and my only desire is to communicate with those who understand'.<sup>84</sup> Whilst the ability to hold multiple identities required the physical space to maintain two wardrobes and the disposable income to rent a room, to have even obtained and read these periodicals was an important part of the 'acts, risks and sharing' which constitute trans history.<sup>85</sup> Out of fear of discovery, many subscribers would likely have not kept old periodical issues to lessen the amount of 'incriminating' evidence of their trans femininity. These valid concerns over safety translate into less archived material with which to reconstruct trans pasts. Accordingly, even the largest and longest-running trans periodical, *The TV-TS Tapestry*, does not have an institutionally archived complete run as of 2025. In an unknown number of titles, in an unknown number of pages, unknown numbers of trans femmes may have wholeheartedly lived their entire trans feminine lives in lost ephemeral works.

## 5 | Conclusion

At first glance, 'male lesbian' looks like it *must* be a slur. That avowedly feminist trans femmes articulated a femme-centric lesbian feminism in the 1970s is already out of step with dominant historicisations which sees the era as one of ascendent androgyny for middle-class lesbian non-trans feminists. Add to this that its authors were trans completely blows open received genealogies of feminism, lesbianism and transness. Under the mantle of male lesbianism, members of Salmacis carried out a visionary reconceptualisation of identity that resisted patriarchal structures and the devaluation of the feminine. Salmacis existed within thriving subcultural communities that imbued it with the imperfect vessels of medicalised trans taxonomy and radical feminist imaginings. This group was undeniably a nationwide subcultural movement that operated alongside the transsexual liberation movement of the period, was in close dialogue with many transvestite activists and social organisations, and drew on feminist along with lesbian feminist discourses and imaginings in the construction of its politics. Salmacis and the male lesbian are an important part of 1970s American feminist and trans feminine herstories. Yet these are not free from the dynamics of white supremacy. Salmacis discourses failed to connect their nuanced recognition of the coercive violences of cisgendering and heteronormativity with how racial capitalism is constitutive of both systems. As such, we hope our history of Salmacis encourages otherqueer and trans scholars to grapple with the complexities of our community's histories, and to rigorously probe questions around constitutive exclusions. These historiographic principles are particularly important when, as in the case of Salmacis, the subject(s) of analysis sought deep transformations at the level of self, community and system as part of world-making projects.

That Salmacis advanced a trans femme-focused philosophy of queer (lesbian, bisexual and sex-positive) feminism free from the cisnormative fragility and TERFy melancholia of much of the wider, largely white, lesbian separatist movement, calls new attention to the synergies between trans feminism, sex-positive feminism and queer sexual subcultures during the 1970s. The organisation's philosophy of male lesbianism explicitly contested the reification of the genitals as the site of gendered truth, which remains a central trope of trans misogyny. Such a position thereby advanced a femme-inism without cisness, wherein the desires and desirability of trans women were central. For Salmacis, to embrace one's trans femininity was, by definition, a feminist move, and likewise to be a feminist acknowledged the entanglement of sexism and cissexism, and (trans) misogyny by default. Developing a distinctly trans philosophy of femme-inism, Douglas and Salmacis Society members do, perhaps, deserve to be considered among the OG lesbian separatists. Not on account of their transness but for their rich articulation of male lesbianism as a sexuality-gender-ideology formation that has the capacity to unsettle and reanimate lesbian feminism as a trans-inclusive, radical and visionary politic in the present day.

### Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their generous readings and valuable feedback on the article. To Ms. Bob Davis for establishing

and hosting us at the Louise Lawrence Transgender Archive. To Dallas Denny for your wisdom and tireless commitment to the trans community, including the periodical networks and their historical preservation. To Blake, for your role as president of Salmacis and for sharing your story with us. To Eden for sharing your own experiences of Salmacis with us. Thanks to Isaac Fellman for insights and advice and at the GLBT Historical Society archives, thanks to Devin McGeehan Muchmore for retrieving flyers and sending scans.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For discussions of STAR and Rivera's Liberation Day call to action, see *Nothing, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolution and Queer Antagonist Struggle* (Untorelli Press, n.d.); Emma Heaney, 'Women-Identified Women: Trans Women in 1970s Lesbian Feminist Organising', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3 (2016), pp. 137–45; Finn Enke, 'Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s: Toward a Less Plausible History', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5 (2016), pp. 9–29.

