Tehran in the early 1970s offered a spectrum of overlapping conceptions of maleness and masculinities. This spectrum structured everyday practices of life with regard to nonheteronormative male gender/sexual desires, and it construed nonheteronormative maleness as being at once criminal, immoral, and theatrical. This chapter offers a preliminary mapping of that scene. It is not, and cannot be, a social history of “gay Tehran.” Although the available scholarly writing on this topic agrees on the existence of an “active gay subculture” in 1970s Tehran, this literature is anecdotal, and the critical archival and ethnographic research necessary to produce an informed history remains yet to be done. But I also want to argue that to name the 1970s as the decade of a gay Tehran obscures important in-distinctions between what is now named gay (always considered male in this context by all writers on the topic) and what is now considered MtF trans. My purpose is thus to offer an initial mapping of the complex overlaps and connections between these lives. I want to trace continuities across the “before” and “after” of the 1979 revolution, as well as note the ruptures introduced by regime change into the scene of nonheteronormative males. Simply casting the advent of the Islamic Republic as the brutal end of gay Tehran does not do justice to the complexity of the tale.

The story of “gay Tehran” in the 1970s has been articulated in at least two domains. At the time, there were a number of articles about Tehran’s “gay scene” in the American gay press. Jerry Zarit’s article at the end of the decade put it succinctly: “Iran was for me, and for others like me, a sexual paradise. In
terms of both quantity and quality it was the most exciting experience of my life.”2 Not all reports shared Zarit’s enthusiasm. David Reed’s article was more sobering.3 By the time of its publication, the idea of “Tehran as gay paradise” must have been circulating widely; Reed was writing a tale of warning against this backdrop: “. . . legend has it that gay sex is big in Teheran. On my way overland from India last year I heard straight travelers’ tales of ‘queer Iranians.’ After un-gay India I couldn’t wait. A New York friend of mine heard similar hot tales last month while researching a Teheran job offer. He’s as excited now as I was then. He shouldn’t be. For his sake and for anyone else gay considering work or play among the Persians, I’ll tell my tale of Teheran. In seven months there I survived rape, robbery, and what an Iranian called romance.”4 Unlike many previous rosy pictures, Reed wrote, “Iranian homosexuals hide in their closets. Or they are hidden in prisons. . . . Iran punishes it [sodomy] with severe jail sentences. . . . Paranoia pervades what little public gay life exists in Teheran.”5 After writing at length about several bars and baths, he summarized his experience in these words: “And such is the myth of gay Iran. Hot air.”6 Paradise or hell, the American gay press after 1979 began to report on the extermination of Teheran gay life by the Islamic Republic.7 There is an implicit progressivist dynamic to these stories: The emerging gay subculture of Teheran would have led naturally to a livelier, more open gay Teheran, except that its life was cut short by the 1979 revolution and the subsequent Islamization of society.

A second domain for the formation of the gay Teheran story has been within Iranian diasporic gay communities, some of whose members lived in Iran in the 1970s.8 But their recollections are narrated through later gay identification developed in their new homes, which, in the 1980s and 1990s, when much of this immigration took place, were dominated by a particular style of sexual identity politics. The Iranian gay diasporic progressivist narrative was informed by this contingent dominance. Through the lens of later identities, earlier sexual and gender subjectivities and practices began to be seen as problematic and backward.

From its earliest manifestation in the diasporic press, Iranian gay identity marked its emergence through a dis-identification with that past. This included a clear demarcation between hamjins-gara’i (same-sex inclination/orientation) and hamjins-bazi (same-sex-playing).9 The former has been embraced as a modern form of identification that outwardly expresses a true inner self; hamjins-bazi, on the other hand, has been disavowed, perhaps because of its pejorative use by government officials, in condemnatory religious texts, in pathologizing contexts by medical professionals, or in hostile general usage within Iranian society and culture at large. This disavowal of hamjins-bazi has
been articulated through turning the societal and cultural abjection back onto the concept itself: they disavow same-sex-playing due to its presumed abusive character and its being marked by disparities of age and economics. This is in contrast to same-sex-oriented relations (characterized as hamjins-gara’i) that allow for genuinely egalitarian romantic relationships among same-sex partners. The differentiating move between hamjins-gara’i and hamjins-bazi thus articulates a homonormative response to an antiheteronormative project.

The imagining of gay Tehran worked differently in these two domains. For the growing gay liberation movement of the 1970s in the United States, traveling to “gay Tehran,” in fiction or in person, was a search for one’s “own kind” beyond national borders. In that sense, it fit well with liberationist dreams of the internationalization of activism and with solidarity work based on “finding the same everywhere” (as in, “Sisterhood is Global”).

Within diasporic Iranian gay activist politics, imagining the gay Tehran of the 1970s provided a critical intervention in the Iranian cultural politics of denial that insisted on the foreignness of non-normative gender/sexual desires and practices. My point here is not to question the sociological existence of such non-normative desires and practices, but to suggest, rather, that imagining them and the period of 1970s as gay may prevent other, equally pertinent ways of thinking about the scene of male non-normative gender/sexuality during that decade. Actively un-familiarizing ourselves with what already has been read through the prism of gay Tehran would, I hope, open up the possibility of seeing differently, and asking different questions about, nonheteronormative practices of life at that time. Furthermore, the dominant narrative of the 1970s as gay Tehran has contributed to the notion of a sharp rupture with the 1980s, making the 1979 revolution into a radically transformative event, obscuring important continuities and different sorts of discontinuities.

The Spectacle of Unmanly Males

The gay Tehran I wish to reread was part of a complex, rapidly growing urban society, in certain domains of which particular styles of nonheteronormative male lives were becoming somewhat visible. This was particularly the case in the growing entertainment industry, which ran the gamut from modern film and television shows to nightclubs that catered to a range of class-inflected tastes. “Lower class” clubs were performance venues that sustained older and more traditional forms of male dance and entertainment, while the performance of such dances in newer, more cosmopolitan nightclubs, and in film, made them more visible to a layer of the urban middle-class population that
may not have been exposed to them in earlier decades; indeed, the urban middle class may well have developed its sense of modernness in part from the disavowal of such cultural enactments.

Mahin’s masculinity (chapter 3) was a strange yet familiar sight. Stories of females living unusual masculine lives were told in history books and in neighborhood gossip. In the more recent period of the 1950s through the 1970s, newspapers and magazines had become another site of such stories. Females living masculine lives fascinated the public. Khvandaniha, under the headline, “This woman works as a porter in men’s clothes in Amin al-Sultan Square,” reported:

“They who live and work there know her [Sughrá Valizadeh] as ‘Abdal-lah and do not know she is a woman. She says that she and her sister had worked as midwives for some thirty years, but the Ministry of Health—because they were not certified—stopped them from practicing. ‘After a few months of unemployment, I got myself a job in a drug den [shirah’kishkhanah], but then the government closed them down; thankfully I could kick the habit I had picked up there and am now healthy and strong.’ She says after presenting for jobs as a woman with no success she decided to don men’s clothes and started working here and no one knows that.”13

In many of these cases, especially in the women’s press of the 1960s, the stories of females living masculine lives would be rescued from the suspicion of “improper sexuality” through the affirmation of the modern marriage ideal, the failure of which had pushed women into these unusual paths. Alternatively, economic hardship and the social inhospitality of many professions to women were said to have forced the choice of masculine living (see figure 4.1 and its caption).

It is seductive to read these stories as tales of resistance against compulsory heterosexuality. Reading them through a related, but not identical, lens of the “marriage imperative” offers a different possibility. As I have suggested in the introduction and will discuss at more length in chapter 7, getting married was, and continues to be, a life-cycle social expectation, without which one does not become an adult in others’ and possibly in one’s own perception. The marriage imperative, when not reduced to compulsory heterosexuality, often has been discussed as a reproductive demand or a requirement of gender conformity. Tze-Ian D. Sang’s perceptive and historically rich analysis, for instance, raises similar issues vis-à-vis the collapse of the marriage imperative into compulsory heterosexuality. She focuses largely on its work for the production of normative womanhood.14 But men are as expected to get married as women. I do not
deny the workings of these other demands, but suggest that there is something more. The adulthood of everyone is bound to marriage. It is almost incomprehensible that someone would wish not to marry.

