Andre Cavalcante, **Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life**, New York: NYU Press, 2018, 224 pp., $27.00 (paperback).

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Research on expressions of gender, and especially queerness, often risks losing sight of its subjects in exchange for theory. Andre Cavalcante's choice to foreground the voices and experiences of his informants in **Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life** is therefore a wise one. The book's theme is less "the 'normal' (and normative) and more about the 'everyday'" (p. 21), a frequently overlooked aspect of queer being that Cavalcante explores through ethnographic observation and interviews with trans participants in the Midwest. His approach follows the idea that queerness is a reorientation that suffuses even the most straightforward actions (Ahmed, 2006)—but it raises the question, Does queerness always need to be disruptive? For many of Cavalcante's informants, the tension is between these radical expressions of trans identity and doing something as mundane as, for example, making dinner. This division between the ordinary and what might be called the *queer extraordinary* (the usual focus of research) manifests in media, whose history, production, and consumption form the book's entry point into trans life.
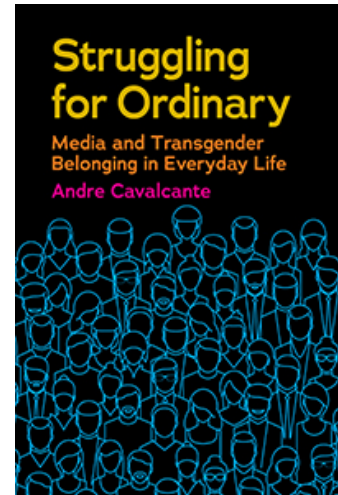
Cavalcante's argument is that media and technology have catalyzed and shaped trans folk's conceptions of identity over the past several decades, and that they reflect the practices the community has constructed. He wisely articulates his insider/outsider status as a cisgender, gay man (p. 9), with regard to the identity politics that often privilege those labels at the expense of other types of queerness. In classic ethnographic fashion, Cavalcante details his process of introduction, familiarization, and relationship building within the trans community over several years. Each chapter of the book opens with and is sustained by narratives from trans individuals, framing a series of topics relevant to them: a historical overview, the difficulty of being trans, trans acceptance, precarity and resilience, and everyday life. Crucially, Cavalcante discusses how his participants have negotiated and integrated media portrayals into their own process of world building, rather than focusing on them in isolation. The book therefore feels geared toward a gender studies audience, using media to challenge ideas of queerness, slightly more than the reverse.

Nevertheless, Cavalcante is conscious of the book's timing with respect to the media landscape; he discusses the recent "tipping point" discourse that has given trans folk a greater degree of presence in mainstream American culture. As one of his informants says:

> It's been changing dramatically in the last 10 years. . . . TV shows come out with trans members of families. I think now the general public is aware that the T [transgender] community is a part of the diversity of the planet. It used to be that we were completely

invisible to most people. Now we are becoming very visible. . . . We can no longer hide in plain sight. (pp. 56–57)

This heightened exposure entails an increase in trans representations that can be both liberating and challenging to incorporate into one's process of identity construction—but visibility is not always proportional to positive attitudes (p. 65; see also Walters, 2001). The tipping point toward trans acceptance remains unevenly distributed across media types, markets, and demographics, a shifting balance between what Cavalcante calls the ideologies of impossibility and possibility in chapters 2 and 3. Significantly, most of the interviewees are able to call upon a media portrayal, usually from television, for each of these two categories: one that does not at all represent them, and one that *could*. The "struggle for ordinary" is not just the reclamation of the everyday within the context of queerness but also the push for mainstream culture to adopt images of trans folk that are three-dimensional.

The emphasis on television reflects its enduring status as a popular and common medium (Joyrich, 2014), where the most representations can reach the greatest variety of people. Cavalcante also attends to other forms by, for, and about trans individuals, ranging from mailed newsletters to web comics to phone apps, that become cultural touchstones. But he argues that beyond offering knowledge and language, perhaps the more important aspect of these media is how they provide examples of queer lifestyles that can be difficult or even dangerous to pursue. They are "engines of hope" (p. 121) and "affective technologies" (p. 126) that move their consumers, by implying an imagined community (see Anderson, 2006) of people who share their experience: the audience, and perhaps the media producers as well. The more recent impact of the Internet cannot be overstated in this respect, whether through direct connections with other individuals, or simply broader access to media artifacts that resonate with the viewer. Several informants in the book speak about how the relative flexibility of online space allowed them to find and form bonds with other, nonfictional trans folk.

As pervasive as media are, Cavalcante acknowledges that the ordinary must also account for moments that are un- or less mediated. In chapter 5, his informants discuss the loss of "the basic taken-for-grantedness of everyday life" (p. 151) during and after gender transition; personal social interactions and public spaces alike become more difficult to navigate. They begin to occupy what Halberstam (2005) calls a "queer time and place," a way of being in the world that is at odds with heteronormative structures and requires a degree of emotional labor and resilience. Media function as one strategy to manage the psychic toll; media's practical function of spreading information and building community among trans individuals is supplemented by the potential to "achieve the rhythms and affordances of everyday life" (pp. 144–145). This is the crux of Cavalcante's presentation of media: They can be multisited and multifaceted tools for the project of improving trans well-being.

While the book is rich with detail and narratives to support the author's arguments, a few assumptions linger under the surface. First, more recent portrayals of trans individuals in media may be more nuanced than the earlier caricatures, but that does not mean they are unproblematic and free from critique. Nor do they exist in a vacuum; Jeffrey Tambor, the (cisgender straight male) star of *Transparent*, recently left one of the most visible trans roles on television amid sexual harassment allegations. And although mainstream media are showing progress toward trans inclusion, they are still normative by nature.

Cavalcante is right to critique those who dismiss the struggle for ordinary as too normative to be queer, yet for his respondents who wish to craft identities that cis individuals will understand and accept, their primary sources seem to be media that advocate a specific kind of ordinary.

Finally, access to media and the means to incorporate or reproduce it in one's own life are not equally distributed resources. The book's presentation of media consumption often relies on a model of common material and cultural circumstances that may intersect with, but is not coextensive with, the trans experience (Johnson, 2013; Roen, 2001). It does seem that many of the respondents come from the same geographic area and have similar life experiences—but what are the media opportunities for individuals with financial hardship, or who don't speak English? There is an opportunity to extend the investigation to media environments available to different sectors of the trans community. From a broader theoretical perspective, Papacharissi's (2015) conception of the *affective public* is also a useful one for further understanding the circulation of knowledge and emotion within and extending out of the trans community, and its connections to media. And following the work of previous scholars (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Capuzza & Spencer, 2017), the research could benefit from a deeper critique of the media production apparatus as a whole; its intentions as a capitalist, heteronormative entity; and the consequent impact on trans representation.

This book is a welcome addition to gender and media studies literature that will benefit both students and experts with an interest in trans identity, opening a line of inquiry that can and should develop further. Andre Cavalcante's deft combination of extensive theoretical knowledge and sensitivity to his informants' needs and desires serve as an example of how to apply deep analysis to moments of everyday life. His work makes a solid case for calling attention to the ordinary, the people who live it, and the relationship they have with the media landscape.

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