<sup>2</sup>Sally Anne Douglas, 'The Feminist Society's Ball'. *The Transvestite World Directory* 41 (1974), p. 12. *Digital Transgender Archive*.

<sup>3</sup>Sally Anne Douglas, 'Salmacis the Feminist\* Social Society of San Francisco', 1. Salmacis, Gay Liberation Files. 1972; n.d. MS Box 21, Folder 25. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society Archives.

<sup>4</sup>Enke, 'Collective Memory'. For histories challenging assumptions of the second wave with transphobic feminism, see Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher, 'Introduction: Trans/Feminisms'. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3 (2016), pp. 5–14; Emily Cousens. *Trans Feminist Epistemologies in the U.S. Second Wave* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Emily Cousens. 'Entering the Archive of Second-wave Trans Feminist Print Culture: The Journal of Male Feminism'. *Gender & History* 36 (2024), pp. 224–40; Heaney, 'Woman-Identified-Woman'; Joy Ellison, "'Wear Your Most Daring Clothes, Honey": The Transvestite/Transsexual Legal Committee and the Emergence of Trans-Feminine Feminist Movements'. *Feminist studies* 49 (2023), pp. 31–58.

<sup>5</sup>For discussions of print as sites of *feminist* knowledge production, see Julie R. Enszer and Agatha Beins, 'Inter- and Transnational Feminist Theory and Practice in Triple Jeopardy and Conditions'. *Women's Studies* 47 (2018), pp. 21–43; Kathryn Thomas Flannery, *Feminist Literacies, 1968–75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Natalie Thomlinson, "'Second-Wave" Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain'. *Women* 27 (2016), pp. 432–45. For trans community periodical networks as sites of embodied knowledge and community formation, see Julian Honkasalo, 'Transfeminine Letter Clubs, Community Care and the Radical Politics of the Erotic', *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 30 (2023), pp. 274–89; Cousens, 'Entering the Archive'.

<sup>6</sup>Sally Anne Douglas, 'Salmacis the Feminist\* Social Society of San Francisco.' 1972, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

<sup>7</sup>Salmacis Society. n.d. 'Salmacis Society: The National Social and Educational Organization for Male Feminist'. Flyer in GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1.

<sup>8</sup>Emma Heaney (ed.), *Feminism against Cisness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024).

<sup>9</sup>Salmacis, 'Salmacis: The Fem-Femme Social Society'.

<sup>10</sup>Suzy Cooke, a peer counsellor at the National Transsexual Counseling Unit in San Francisco in 1968, who later became a staff photographer at the Daughters of Bilitis' publication, *Lesbian Tide*, describes the activism of trans people in the feminist and liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s as part of a 'second wave' of trans liberation; a more radical movement which was 'influenced by the pop culture of the sixties, who were influenced by feminism, who were influence (sic) by ... Stonewall and the whole gay liberation thing. Because that first generation, that first wave, they would not even consider interacting

with the gays. They just would not'. In Susan Stryker. 1998. *Suzan Cooke Interview*. GLBT Historical Society.

<sup>11</sup> For considerations of the role of trans lesbians in second-wave feminism, see Nat Raha, *Queer Memory in (re)Constituting the Trans Lesbian 1970s in the UK* in Glyn Davis and Laura Guy (eds) *Queer Print in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 197–21. For an argument about reinstalling lesbianness, and therefore refusing the archival encounters with trans women, see Jules Gill-Peterson, 'Toward a Historiography of the Lesbian Transsexual, or the TERF's Nightmare'. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 26 (2022), pp. 133–47, at pp. 139–40.

<sup>12</sup> For examples for the former, see Thaïs E. Morgan, 'Male Lesbian Bodies: The Construction of Alternative Masculinities in Courbet, Baudelaire, and Swinburne.' *Genders* 15 (1992), pp. 37–57; Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Solomon, Swinburne, Sappho.' *Victorian Review* 34 (2008), pp. 103–28. For examples of the latter, see Jacquelyn N. Zita. Autumn, 'Male Lesbians and the Postmodernist Body.' *Hypatia* 7 (1992), pp. 106–27.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Stryker, Regina Elizabeth McQueen Interview, Oral History, 17 July 1997. Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California in cooperation with Joanne Meyerowitz, University of Cincinnati. Available online: [https://docs.glbthistory.org/oh/McQueen\\_ReginaElizabeth7-17-1997\\_web.pdf](https://docs.glbthistory.org/oh/McQueen_ReginaElizabeth7-17-1997_web.pdf); Nicholas Matte, 'Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities: Medicine, Media, Activism, 1960–1990' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2014); Bob Davis, 'Using Archives to Identify the Trans Women of Casa Susanna'. *TSQ* 2 (2015), pp. 621–34.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Beirne, *Lesbians in Television and Text after the Millennium* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 207 n19.