If we assume that the key imperative is not the taboo of homosexuality (compulsory heterosexuality) but rather the marriage imperative, then the pressure on women and men was/is not so much not to have sex with “their own sex” as not to become resistant to marriage, not to resist the dominant determinant of one’s life plot. Many mothers, for instance, could identify with, and even take (hidden) pride in, their daughter’s urge for some degree of masculine behavior. Fathers may similarly appreciate the subtext of the desirability of masculinity. All this parental tolerance, if not pride, would slowly fade into anxiety and eventually into pressure if a non-normative daughter did not grow out of these tendencies by her twenties and if the early signs of masculinity translated into a refusal to marry. To really get out of the marriage imperative, a woman would have to enact a surfeit of resistance; that is, a degree of over-performance of masculinity by a woman could let her off the hook, with

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**Figure 4.1.** Guli, a young woman who has worked as a man for years “as a porter and a bus driver. . . . At the age of forty, she has not yet got married. . . . She loves her work and hates marriage. Who knows what events have made her be so skeptical about men?” Khvandaniha, May 28, 1968; story based on a report in Itila‘at-i banwan.
the family giving up on her as a woman. This usually means losing familial protection; it means possibly being shunned and feeling forced to move away and to actually live as a man, to make a living as a man, and possibly to live in men’s clothes. When the cases of females living as men could not be subsumed into dominant narratives of forced marriages, abusive husbands, or economic hardship, they would be presented as bizarre exceptions, verging on insanity. This was the case of the two sisters from Qazvin, sixty-one and sixty-five years old, who had lived the previous forty-five years of their lives in an abandoned Qajar-era fort, largely cut off from the outside world. Even in this case, they were said, as highly educated women of their time, to have opted for this life to refuse unwanted marriages.15

The trouble with Mahin’s style of masculinity was that she had not only combined her masculinity with same-sex desire, but she also was reported to have recruited other young women to engage in non-normative sexual practices and disrupted marriages. She had pressured Zahra to refuse her family’s entertainment of marriage proposals and disrupted the marital harmony of her married friends by providing them with an alternative object of desire and sexual pleasure. She had “overdone” female masculinity.

The acceptable configuration of public female non-normative gender self-styling (up to the limit of marriage disruption) did not have an equivalent for males: males who did not wish to marry or could not perform their “marital duties” could not get away from their social obligations through a surfeit of feminine performance.

In earlier times, dressing as a woman and opting for a womanly career could mean “housewifery,” that is, becoming a male kept by another man.16 By the mid-twentieth century, such behavior would have added scandalous shame to the insult and injury of refusing adult manhood. Males who wanted to live womanly lives tended to keep it a secret, fearing censure and punishment. Such was the fate of a male person who had worked for nineteen years as a female masseur in a women’s public bath.17 In another case, a male person who had lived and worked for the previous fifty years as a woman was forced into men’s clothes, with her hair shaved off her head.18 In yet another case, a male person refused to leave the hospital in men’s clothes after her forced “disambiguating sex-surgery” and declared her intention to continue living a womanly life.19 These reports never had any admiring or approving edge to them; rather, they were cause for apprehension and incomprehension.

A less scandalous report about “the young man who dresses and behaves in a completely contrary fashion,” who wore his hair long and was a dancer, constituted an exception: He was thought to stand out like “a red bean on
the surface of rice pudding.” He was a spectacle. *Khvandaniha’s* lengthy account was made possible in part by displacing his contrarian self-presentation onto his “unusual background”—of an Azarbaijani father and a mother from Istanbul. The report vacillated in tone, sometimes sympathetically presenting the “young man” as a philosophically oriented intellectual, at other times as a weird recluse, and sometimes as someone whose unconventional self-presentation produced unwanted social reaction: He was followed by curious street kids who made fun of him; he had been arrested twice for appearing inappropriately in public. A line drawing of his face (compared with a full-stature photograph) made his face appear more female by emphasizing his plucked eyebrows and giving him fuller hair (figures 4.2 and 4.3). The sketch performed a “distancing mimicry” that pulled him toward a woman-presenting male, imagining the “contrarian young man” as an out-of-place character and presumably explaining his street harassment.

He was said to have eventually opted for a more routine life, making his living by opening a sandwich shop on Maulavi Street in a popular southern Tehran neighborhood. His “strange” style of public self-presentation and his former chosen profession (a dancer with an Azarbaijani dance troupe) positioned him on the border of social tolerance: men as dancers or performers of female roles in theatrical and, more recently, cinematic roles.

The figure of the male performer or dancer has a long history in Iran. Anthony Shay’s numerous essays offer us a rich conceptual vocabulary for understanding the cultural work of this figure and its history, not only for the Tehran of the 1970s but also into the present. Several of his propositions are pertinent here. He challenges “the romantic views that many gay men hold that the presence of male dancers and the sexual interest expressed toward them by Middle Eastern men somehow constitutes evidence for an environment accepting of homosexuality and a utopian gay paradise,” and “the oft-expressed viewpoint that male dancers were imitating or parodying women. . . . The presence of male dancers, professional and nonprofessional, in public and private space requires a (re)evaluation of the meaning of these male bodies.” Shay argues that in the 1970s in Iran, modern choreographers attempted to eradicate traces of the earlier male choreographic tradition by creating what he calls hypermasculine styles of movement for male dancers, often within “folk dance” choreographies, “suitable to the urban Westernized male and their sensitive elite audiences.” As he notes, the older style of male dancers continued their performances in “the gritty underworld” of nightclubs and cafés. Indeed, “[i]n the late 1960s and early 1970s a wave of nostalgia for Qajar-era [before 1925] performing and decorative styles swept through Tehran, where a number
Figures 4.2 and 4.3. Both these images are from Khvandaniha, January 29, 1955.
of cafés sprang up in which former boy dancers, now elderly but still capable performers, appeared.\textsuperscript{23} The sharp contrasts between the two modes of male dance performance, Shay concludes, point to “the underlying changes in attitudes toward sexuality and gender.”\textsuperscript{24}

For the emerging urban middle class, the more traditional male dancer and entertainer may have come to mark lower-class taste and were tainted with the immorality of suspected sexual availability. The male dancer and zan-push (woman-attired) male actors, however, not only continued to occupy the café entertainment scene and some of the more “gritty” nightclubs, but the figure of the zan-push got a new, somewhat more respectable, life in the growing cinema and theater productions.\textsuperscript{25}

The dominant style of the zan-push was what Beeman calls “pretend mimic,” that is, looking like a woman but achieving a “distance” from the female through exaggeration of clothing, makeup, the high pitch of the voice, and body movements. What cultural spaces did this “distance” provide in the 1940s and 1950s? This was a style of performance that accommodated significant traffic, even then, between the worlds of stage and screen and the ongoing public conversations about sex change.

In 1955, for example, Khvandaniha published in its regular “Album of Artists” page a picture of the actor ‘Ali Tabish, dressed as a woman, along with a commentary entitled “Is this a man or a woman?” (figure 4.4):

You have frequently read in the press that in such and such corner of the world, for example in Europe or America, a woman or a man was fed up with her/his own (sex!) and with a surgery her/his constitution was changed.

This (twentieth-century whim) has not yet found adherents in Iran, so the man you see in this picture in women’s clothes, standing with special coquettishness, is our very own famous actor ‘Ali Tabish. Since he hasn’t had any luck with manhood, he decided to don for a few hours the attire of (devil’s apprentices), not in street and public but in the play (Charley’s Aunt) in which he plays the role of a capricious woman.\textsuperscript{26}

Zan-push performances were included in many films that in a later period were called “FilmFarsi.” Among these are Madmuazil Khalah (Ms. Auntie, 1957, Amin Amini) with ‘Ali Tabish playing the aunt figure; Zalim-bala (translated on the film posters as The Naughty Girl, 1957, Siamak Yasami); and Shabaji Khanum (1958, Sadiq Bahrami). The anxiety in the mid-1950s over waking up as the other sex also was reflected in the satirical 1959 film, ‘Arus Kudumah? (Which one is the bride?, Farrukh Ghafrari).\textsuperscript{27}

As Beeman notes, “Sexuality is also an important undertone for the ‘mi-
metic’ female portrayers. . . . Since these actors, with few exceptions, claim to be fully heterosexual males, this situation can be an uncomfortable social position for them.”28 This “uncomfortable social position” was much murkier for male dancers who performed in the “gritty world” of nightclubs. Along with the more respectable reports of “Album of Artists,” Khvandaniha (and other magazines) would also publish alarming reports, with lurid photographs, about the nightclub life of Tehran (as well as major European cities), emphasizing that these spaces were populated by men dressing up as women to exploit male clients.29 They produced a steamy and seamy nightlife designed to rob hard-working citizens by luring them with the temptations of alcoholic drinks, entertaining music and dances, and “available” male and female singers and
dancers. According to one 1954 report, there were a total of 332 cafés and restaurants in Tehran, only a dozen of which offered musical and dance performances. These were said to be largely clustered in two areas of Tehran, by this time known for their more “gritty” nightlife—Lalah-zar and the district around Shahr-i nau (Tehran’s red-light district). The report further implied an overlap between sex work and the entertainment offered in these nightclubs by describing several of them as run by women named “Khanum,” a designation often used, in this context, for women who bossed their own group of sex workers. The report included several photographs of performers and clients, including one of a male dancer, Baqir Namazi (figure 4.5).

At times, a male dancer would attract public attention accidentally—often in the context of charges of “taking advantage” (ighfal, a word with a high sexual charge) of men or of scuffles leading to injuries and the pressing of charges, all of which worked to consolidate the association of some sort of criminality with non-normative gender/sexual presentations. Such was the case of Akbar Burzabadi, who was arrested after knifing one of a group of young men who had been harassing him on a Tehran street. Akbar was “a woman-presenting male [mard-i zan-numa] who makes himself up as a woman and works at one of Tehran’s popular musical [saz-u-zarbi] café-restaurants. Yesterday evening, Akbar, with wig and heavy make-up, left home to go to work.” He was followed and harassed by a group of young men and eventually attacked them with a knife, injuring one of them, who filed a complaint. The paper added, “The officers [at the police station] indicated that he had been booked several times in the past on the charge of taking advantage of men; he sits at café customers’ tables, looking like a woman, and taking advantage of them.”

Within this context, a “distancing” style of feminine mimesis could signal particular kinds of gender/sexual desire: it could be enacted by males who wanted to present themselves as female-acting non-females (thus the need for “distancing exaggerations”) who wanted to be desirable to men who desired female-presenting non-females. At the same time, some males opted for “complete” mimesis—working as female dancers and intending to be taken totally for women. This style of mimesis allowed some males to live as women. Such, for instance, was the case of one café dancer known as Nargis Salihi, who was believed to be a woman and who had worked for five years before it was found out that s/he was Nasir Salihi (figure 4.6). The “outing” resulted from a café scuffle that led to Salihi’s detention, along with a number of clients, at the local police station. When interrogated at the police station, Salihi explained that she had moved to Tehran from Arak (a small provincial town) five years ago. Because she “was very fond of wearing women’s clothes,” she explained,
Figure 4.5. Male dancer Baqir Namazi, said to have performed well in several countries. Kh wandaniha, September 25, 1954, p. 37.
“I made myself look like a young woman. I then went to the town registry in Ray [a suburb of Tehran] and declared my birth certificate lost and requested a new one in the name of Nargis Salihi. With the new birth certificate, I began a career of singing and dancing and have developed a circle of admirers.”

As we will see more fully in chapter 7, both styles of self-fashioning continue to inform MtF public presentations today and are often cause for tension between those who want to completely live as women, and thus argue against the exaggerated femaleness of those other MtFs, who, in their opinion, “are giving a bad name to the community.” In the 1970s, these two analytically distinct styles of male non-normativity existed more as a continuum, which also included a range of other strategies for males living as women. Some were individuals such as Nargis, who lived as women without undergoing any form of medicalized body modification, but a growing number of people opted for various degrees of hormonal and surgical intervention.
The world of non-normative males was visible in the 1970s not only in the “gritty world” of entertainment. The upper echelons of an expansive art world—painters, photographers, television producers, and performers—were also rumored to harbor nonmasculine males. Indeed, the two poles of the culture industry were not sealed off from each other. At elite parties catering to males who dressed as women, members of high society mingled with khamums who worked in menial day jobs. One difference was that the very rich could dress up at home and be safely driven to such parties by their chauffeurs, whereas the less affluent had to change clothes upon arrival. These parties were the equivalent of women’s nights out, daurah parties (women’s parties that rotated among different women’s homes). The more well-to-do males would throw lavish parties and invite the rest of their circles, sometimes numbering in the hundreds.

Not all men-loving men in Iran during this period opted for either of these styles, of course. Many lived lives scarcely distinguishable from those of other men. They too socialized with the “more flamboyant” non-masculine-attired males. These spaces of socialization acquired the label of “gay parties” or “gay bars” in international gay media coverage, as well as in collective memories of 1970s Tehran for Iranians in later decades. But males living as women who socialized through these networks did not consider themselves homosexual and defined their relationship with men in heterosexual terms. Within these intimate (khaudi) circles, they addressed each other by their female names. Many lived double lives; they dressed as men, went to work as men, and some were even married and had children. At night, they lived as women. The parties were not a space for finding potential lovers or partners, but rather a place to dance and have fun, to exchange gossip about one’s adventures, and to meet people like oneself (which by definition excluded people who were one’s target of desire).

Some of these trends continue into the present. Today’s “gay parties” similarly are seen to be for people of the same kind. Behzad had not been in any relationship for a while at the time of our second conversation in July 2007. All three of his previous significant relationships had broken up through the loss of his lover to marriage (with a woman). Now in his early fifties, he seemed resigned to living his life and waiting for something to just happen. When I asked him why he was not going to any gay parties to meet someone, he was puzzled: “why would I go to a party to spend time with people like myself? Years ago, in my twenties and thirties, when I was still trying to figure things out for myself, I used to go to some of these parties—they are good for the younger folk so they don’t feel they are the only ones who are not like
others.”39 Cyrus, another gay-identified man in his early thirties, similarly found the parties not to be where one goes to find someone: “They are for hanging out with like-minded men.” He has met the last two of his partners at the gym to which he goes regularly: “The men who pick me up, they are all either married—and I move away from them as soon as I find out—or else I lose them to marriage sooner or later. It is very depressing.”40 The distinction within the party scene that Behzad and Cyrus were reporting is between those who, like Behzad and Cyrus, do not look very different from straight men and those who have more feminine—“girlie-like,” Behzad called it—styles of self-presentation. But they would all be looking “out there,” not in the gay parties, for potential lovers and partners.

Being like each other, then, tended (and tends) to exclude coupling as lovers. This structure of desire and identification reflects the dominance of a larger discourse in twentieth-century Iran that has transformed males and females into “opposite sexes,” and which depends on the notion that “opposites attract”—a discourse that sets the parameters of sexual/gender subjectivity, whether normative or not.41

We have no ethnographies, nor published memoirs, that would map this culture in the 1970s. We have instead a vast circulation of rumors from the time that have since acquired the status of fact. It was said, and still often is, that Iranian television had become a safe haven for gay men, who enjoyed the protection of not only Reza Qotbi, the director of National Iranian Radio and Television and a cousin of Queen Farah Pahlavi, but, somewhat equivocally, of the Queen herself. When the Tehran daily Kayhan published a report about the purported wedding celebration of two gay men in a club, the Queen is said to have reacted negatively and asked the men involved and their friends to behave more responsibly and avoid such excesses in the future. In their defense, the men are said to have clarified that the celebration was a birthday party and had been misreported in the press.42 Kavus, a self-identified gay man in his late fifties in 2007, similarly recalled the public view of these marriages as misrecognition: “How could two khanums get married?” He laughed. He described these occasions as “dressing-up parties,” in which at times two khanums would dress up as a bride and groom couple. These were carnivalesque performances, he said.43 In real life, he added, “both of them would be interested in straight [the word pronounced as in English] married men. Targeting married men was like a conquest, a proof of womanliness. In these parties, they would brag about who had succeeded in breaking up which marriage.” If a khanum developed a special relationship with a lover, sometimes, s/he would “marry” this guy. But the occasion was not a public ritual, nor celebrated by
a “wedding party.” At most, for memory’s sake, they would go to a photographer for a “wedding portrait,” for which occasion the khanum would change to a wedding gown. A painting by Iranian artist Ghasem Hajizadeh is possibly drawn from such a photograph (see plate 1).