<sup>15</sup> Raha, *Queer Memory in (re)Constituting the Trans Lesbian*, pp. 197–217.

<sup>16</sup> Gill-Peterson, 'Toward a Historiography of the Lesbian Transsexual', pp. 139–40.

<sup>17</sup> Chu, 'On Liking Women', para 21.

<sup>18</sup> Chu, 'On Liking Women', para 22.

<sup>19</sup> 1970 was an explosive year for trans liberation with the establishment of radical groups like Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and Transsexual Action Organization, which contested the assimilative respectability politics of much 1960s trans organising.

<sup>20</sup> While Salmacis broke with the acerbic homophobia, sex-negativity, and secrecy of most other femme-focused trans feminine subcultures, the society financially required a comparable level of affluence to groups that it otherwise diverged from. In the early 1970s, members had the relative wealth to pay yearly \$10 membership dues that translate to nearly \$70 as of 2023. Not covered by membership were tickets for the group's galas which often cost as much as membership dues. The Society's September 1975 Awards Gala featured tickets for \$5.50 in advance, 6.50 at the door and a ten-pack for \$50, when adjusted to 2023 amounts: thirty-one, thirty-seven and 286 dollars. After Douglas resurrected the group in 1986, she began to offer a range of feminisation guides and in-person workshops. In the case of the latter, the five-day 'Ms. Sandra & Sally Anne's Femininity Glamour Workshop' cost \$750, now upwards of \$2,000, and excluded lodgings, transportation, bar fees, dinner, wardrobe costs and purchase of one of the required textbooks on stage make-up.

<sup>21</sup> K. J. Rawson, 'Archival Reckonings: Confronting White Supremacy in the Digital Transgender Archive'. *The American Archivist* 86 (2023), p. 549; Syrus Marcus Ware, 'All Power to All People? Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto'. *TSQ* 4 (2017), pp. 170–80; Jonah Garde, 'Provincializing Trans\* Modernity: Asterisked Histories and Multiple Horizons in Der Steinachfilm'. *TSQ* 8 (2021), pp. 207–22.

<sup>22</sup> In a 1971 issue of *Drag*, Douglas' bio for her article 'What You Always Wanted to Know About Hormones (But Were Afraid to Ask)' described her as follows: 'The author, Sally Douglas, has been active in the drag scene for many years as both a researcher and as a participant. In

late years, she has devoted an increasing amount of time to writing and lecturing on subjects related to the field of male lesbianism; and has done much to further the social acceptance of this mode of life. She has accumulated a wealth of experience on the clinical and psychological aspects of estrogen therapy'. Sally Douglas. 'About the Author'. *Drag* 1 (1971), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Cannon, 'Feminism: An Editorial'. *Journal of Male Feminism*, (1979), pp. 3–5.

<sup>24</sup> Salmacis Society, 'Salmacis Society: Male Lesbians?' *Drag* 2 (1972), p. 13. *Digital Transgender Archive*.

<sup>25</sup> Salmacis Society, 'Salmacis Society: Male Lesbians?', p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Salmacis, 'Salmacis: The Fem-Femme Social Society'.

<sup>27</sup> According to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, there were 'about fifteen' Daughters of Bilitis chapters in all. See Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, 'Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder That Teetered'. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 5 (2001), p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> Reflective of the fragmentary archival record for the group, there is no singular exhaustive catalogue of chapters. We compiled this list from the following sources: Sally Anne Douglas, 'Weekly Activity Schedules'. *Salmacis Fall Honors Newsletter*, (circa Fall 1973), p. 2. In the GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1; International Alliance for Male Feminism, 'The Salmacis Feminist Social Society Affiliates with the Alliance'. *The Journal of Male Feminism* 77 (1977), p. 4. *Digital Transgender Archive*; Sally Douglas. 'Regional Chapters of Salmacis Society Listed Below'. *The Transvestite World Directory* 41 (circa 1974), p. 13. *Digital Transgender Archive*.