Painting from photographs in Iran goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when it began to supplement portraiture. As Layla S. Diba has observed, for Persian artists of the period, who “aspired to depict their subject as realistically as possible,” photography provided the means “to produce accurate compositions.”44 In many of his paintings, Hajizadeh has ventured to connect with this earlier tradition, but he is decidedly not aspiring for realism.45 He has produced numerous (possibly more than a hundred) paintings that seem to be based on the socializing culture of males living as women in Iran of the 1970s (see plate 2 for one such painting). Taken as a whole, these paintings constitute a visual ethnography of that scene.

Hajizadeh’s deployment of the visual gap in his paintings from photographs restages the “distancing” between “body and appearance” to which woman-presenting males aspire. The very expression mard-i zan-numa (woman-presenting male) contains a level of linguistic double-valence that lends itself to multiple associations and incitements. The suffix -numa is linked with the verb numudan (to display, to present), making the male in mard-i zan-numa do the work of displaying womanhood. Their very enactment of presenting-like, in apparent dissonance from their body, displays a representation of womanhood. At the same time, and linked with the same root, -numa pulls in layers of meaning from its association with numayish (a show, a theatrical performance), numayishgah (exhibition), and numayish dadan (to stage an appearance, to show off). In other words, mard-i zan-numa in her/his exhibiting, showing off, mode of self-presentation as-if-a-woman performs and displays at once womanhood with a “distance” and performativity of womanhood itself.46

Hajizadeh’s style of painting from photographs, yet distancing the painted image from the photograph, resonates with this “distancing mimesis” of womanhood performed by woman-presenting males. Photography’s claim to authenticity, in particular within the earlier tradition of realistic painting in Iran, parallels the biological body’s claim of some authentic sex/gender; Hajizadeh’s painting from photographs enacted the “distancing mimicry” that a mard-i zan-numa presented in her/his dissonant performance of the truth of the body. The paintings retain an “as-if-photography” quality and gesture in a similar way both toward and simultaneously away from a scene of authenticity, as mard-i zan-numa does vis-à-vis “as-if-woman.” Cultural recognition of the works as paintings from photographs may even incite a desire to see/
imagine what the original may have been. Similarly, a mard-i zan-numa may incite imagining what s/he would have been as a “real woman.” As Brad Epps has suggested, “the painting from the photograph . . . stages, or restages, some of the tensions between the biological body and social self-presentation (self-styling), between ‘being’ and ‘appearing.’”

The effect of Hajizadeh’s distancing mimicry is particularly acute in his painting of a woman-presenting male with his/her man in a composition that is reminiscent of studio wedding portraits of the period (see plate 1). The painting moves away from a presumed photograph, but within the photographic/painted text there is a second distancing as well. The “wedding” moves away from a wedding. Here two “major” acts of distancing mimicry are performed, the effects of which are further amplified in a series of “minor” distancings: the dress is not quite a wedding dress, nor is the groom quite as prepped up as a “real” groom. Unlike most studio wedding portraits of twentieth-century Iran, the bride and groom are not facing the camera frontally, but instead are turned toward each other bodily; the studio space also does not mimic the usual studio backdrops (figure 4.7).

The combined effect of the major and minor distancing mimeses keeps the viewer in suspense, in a state of unease provoked by the scandal of sex/gender uncertainty: What are we looking at? Are there two men? One man with a woman? Are they, or are they not, in a studio? Are they, or are they not, a bride and groom?

The Shame of Unmanly Males

The emergence in the 1970s of more visible scenes of nonheteronormative maleness, along with increased knowledge of such scenes circulating in speech and print, was widely perceived as a moral corruption of Iranian culture through Westernization. The perception had class connotations: only elite society in Tehran was assumed capable of fostering such calamities. The extensive circulation of extravagant rumors about high-society circles of nonheteronormative males became part of the criticism of Pahlavi court culture, which was seen as corrupt and as encouraging further corruption. While subsequent to the establishment of the Islamic Republic and the world-wide growth of Islamist movements, one tends to associate such criticism with an “Islamist backlash”; in the 1970s, attacks against an “excess of cultural liberties” were a much more broadly voiced concern. What sustained the power of nonheteronormative maleness as a sign of excessive liberty (or, as it was by then commonly called, “Westoxication”) was the shame and disgust associated with
Figure 4.7. Studio Wedding Picture, 1919, photographed by Minas Patkerhanian, 12×9 cm. Source: Parisa Dadmandan (Nafisi), Chihrah-nigaran-i Isfahan: Gushah-i az tarikh-i 'akkasi-i Iran.
any public spectacle of non-masculine maleness and nonheteronormative sexuality.

What made “it”—this preferably unnamed horror—a cultural assault and moral insult was above all not its putative Western origin, but the shame of being kuni. The most derogatory word in the realm of sexuality, kuni literally means anal, but in Persian it exclusively means to be receptive of anal penetration. Young male adolescents often first become familiar with the word as that which signals the edge of abjection; for instance, when parents warn their young son to stay away from certain activities (such as dance) and from certain (ill-reputed) persons, lest they become kuni. The equivalent word for women, baruni, does similar disciplinary work, but its moral load is much lighter. The gut shame associated with kuni seems to have made it resistant to any measure of self-appropriation and re-signification. When the word gay began to arrive, some did not take to it. Behzad said he initially “disliked gay because in my mind I would translate it into kuni and I stayed away from it.” Ironically, the more recent acceptance and circulation of gay in Persian signifies the same aversion to kuni: the need for a word that is “not-kuni.”

Manifestations of shame and disgust saturate innumerable small details of personal lives. When Behzad, from the secular, educated, urban middle class, at the age of thirty felt compelled to explain to his cousin, who had been his playmate ever since childhood, that the reason for his refusal to get married was that he was “man-loving,” the cousin ran to the bathroom to throw up. Just as often, the disgust was/is translated into put-down sneers and derogatory name-calling, most commonly iva’khvahar. At the societal level, both generic humor and jokes targeting particular individuals sustain the work of anxiously warding off the threat of being “like that” oneself.

Amir ‘Abbas Huvayda, Iranian prime minister from 1965 to 1978, and many members of the court and its surrounding société culture were regular targets of such humor. A more popular target was Faridun Farrukhzad, a well-known entertainer, TV performer, and programmer. He produced the popular program Mikhak Nuqrah-i (Silver Coronation); he also performed in some of the more upper-echelon nightclubs and summer resorts.

My concern here is not whether Farrukhzad or Huvayda were gay (in whatever sense of that word); rather, I ask what cultural significance the public perception of their being “like that” may have had. What cultural labor did the public circulation of satire and mockery—rumored or printed—around their presumed effeminacy, questionable masculinity, and sexual impropriety perform? What was the relation of mockery to the regulating work of moral prohibitions and legal sanctions against sodomy, which was always assumed to
be the sole meaning of such male-male relationships and was the reason for the assignation of the term *kuni*? What was the relation between these public circulations of non-normative, masculine-presenting males and the growing public visibility of woman-presenting males?

Consider, for instance, this provocative piece about Prime Minister Huvayda’s trip to Qazvin. The unnamed columnist of the satirical page “Kargah-i namadmali” wondered why, unlike the Prime Minister’s other provincial trips—never a confidential matter—this trip was kept secret. Back in 1956, when Minister of Justice Gulsha’ian had dissolved and re-formed the High Court, the daily *Kayhan* ran a satirical piece recalling that when ‘Ali Akbar Davar (1885–1937), Minister of Justice, sent new judges to Qazvin who did not please Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali Sabit (the deputy from that city), the latter challenged the minister in a parliamentary session, asking if the said judges were “approved by the world [dunyapasand] or are they favored by Qazvinis [Qazvini-pasand]”? The question, the paper continued, elicited riotous laughter in the parliament, since among the members of parliament some were known to be “Qazvini-pasand.” As a result of this question, Davar had cancelled those appointments. So now, *Kayhan*’s writer demanded, one wanted to be certain that the new reorganization of the judiciary would be acceptable—not simply Qazvini-pasand. Other Qazvini jokes of this period played on the double meaning of *jinsi* as both sexual and in-kind. When a severe earthquake hit the area around Qazvin in 1962, a “Kargah-i namadmali” column later recalled, the popular storyteller Subhi Muhtadi, who was fundraising in a gathering for the earthquake survivors and was refused by a “good-looking young man” (on the grounds that aiding the earthquake survivors was government’s responsibility), retorted by saying “This young man likes to aid his earthquake-survivor brothers in-kind [kumak-i jinsi].”

Ethnic jokes saturate Tehrani culture. The culture of text messaging and the mass circulation of images on the Internet has increased the ubiquity of circulation of these jokes in recent years. Tehranis think Azarbaijanis (or indeed all Turkish-speaking people and others ethnically coded as Turks) are stupid (“as stupid as a donkey”); Rashtis (assumed all male) are dishonorable and don’t care about the sexual transgressions of their female kin (especially their wives); Isfahanis are at once stingy and business-smart; people of Luristan are plain dumb—the list of assignations goes on, and so does the proliferation of related jokes.

The jokes related to Qazvin, however, stand out as a genre of its own. Qazvinis are “well-known” among Tehranis for having a preference for *kun* (ass). Being kuni falls on the side of an “unmentionable assignation,” an abomina-
tion. It provokes deep disgust; the jokes attempt to avert such provocation. The low comedy of Qazvini jokes complements the disgust-provoking unmentionability of kuni. Disgust makes things unmentionable, intensifying the spectral danger of the disgusting thing. The low comedy of Qazvini jokes works to circulate the knowability of the unmentionable in polite, enlightened company who would of course deny any such prejudicial sentiment. Because of this subtext of disgust, it is almost impossible to own the comic assignation. Iranian Turkish speakers can, and do, play with the jokes on stupidity by one-upmanship, returning the favor of stupidity to Tehranis (or more generally to Persian speakers, generically referred to as Fars-ha); Isfahans can appropriate their smart economic know-how as a positive character; Rashtis can boast about their gender/sexual liberalism; even Lurs could turn their accusation of dullness into a weapon of the weak. But what can one do with kuni? To claim the joke would put the person in a disgustingly abominable, totally abject position—unless and until the rest of one’s national compatriots are willing to come to terms with their disgust.61

What does that “gut” feeling of revulsion speak to? Why does the spectral threat of being/becoming kuni seem to be so shattering to a modern (male) Iranian’s sense of self? It is impossible—or, at any rate, it is not my project—to give a convincing etiology of disgust. But it is critical to ask what cultural work disgust performs. What does it do to “the disgusting”? What does it achieve for “the disgusted”? Miller asks, “Why is it that disgust figures so prominently in routine moral discourses, even more so perhaps than the idioms of other moral emotions such as guilt and indignation?”62

The shift from guilt and indignation to disgust that Miller discusses is a historically produced shift in idioms, possibly related to the emergence of a human-referenced sense of being in the world in which the ground for morality can no longer be as solid as divine prohibitions. In the Islamic world, in the passages of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) dealing with sodomy (lavat), one does not sense a sentiment of disgust. The dominant message in these passages is the enormity of the sin, of the transgression of what is referred to as hurmat-i dubur, the sanctity/prohibition of the anus. It is the enormity of the sin that aroused the anger of God, one is told, such that “a whole people were punished for it.”63 Whereas lavat is sinful, being kuni is disgusting. For those who have become modern, the sentiment of disgust seems to replace the work of hurmat and, perhaps, as Miller suggests, “acts as a barrier to satisfying unconscious desire.”64 It is this work that complements the laughing labor of the low comedy of barely disguised jokes about the Qazvinis, those infamous desirers of kunis.65
Other modes of comic relief about the more public circulation of images and self-presentations of nonheteronormative males in the 1970s focused on Faridun Farrukhzad (1938–92). A poet, singer, performer, actor, and television personality, in life Farrukhzad was largely a subject of gossip and approbation; in death, he has been belatedly acclaimed for his poetry and—once he was forced to leave Iran in the early 1980s—his later political activism in Europe. He was brutally murdered, it is assumed, at the instigation, if not the direct involvement, of elements within the Islamic Republic. Mocked and reviled, Farrukhzad also has provided, then and now, a figure of identification for Iranian gay men. Pages of diasporic Iranian gay publications have articles, poetry, and celebrations of his life.

Almost as soon as he began his performance career in the late 1960s, Farrukhzad became the subject of gossip columns, where he was consistently mocked for his self-presentation. He seemed to be a modernist’s nightmare of the repulsions and seductions of a repressed past. What modernists had hoped to have buried in the past and in lower classes—that style of male dancing and entertaining that was deeply marked by gender/sexual inappropriateness and transgression—seemed to have found its way out not only into the more modern nightclubs but onto the national television. Farrukhzad’s shows were enormously successful. The way to ward off this ghost of the past, this class-misplaced figure, this popular spectacle of a returned repressed, was to crack jokes as one watched the show and to saturate the oral and printed gossip with sexual innuendos. Responding to an article in Sipid va siyah in which Mas’ud Farzad had suggested “most of our poets and writers and literary luminaries are sexual deviants except for Sadiq Hidayat,” the author of the satirical column “Kargah-i namadmali” argued that Sa’di’s generation experienced sexual deviancy because in their time women were veiled and interactions between girls and boys were very limited. Now that this was no longer the case, people like Faridun Kar and Faridun Bikar (Kar is a family name but also means work, labor; bikar is not a family name and means idle, unemployed—Farrukhzad’s occupation as an entertainer was not considered real work) have no excuse for being sexual deviants and become ankarah (“to engage in that”—unmentionable act) when the means to be inkarah (to engage in this) are available. Similarly, Khvandaniha reprinted a cartoon from the satirical weekly Taufig, targeting Farrukhzad, in the tradition of a male dancer, as “available” (figure 4.8).

What is remarkable in the incessant circulation and recirculation of reports about Farrukhzad was that a popular magazine such as Khvandaniha would at once recycle such reports and distance itself from the “gritty world” that fed
For instance, in the summer of 1972, a brawl broke out during Farrukhzad’s performance at the Motel Qu, a popular summer resort on the Caspian Sea, reportedly because he had made an inappropriate comment that had offended some in the audience and disturbed the family ambience of the place. Farrukhzad was beaten up, and the incident was reported in the press. The precipitating comment itself, however, is not reported, lending it the additional power of imaginative knowledge. Khvandaniha republished a four-page report about the episode that had appeared in Zan-i ruz, yet prefaced it by saying it was beneath the dignity of the journal and sensibilities of its readers for Khvandaniha to enter the scandalous world of what went on in the name of art, but since people took their families to these resorts, it was important for them to know to what they and their families would be exposed. Farrukhzad was an irresistible topic that simultaneously fascinated, allured, and repulsed. He was well aware of this and articulated the paradox of attraction and repulsion that people felt toward him: “People love me with fear,” he once said in an interview.

In January 1974, Farrukhzad married for a second time. Even before the
actual wedding, the press was full of gossip about the disputes between the couple and their imminent breakup. His new wife was Taraneh Sunduzi, a young woman of sixteen. A cover article in the April 24, 1974, issue of *Ittila’at-i banvan* already reported marital troubles and an unhappy Taraneh. Within months of their marriage, the couple filed for divorce, which became final on June 17, 1974. Taraneh’s father told reporters that when they had agreed to their daughter’s marriage to Farrukhzad, “they had been unaware of some of his moral characteristics.” The father’s vague reference to some “moral characteristics” was reported to have been articulated in more specific terms by his daughter: Taraneh was allegedly overheard telling her father, “Faridun is *dau-shakhsiyyat*; no woman, even of the worst sort, could live with him. It is good we are divorced.”

But what did the term *dau-shakhsiyyati* mean in this period? Literally a person “with two personalities,” like the related expression *dau-jinsi*, a person “with two sex/genders,” *dau-shakhsiyyati* did not have a stable meaning. Both were used interchangeably to refer to persons we would name bisexual, intersex, or transgender-/sexual. Up to the present, *dau-jinsi* has sustained its multiple meanings—much to the dismay of trans persons who neither consider themselves to be intersex nor like the undertone of association with nonheteronormative sexuality. It was the context of its reference to Faridun Farrukhzad—a public persona already much rumored to be sexually nonheteronormative, in part defined through the cultural association of a professional male dancer with sexual availability to other men—that determined its meaning. In this sense, Taraneh, speaking from the knowing position of a former wife, explicitly stated what presumably everyone already knew.