<sup>29</sup> In order of their appearance: Sally Anne Douglas. circa. 1974, 'Bi-Centennial in Hawaii: A Paradise for the Traveling She-Male?' *The Transvestite* (43): p. 8. *Digital Transgender Archive*; Charlotte Allison, Sep/Oct 1976, 'Where Do We Go From Here?' *Salmacis Society Bi-Monthly Newsletter* 3, p. 1. GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1; International Alliance for Male Feminism, Winter 1977.

<sup>30</sup> Angela Douglas. 1970. 'Transvestite & Transsexual Liberation'. *Come Out* 1, p. 21. *Independent Voices* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28035047>.

<sup>31</sup> Zackary Drucker. 2018. 'Sandy Stone on Living Among Lesbian Separatists as a Trans Woman in the 70s'. *Vice Magazine*, 19 December 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Emma Heaney. 2016. 'Women-Identified Women: Trans Women in 1970s Lesbian Feminist Organizing'. *TSQ* 3 (1–2): pp. 137–45, p. 140.

<sup>33</sup> Salmacis, 'Salmacis: The Fem-Femme Social Society of San-Francisco Glossary' 1972, In GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1.

<sup>34</sup> Linda Lee, 'Linda Lee's Drag Scene', *Drag* 5 (1975), pp. 38–39. *Digital Transgender Archive*.

<sup>35</sup> Of further note is the surprisingly connected cross-country network of Salmacis supporters. Though Salmacis was most popular on the West Coast, *GCN* and *The Gay Liberator* were Boston- and Detroit-based publications. As both of these cities contained Salmacis chapters, there appeared to be a degree of connection between affiliates.

<sup>36</sup> Sally Anne Douglas, 'A Welcome to Feminist Women'. *Salmacis Fall Honors Newsletter* (circa Fall 1973), p. 1. In GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection; Sally Douglas, 'She-Male', *The Players* (circa 1978), p. 94. In GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection.

<sup>37</sup> Salmacis, 'Salmacis', *Renaissance* 1 (15 May 1976), p. 4; Gemini Associates, 'Sally Douglas' Gemini Associates' New Directory of Transgenderism'. *Renaissance* 2 (22 May 1977), p. 9. *Archives of Sexuality and*