The disturbing specter of Farrukhzad’s performative persona also intersected with another source of anxiety in the 1970s; namely, that of “gender confusion.” Numerous social commentators wrote essays about the current state of youth, lamenting the disappearance of manly valor and of young men with long hair whose demeanor was that of a flirtatious girl, especially when they danced to rock music—all in “blind imitations of the West.” For a modern Iranian masculinity that had crafted itself through hetero-gendering previously androgynous concepts of beauty, and by the adoption of more disciplined and uniform sartorial practices during the first half of the twentieth century, the new fashions and tastes of the young seemed nothing short of a threat to national honor.

Part of this gender anxiety resided in fear of the failure of sex/gender recognition and of what that misrecognition would cause. One woman wrote:
Once upon a time when we looked at men, we had no doubt that they were men. But now with these Beatle-style hair-dos and pants that show the body and high-heeled shoes and manicured nails, we are forced to look again and again to remove our doubt. In the old days, if you called a man a woman, that was an insult, but now they try to make themselves look like women. Several days ago, in Nasir Khusrau Street in Tehran, I ran into a man who had braided hair, was displaying a lot of jewelry and exactly like women had plucked his eyebrows and wore heavy make-up. It is astonishing that these men who always considered women to be beneath them and thought of themselves as the superior sex are putting themselves in women’s place when it comes to dressing and make-up.  

Connecting such gender/sex ambiguity to sexual deviation was an easy imaginative leap. Under the bold headline, “The danger of women and men looking alike,” another newspaper article cautioned against the clothing, lifestyles, and work of women and men becoming too similar. This kind of confusion “threatens today’s civilization, in the same manner that two thousand years ago civilized nations such as Greece and Rome . . . were overthrown. In ancient Athens, before they were defeated by the Spartans, men had begun to make themselves up like women. . . . In ancient Rome too, similar things happened. . . . Moreover sexual deviancy, as it is today, became so prevalent that it caused their overthrow and destruction.” Societal destruction was not the fate of people of Lot only.

The Hope of Gender/Sex Ambiguity

The spaces opened up by a more visible nonheteronormative maleness and by gender/sex ambiguity nevertheless offered some hopeful possibilities for women-presenting males. As I have argued in chapter 2, one significant effect of the emergence of academic and vernacular sexology and psychology was that the affiliation between transsexuality and intersexuality was severed and transsexuality was placed squarely in the spectrum of deviant sexualities, in particular as an extreme form of homosexuality. This shift transformed transsexuality from a given, created, wondrous/strange category into a diagnostic/moral one. Not only did this shift pathologize transsexuality, immoralize it, it also linked it to the by-then established affiliation of homosexuality with criminality. Yet such immoral and criminal inscriptions did not affect woman-presenting males overnight. At least in the first half of the 1970s, there was no homogeneously dominant sense of moral reprehensibility. The dailies and
popular weeklies continued to report on sex-change operations without moral apprehension. Despite some negative, at times hostile, articles by scientists and legal professionals, living nonheteronormative lives had become visibly, though precariously, more possible. Paradoxically, the affiliation of woman-presenting males with the larger world of nonheteronormative males had provided possibilities for living alternative lives, with or without surgery. As I have argued already, “gay Tehran” was inclusive of a broad spectrum of male nonheteronormativity.

The press reports of surgeries performed in Iran were particularly important in informing woman-presenting males of more affordable possibilities, which until then had seemed to be available only at great cost in Europe. The 1973 Kayhan report on the srs performed in Shiraz (discussed in chapter 2), for instance, had inadvertently advertised what the process would be for any interested reader: psychological consultation and acquiring permission from the Legal Medical Board.

During the same period when Zan-i ruz was running various reports and articles related to the story of Zahra’s murder by her jealous lover Mahin, the rival women’s weekly, Itila’at-i banuan, ran the life story of Rashil (formerly Sa’id) Sa’idzadeh over eight weeks. The coverage in a popular women’s weekly transformed the coverage of sex change from short medical news items into a full-length, melodramatic, human interest story. In the first issue, a huge headline, running the entire width of the page, declared, “The 28-Year-Old Newborn to the World of Women.” A supra-title exclaimed “wondrous, extraordinary, unbelievable . . . but true!” while a subtitle explained that “Sa’id whom everyone thought of as a man has now become a coquettish woman!” (figure 4.9).

Every week, the story was accompanied by photographs of her after the sex change (see figures 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12).

Figure 4.9. Headline of first installment of Rashil’s story. Itila’at-i banuan, January 9, 1974.
Figure 4.10. Two photos of Rashil Sa’idzadeh, *Ittila’at-i banuvan*, January 9, 1974.

Figure 4.11. Another photo of Rashil, *Ittila’at-i banuvan*, January 16, 1974.
As if “seeing was not believing”—a weight of incredulity inherited from the preoperative status of woman-presenting males as inauthentic mimicry—Rashi’s various medical and legal documents were reproduced as well (figures 4.13 and 4.14).

Most important, Rashil’s story was narrated as her own story and in the first person. After a long, patronizing, introductory editorial note in the first installment (as well as shorter editorials in every issue), the story unfolds in Rashil’s narrative voice. The sustained narrative, serialized in the tradition of short novellas and accompanied by her postoperative photographs and legal and medical documents, fully fleshed out the story of a livable sex/gender-transitioned life. This was not a story of misery, misfit, and disorder, although all these elements were part of her story. This was instead a “sweet and interesting” story with a happy ending.

Both the editorial notes and Rashil’s narrative depicted Rashil both as an intersex and a trans person. The editorial described Rashil as one of those creatures to whom nature had been cruel; s/he was born “bilataklif” (in a conundrum). It described the successful surgery as one that had transformed and transferred Rashil “who belonged physiologically to the world of men . . . but had always considered herself to belong psychologically to the world of women” to her desired womanhood. Her own narrative placed more emphasis on sexual ambiguity. Even though she repeatedly noted that no one around her, including her mother, with whom s/he had gone to public baths through
her early elementary school years, had ever noticed any unusual physical distinctions, she was convinced from early on that s/he was different from her/ his brothers (s/he had six brothers and no sisters). When as a teenager s/he read a magazine article about hermaphrodites, s/he was convinced that s/he must be one, “a dau-jinsi [two-sexed], neither a boy nor a girl.” This belief was strengthened when in high school s/he actually met another student, Mahdi, who had been brought up as a girl before it was decided that s/he was closer to male and a surgical operation had “clarified and fixed” his/her sex. This convinced Rashil that “even though I am apparently a boy, I am really a girl in boy’s skin.” The comforting self-perception was somewhat dampened when Mahdi had told her/him that there was no one in Iran who could do this operation and s/he had been sent abroad. This began Rashil’s earliest surgical fantasies and later engagements with medical professionals.

Rashil’s nonheteronormative gender/sex identification (and, since her/his middle school years, sexual desire) found another familiar script as well: When s/he noticed an advertisement for an acting school, s/he decided that acting would be a fitting career—s/he could play female roles. The trouble was that

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by the mid-1960s, a growing number of young women were already turning to these schools: “I went to the school and registered for an acting class . . . but there were enough girls there and naturally they were assigned the female roles, so after a few sessions I dropped out.” Nonetheless, Rashil began to grow her/his nails and hair, pluck her/his eyebrows, use makeup, and pay attention to her/his dress style to make it more womanly—behavior that began to alarm her/his parents, especially because at this time her/his father had various employment appointments in smaller towns. Her/his father was concerned that people would begin to talk about Rashil (then Sa‘id) as a “sexual deviant” and asked her/him not to make her/himself look like a woman in excess (dar zan-numa shudan ifrat nakun). The father also began to look for doctors from whom to seek medical advice. After several crushes (all on young men), Rashil (then Sa‘id) developed a loving and caring relationship with Hushang, an electronic technician, who also encouraged her/him to seek surgical treatment, declaring that he was deeply in love with her/him and would marry her/him after surgery. Hushang died in a car accident, which devastated Rashil (then Sa‘id). By this time, her/his family was transferred back to Tehran and s/he began to look for an acting job. S/he indeed got a chance to play the part of a young girl when, because of a family crisis, the assigned actress did not show up on filming day. Rashil (then Sa‘id) continued to pursue acting in female roles, largely in small marginal casts. S/he met a male actor, developed a close friendship with him, and accompanied him to parties fully dressed as a woman.

What eventually pushed her/him to seek sex-change surgery was a continuous entanglement with military conscription officers who were tracing her/his absence from the army when s/he had become eligible for the two-year service. The army medical doctor diagnosed her/him as trans and began her/his legal process of transition. After a few initial tests, s/he was sent to the courts to get referred to the Legal Medical Board. There s/he was interviewed by a four-member board composed of a surgeon, a gynecologist, a psychologist, and a plastic surgeon. Several weeks of further tests and four months of psychological counseling finally took Rashil to Tehran’s Asia Hospital, where Dr. Taqavi performed a series of four surgeries, the first of which occurred on February 28, 1973.

The eight-week run of Rashil’s story in a popular women’s weekly, which built upon previous decades of news of intersex surgeries reported as sex change as well as reports of prominent international sex-change surgeries, transformed the idea of sex change into a tangible possibility within the public imagination. Rashil’s detailed life story contributed to a pattern of life narra-
tives that would structure much of the scientific and popular writings, including autobiographical writings, about transsexuality to the present day.

As the story of Rashil Sa’idzadeh indicates, it was still possible to write, even at great length, about trans persons (especially if their gender/sexual non-normativity could be vaguely associated with a physical intersex condition) in a way that was unthinkable to write about cross-dressing males without surgical modification who were living as women. Rashil’s story was framed with sympathy and at times as a form of heroism that triumphed against all odds. The woman-presenting males, on the other hand, could be laughed at, mocked, sniggered about, or tolerated in hostile silence. They could be subject to moral outrage and criminal suspicion. By the mid-1970s, however, the medical establishment, possibly alarmed at the growing rate of sex-change surgeries performed outside any norms of institutional medical supervision, transferred the moral judgment against homosexuality onto trans persons. It took the professional and disciplinary power of the mci to bring the full weight of opprobrium associated with homosexuality to bear on the life options of woman-presenting males, thereby delineating and enforcing a kinship relationship between male homosexuality and MtF trans.

*Science Rules on Unmanly Males*

Formed in 1969, the mci established a whole series of regulations for medical practice during the first years of its operation. It also acted as the authority where complaints about medical practice could be filed and reviewed. In the early 1970s, it began to produce guidelines on new medical practices, such as acupuncture. Indeed, its rulings on sex-change surgery and acupuncture were decided in the same session of the board of directors on September 28, 1976. Alarmed by the apparent increase in public awareness and the accompanying increase in the performance of sex surgeries among woman-presenting males, the mci decided to ban sex surgeries except in the case of intersex individuals. A huge front-page headline in the daily Kayhan informed the public of this decision on October 10, 1976 (see figure 4.15).

The page 2 text of the report explained that the decision “meant that sex-change through surgical operations and the like, which are aimed to solely change someone’s apparent condition, is no longer permitted.” It quoted “an informed source” as saying that “this operation can cause psychological and physical harm and that is why the mci has banned it. . . . From now on any doctor who performs such operations will be legally prosecuted.” The paper added
that, “up to now some thirty sex-change operations have been performed in Iran.”

The full text of the decision was not published until some three years later, in the *Newsletter of the Medical Council of Iran*. It read:

In general, changing the apparent sex through surgical operations and the like is not possible, “neither from a psychological nor from a physiological respect.” Since this type of young man—who now insistently ask that their apparent condition be changed—cannot become a perfect woman in the future and become married to a man as a woman, and since the hole that is created for them will most likely become a source of chronic infections, and since there is a high probability that they will then express enmity toward the persons who have changed their condition and their sex, or at least they will express regret under conditions that a reversal to their prior condition is not possible, therefore such persons must be considered mental patients, they
must be treated psychologically, and one cannot permit that they would be moved out of their current condition and appearance.83

The delay in publication perhaps indicated a level of disagreement among medical practitioners on this issue that dated back to the 1940s, when Dr. Jahanshah Salih, in his textbook, had argued strongly against the possibility, advisability, and morality of sex change (discussed in chapter 2). Indeed, this difference of opinion continues to inform conceptions and practices of sex change in Iran today.

This statement is a remarkable document on many levels. It implies that to be a “perfect woman” is to be a perfect “hole,” and that surgically modified MtF trans individuals are deficient in womanhood to the extent that the surgeries they receive produce unsatisfactory holes. The concern articulated is evidently driven in part by the expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of surgery woman-presenting males were receiving. But it also was a move to put medicine’s house in order, in keeping with other efforts to promote professionalization. Officially no sex change was taking place in reputable hospitals, such as Women’s Hospital in Tehran; but some surgeons were carrying out sex-change operations either in smaller private clinics or by listing their clients as intersex.

A prominent gynecologist trained by Dr. Jahanshah Salih, Dr. Yahya Behjatnia—who for many years headed the Family and Infertility Clinic of the Women’s Hospital—recalled that many woman-presenting males would visit him and beg him to change their sex. But because this was not a permitted practice, if they persisted, he would advise them to go abroad.84 In some cases, by the time a woman-presenting male would come to him, he explained, s/he was dressed as a woman and looked like a woman; s/he had already obtained hormonal treatment, already had breasts, and would come for the removal of male sexual organs and vaginal construction. If there were any surgeries, he insisted, it was done surreptitiously.

Dr. Mehdi Amir-Movahedi, also a prominent gynecologist, was a highly regarded specialist in uterine surgeries, intersex surgeries, and vaginal construction for women who were born with no or very restricted vaginas.85 He served on the Board of Directors of the MC1 for several years and echoed many of the same observations as his colleague Dr. Behjatnia. He compared the situation to that of women seeking abortion. At the time, abortion was illegal except under strict certifications, such as a pregnancy threatening the mother’s life. Yet with the right connections and money, many doctors would perform abortions.86 At the Women’s Hospital, Dr. Movahedi explained, “we were very strict, we would not do anything that was against regulations, nor would we
train medical students for illegal surgeries. I worked there for some twenty to thirty years and I do not recall a single case of sex-change surgery. If any of our trainees performed this in their own clinic, the mci would prosecute them. I served on the Board of Directors, we would not authorize such surgeries; it was against the law. I served eight years as the chief of the mci court that dealt with complaints having to do with gynecological issues, and no such case was brought there.” Why, then, did the mci opt for issuing an official statement on sex change, I asked? “If there were any related complaints, they were not made when I served there. But many in the old days would do things for money and perhaps that is what happened. In my own practice, I did many vaginal constructions; but this was exclusively for intersex patients and a few times women came to me when they had marital problems and I would realize they did not have a proper vagina, just a small crevice that allowed menstrual blood flow. I would construct a vagina for them so that they could have intercourse with their husbands.”

That the text of the mci decision was not published until 1979, and that later interviews with prominent gynecologists who at the time worked in Women’s Hospital insistently emphasize that no sex-change surgeries were performed by reputable surgeons in this period, lead one to speculate that, despite persistent disavowals, reputable surgeons were indeed carrying out a whole range of surgeries that began to endanger the reputability of other surgeons. The division was not a matter of differing professional opinions about the advisability of genital surgery for woman-presenting males; rather, it involved matters of moral reputation. By this time, in the dominant scientific discourse, intersex and trans persons had come to belong to distinctly different categories. The latter had become affiliated with sexual deviancy rather than birth defect. It was the morality of sex change—or rather, the moral status of the persons requesting or performing sex change—that was at issue. This was indeed at the heart of public conversations at the moment of the mci decision against surgical sex change in 1976.

Both national dailies, Kayhan and Ittila’at, gave extensive coverage to this decision in 1976. Ittila’at, which was at the time viewed as the more establishment-oriented daily, ran a headline that the clerical establishment (jami’ah-i ruhaniyat), following the ban on sex-change surgery, called this operation a “forbidden and satanic act” (fi’l-i haram va shaytani). Ayatallah Haji Mirza Khalil Kamarah-i told the paper that in the Qur’an, Satan stated that he would tempt children of Adam away from the right path and make them change their constitution. Changing one’s sex is a prime example of changing one’s constitution; thus sex-change surgery is a satanic act and for-
bidden. An “informed source” was quoted to have told the paper that if any nonintersex healthy person underwent sex-change surgery and later the person filed a complaint against the surgeon, the latter would be prosecuted on the charge of causing damage to an organ and might have his or her medical license suspended for a period. The source added that there was already one such case in front of the mci.