- Gender; Sally Anne Douglas, 'Letters to the Editor', *Gender Review: The FACTual Journal* 5 (July 1979), p. 12. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
- <sup>38</sup> Sally Anne Douglas, 'Salmacis: The Feminist Social Society of San Francisco'. *The Lesbian Tide* 1 (July 1972), no. 12, p. 7. *Independent Voices: Feminist, LGBT* <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28039246>; Sally Anne Douglas, 'Dear Lavender Woman'. *Lavender Woman* 2 (March 1973), p. 2. *Independent Voices: LGBT* <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28039109>; Sally Anne Douglas, 'An Open Letter to the Bisexual Center'. *The Equalitarian Feminist* 30 (Summer 1977), pp. 6–7. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter Collection, Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
- <sup>39</sup> Salmacis Social Group, 'Transvestites & TS-Lonely?' *Los Angeles Free Press*, 2–8 April 1976, p. 35. *Independent Voices: Campus Underground*. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28040187>; Sally Douglas, 'Salmacis Society', *Berkeley Barb*, 9–15 November 1973, p. 21. *Independent Voices: Campus Underground*. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28033450>; 'Gay Guide', *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, 2–15 November 1974, p. 23. Series IV: Research Subject Files. Series IV.D Bathhouses, Bars, Tourism, and Sex Laws: AIDS Clippings, 1. 1974–1989. MS Box 168, Folder 4, The Allan Berube Papers: Series IV: Research Subject Files. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*; Greg Turner, 'Sexual Identity', *The Gay Liberator*, Spring 1976, 6–7, p. 16. *Independent Voices: LGBT* <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28037218>; Sally Anne Douglas, 'Who Am I?' *Gay Community News*, 15 April 1978, p. 6. George Whitmore, 'Community Voices'. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
- <sup>40</sup> Salmacis, 'The Equalitarian Feminist Social Society'. n.d. Flyer in GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1.
- <sup>41</sup> Salmacis, 'Salmacis: The Fem-Femme Social Society', p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup> For a history of those associated with Virginia Prince's social organisation, Tri-Ess (Originally FPE) See Robert S. Hill, "'As a Man I Exist; as a Woman I Live": Heterosexual Transvestism and the Contours of Gender and Sexuality in Postwar America', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 2007).
- <sup>43</sup> For the announcement: Franny, 'Franny's Communique'. *Salmacis Society Newsletter* 1 (August 1975). *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*. For the lesbian pedigree of Le Cave: Eric Garber, 'A Historical Directory of Lesbian and Gay Establishments in the San Francisco Bay Area', circa 1980s, Wide Open Town History Project Records, 39. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
- <sup>44</sup> Phyllis Lyon, 'Dear Pat' circa 1981, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
- <sup>45</sup> As was common between the liberation movements of the period, there was cross-fertilisation between women's liberation and transgender liberation and, as Susan Stryker and Talia Mae Bettcher remind us, 'radical trans activism drew upon tenets of the women's movement perhaps even more than it did from gay liberation rhetoric'. Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher, 'Introduction: Trans/Feminisms', p. 10. Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York City: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), p. 5.
- <sup>46</sup> Salmacis, The Equalitarian Feminist Social Society, n.d.; Salmacis Society, 'Salmacis Society: Male Lesbians?'; Salmacis, 'Salmacis: The Fem-Femme Social Society'; Salmacis, n.d. 'Salmacis: The Shemale-Lesbian Social Society'. Flyer in *Newsletter* In GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1.
- <sup>47</sup> Morgan DiCesare, 'Revisiting Transvestite Sexualities through Anita Bryant in the Late 1970s', *Peitho: Journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition* 22 (2020).
- <sup>48</sup> Stryker, 'Regina Elizabeth McQueen Interview', p. 21.
- <sup>49</sup> Sally Douglas, 'From the Publisher', in *Sally Douglas' All the Social Femmes*, (circa 1978), p. 9, (Milpitas: Gemini Press). In GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 1, Folder 23.
- <sup>50</sup> Salmacis, 'A Welcome to Feminist Women'. *Salmacis Fall Honors Newsletter* (1973), In GLBT Historical Society Archives. Francine Logandice Collection. Carton 2, Folder 1.
- <sup>51</sup> R. A. Hoskin, 'Can Femme Be Theory? Exploring the Epistemological and Methodological Possibilities of Femme'. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 25 (2021), pp. 1–17.
- <sup>52</sup> Douglas, 'Salmacis the Feminist\* Social Society of San Francisco', p. 9.
- <sup>53</sup> For example, Sue-Ellen Case, 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic'. *Discourse* 11 (1998), pp. 55–73; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); U. Dahl, 'Femmedbodiment: Notes on Queer Feminine Shapes of Vulnerability'. *Feminist Theory* 18 (2017), no. 1, pp. 35–53.
- <sup>54</sup> Naomi Scheman, 'Queering the Center by Centering the Queer: Reflections on Transsexuals and Secular Jews'. In D. T. Meyers. (ed.) *Feminists Rethink the Self* (1st ed.) (Boulder: Routledge, 1997), p. 127.
- <sup>55</sup> Sally Anne Douglas, 'Who Am I?' *Gay Community News* 5 (15 April 1978), p. 5. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
- <sup>56</sup> Susan Stryker, '(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies'. In Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 7.
- <sup>57</sup> Stryker, '(De)Subjugated Knowledges', p. 8.
- <sup>58</sup> Douglas, 'Salmacis the Feminist'.
- <sup>59</sup> J. Nestle. *A Restricted Country: Essays and Short Stories* (London: Sheba Feminist, 1988); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Elizabeth Lapovsky Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York City: Routledge, 1993); Natasha Kraus, 'Desire Work, Performativity, and the Structuring of a Community: Butch/Fem Relations of the 1940s and 1950s'. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 17 (1996), pp. 30–56.
- <sup>60</sup> Linda Strega, 'The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity' (2017). Guest post on *Bev Jo- Radical Lesbian Feminism Writing*. <https://bevforadicallesbian.wordpress.com/2017/07/27/the-big-sell-out-lesbian-femininity-by-linda-strega/>
- <sup>61</sup> Salmacis, 'Salmacis the Shemale Lesbian Social Society'.
- <sup>62</sup> For example, Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974); Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989).
- <sup>63</sup> B. Martin, 'Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias'. *Diacritics* 24 (1994), no. 2/3, pp. 104–21, at p. 108.
- <sup>64</sup> Salmacis, 'The Equalitarian'.
- <sup>65</sup> Salmacis, *Sally Douglas's The Shemale-Lesbian Primer: Exclusive Tips on How to Be a Successful Shemale Courtesan* (1986), The Louise Lawrence Transgender Archive, Vallejo, California.
- <sup>66</sup> Salmacis, 'Sally Douglas's The Shemale-Lesbian Primer', p. 8.
- <sup>67</sup> See, for example, S.L. Hoagland, *Lesbian ethics: toward new value*, (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1990).
- <sup>68</sup> Salmacis, 'Sally Douglas's The Shemale-Lesbian Primer', p. 5.
- <sup>69</sup> Cathy Roberts, 'Letter: From Cathy Roberts'. *Journal of Male Feminism*, (1979), p. 48. *Digital Transgender Archive*.
- <sup>70</sup> Greg Turner, 'Sexual Identity'. *The Gay Liberator*, (Spring 1976), pp. 6–7, 16. *Independent Voices: LGBT*.
- <sup>71</sup> Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' in G. Rubin, *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 167; Carole Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge, 1984); K. Paul, Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Essays on Sexual Dissent and American Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995). See also the special issue of *Signs*, 'Pleasure and Danger: Sexual Freedom and Feminism in

the Twenty-First Century', 2016, for a reflection on the sex wars. For a discussion of the 'flashpoint' of the sex wars, the Barnard conference, see Rachel Corbman, 'The Scholars and the Feminists: The Barnard Sex Conference and the History of the Institutionalization of Feminism'. *Feminist Formations* 27 (2015), pp. 49–80.

<sup>72</sup> Alice Echols critiqued what she documented as the 'descent' into cultural feminism in the late 1970s and early 1980s US women's liberation movement in Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America: 1967–75* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 6, pp. 243–86.

<sup>73</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 227.

<sup>74</sup> See Levi C.R. Hord, 'Specificity without Identity: Articulating Post-Gender Sexuality through the "Non-Binary Lesbian"'. *Sexualities* 25 (2022), pp. 615–37.

<sup>75</sup> Whilst this phrase is frequently attributed to Ti-Grace Atkinson by Anne Koedt in 1971, Kate King (1994, 125) has highlighted that this is in fact a misinterpretation of Atkinson's phrase: Feminism is a theory; but Lesbianism is a practice.

<sup>76</sup> J. Szpilka (forthcoming), 'Red-Tinted and Unknowable': Sex and Survival in the Trans Interregnum of Alison Rumfitt's Tell Me I'm Worthless' *TSQ*.

<sup>77</sup> Betty Luther Hillman, "'The Most Profoundly Revolutionary Act a Homosexual Can Engage In': Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964–1972", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20 (2011), pp. 153–81; Martin Meeker, 'The Queerly Disadvantaged and the Making of San Francisco's War on Poverty, 1964–1967', *Pacific Historical Review* 81 (2012), pp. 21–59; Joseph Plaster, *Kids on the Street* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023). Jennifer Worley, "'Street Power" and the Claiming of Public Space: San Francisco's "Vanguard" and Pre-Stonewall Queer Radicalism', in Eric Stanley and Nat Smith (eds), *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (2nd ed.) (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015), pp. 35–45.

<sup>78</sup> Hillman, 'The Most Profoundly Revolutionary Act a Homosexual Can Engage In', pp. 161–62.

<sup>79</sup> 'Camp Stamp', *Vanguard* 1, (March 1967), p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> If a trans femme who had sex with non-trans femmes could be a heterosexual transvestite, male cross-dresser, or male lesbian, a trans femme who had sex with a man was all too often pilloried by her peers as 'the drag queen'. Though an identity proudly held by many, in these social circles to be called a drag queen, street queen or hair queen was oftentimes an implicitly racialised and homophobic insult.

<sup>81</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholas Matte, 'Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities' (2014); Chris Aino Pihlak, 'A Moveable Closet: Constructions of Femininity Among Twentieth Century Transfeminine Periodical Communities', (unpublished master's thesis, University of Victoria, 2023).

<sup>83</sup> K. J. Rawson, 'Archival Reckonings: Confronting White Supremacy in the Digital Transgender Archive', *The American Archivist* 86 (2023), p. 549.

<sup>84</sup> Tekla, 'Letters to the Editor'. *Transvestia* 4 (October 1964), p. 68. *University of Victoria Transgender Archives*.

<sup>85</sup> Davis, 'Using Archives', p. 627.