Several doctors also were interviewed, including Dr. Amir-Movahedi, Dr. Husayn Parsa (at the time the director of Women’s Hospital), Dr. Hasan Muhajiri, and Dr. ‘Ali Asghar Pilasid. All agreed that sex-change surgeries on healthy males—males were the dominant topic of this conversation—must be forbidden, while those on intersex persons were corrective surgeries and were allowed. Several referred to healthy males who insisted on changing their sex as mental patients who should be treated psychologically.

Kayhan—reputedly somewhat off the establishment track—focused on doctors and interviewed woman-presenting males as well.88 Dr. Karimi-nizhad, a well-known geneticist and the head of the Genetics and Pathology Department at Women’s Hospital, spoke at length about hermaphrodites and why their operation should actually be called one of the “clarification of sex” and not “sex change.” He elaborated on the importance of helping intersex individuals through these sex-clarifying surgeries. Indeed, the whole report was framed as if the mci decision was about intersex persons, and throughout it used the word dau-jinsi (two-sexedness) in that sense, making no distinction between transsexuality and intersexuality. Dr. Ma’navi, a psychologist, also had taken the mci decision to mean the banning of intersex surgeries—a decision that he found unwise and opposed. The report concluded with a section titled “individual freedoms,” asking whether the issue should be considered one of individual autonomy over one’s life and inviting all its readers—doctors, psychologists, geneticists, and general readers—to contribute to a discussion of these issues.

The Kayhan coverage included two photographs, one of an operating room, with the caption reading: “In the operating room: This may be the last patient who is on the operating table for surgery and sex-change. From now on, according to the decision of the Medical Council, no doctor is authorized to operate on ‘two-sexed’ persons in order to change their sex.” The second (figure 4.16) showed a group of woman-presenting males, three of whom were visiting a friend who was recovering from her sex-change surgery.

With doctors, even those from Women’s Hospital, and prominent psychologists unclear about the implications of the mci decision, five days later a bulletin was issued to clarify the critical distinction that mci was now codifying
Figure 4.16. Three woman-presenting males visiting a friend, Monica, after her surgery. The caption reads in part: “Roya, Firuzeh, and Sahar (who are all boys who have womanly inclinations) look at her enviously. It is not clear if their wish to have surgery and change sex could be fulfilled any longer.” Kayhan, October 11, 1976.
in medical legislation. Kayhan ran the new mci bulletin under the headline: “Deviant young males desire sex-change.”

Pursuant to the news coverage of the decision concerning sex-change, and considering the legal responsibilities of the mci, it has become necessary to offer some explanation in order to clarify the matter for the general public as well as for our medical colleagues. The banning of sex-change concerns those who physiologically are perfect females or males. Some of these deviant youth, either from ignorance or from whimsical desire or due to psychological disorders, want to change their sex. It must be categorically said that this is impossible. Embracing such a capricious action leads to serious side effects and difficult-to-cure diseases. From the point of view of civil law, too, there will be numerous challenges. Often such surgeries result in regret, but there is no reversal, which leads inevitably to dangerous psychological illnesses, at times ending in suicide or in murder of the surgeon. Therefore, given all the issues involved and taking into account the opinion of experts and specialists in various medical fields, the mci warns those young persons who think such operations are possible of the dangerous and ominous consequences of the operation and explicitly declares that changing one sex to the other through such operations is impossible.

The bulletin ended by emphasizing that this was different from the case of “two-sexed individuals (hermaphrodites [transliterated in Persian]) who are sexually ambiguous and exhibit a disorder of a genetic, chromosomal, or other similar nature.” For such cases, after necessary tests had determined the sex of the person, surgical operations were not prohibited.

The 1976 mci decision had paradoxical effects. It must have made some surgeons more cautious about sex-change operations, but the practice of surgical sex change continued, along with media interest in it. The medical community as well, even in the publications of the mci itself, continued to produce articles that covered the subject of sex change in supportive terms. Indeed, the mci’s insistence on the impossibility of sex change, along with the simultaneous banning of surgeries deemed impossible, combined with the prominent coverage of the decision in the national dailies, created a productive public conversation that circulated knowledge of surgical sex change on an unprecedented scale. Against the mci’s intentions, perhaps, the very possibility of such operations received broader attention.

Noushin, for example, now in her fifties, said she had no idea this operation was possible in Iran before she read these newspaper reports. In the 1970s, she was part of the socializing circle of singers and entertainers. Her/his parents

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had noticed her/his “incredible voice” when s/he was a teenager and encouraged her/him to take voice lessons. She became a singer and continues to be in much demand even today, though now she performs only at private parties. She counted many of the famous male and female singers of the 1970s among her friends. She and another close friend, the son/daughter of a high-ranking army officer, had been planning in the mid-1970s to go to Europe for their sex-change surgeries. Her friend’s father was making arrangements for them to get an appointment at a famous London clinic. The MC1 decision and the newspaper coverage made them realize they could do it in Iran. Noushin and her friend visited Dr. Taqavi in Asia Hospital (the same hospital and surgeon who had operated on Rashil Sa’idzadeh). They also visited Dr. Behjatnia in the Women’s Hospital. Both doctors advised them to go abroad under the current circumstances. Eventually in 1977, after a period of hormone therapy in Iran, they went abroad for their operations.

Aside from going abroad or using “back-street” surgeons, the other option remained living as a woman-presenting male without surgical transformation (obtaining hormones seems to have continued to be as possible as before). Many took this latter route. One such woman-presenting male, now internationally known, was Maryam Khatun Mulk-ara (1950–2012).

Born male in 1950, s/he was given the name Faridun. According to her extensive articulations of her early life, already by the time she was in her late teenage years she would go out to parties dressed as a woman. When she was eighteen, during her return walk from a party, a car stopped and she noticed the occupants were “three transsexual males just like me.” The three had the male née-names Kayvan, Umid, and Siamak, but their current names were Kati, Sharareh, and Firuzeh. The moment she joined them in the car, they designated her Faranak.

The naming marked for Mulk-ara the beginning of a new life; she referred to this accidental meeting “as the true moment of my entry into a collectivity, a group of people like myself. Anywhere in public gatherings we would go, everyone present would want to socialize with us. In those days, there was no distinction between gay, two-sexed people or transsexuals. Everyone knew these individuals existed, but no one knew exactly what the problem was. People referred to all these individuals as ‘iva-khwahar’ [o’sister]” (7). Mulk-ara described these gatherings and parties as “a place where everyone was a woman, that is, even though they were known as males in social norms of recognition. . . . The ambience was just like the ambience of womanly gatherings. We talked about fashion and other women’s issues.” In the early 1970s, she
started working at the Iranian National Radio and Television, where she went to work dressed as a woman. It was there that she was first encouraged to go abroad for a sex-change operation. She spent some time in London in 1975 to learn more about herself and to look into various possibilities; it was there that she “learned about transsexuality and realized I was not a passive homosexual.”

This moment of “learning about transsexuality” has become a critical node in current narratives of trans persons. In particular, learning to distinguish oneself from “a passive homosexual” has become a key moment for male-bodied persons. These interviews with Mulk-ara were carried out in 2005–7, and, as much as they provided Mulk-ara’s personal narratives, they also reflected the consolidation of this distinction into contemporary discourses and practices of transsexuality I discussed in chapter 1.

Upon her return from London, Mulk-ara began to lobby various authorities to see what could be done in Iran, but everyone told her that because of the prevailing social atmosphere, the government could not do anything. By this time, of course, it was not some nebulous presumed social conservatism but an official scientific institution—the MCI—that had closed the emerging medical possibilities for SRS in Iran. This was the period in which Mulk-ara also was concerned about the implications of her practices from a religious point of view, saying, “I was in a religious conundrum” (az lihaji shar’i sargardan). She visited Ayatollah Bihbahani, who consulted the Qur’an; it opened on the Maryam chapter (a very auspicious chapter for Mulk-ara, as it is the only chapter bearing a woman’s name; it was that occasion that provided her with her eventual name of Maryam). Ayatollah Bihbahani suggested that she could contact Ayatollah Khomeini on this issue, who was at the time in Najaf. Ayatollah Khomeini confirmed that “sex-change was permitted and that after surgery, she must live her life as a woman.” At this point, she began to plan for going to Thailand, but by then the years of revolutionary upheaval had erupted. Mulk-ara eventually did go to Thailand for her surgery, but not until 2002.

But back in the early months of 1979, once the general strikes came to an end, like most people she went back to work. It was here that her troubles began: “They asked me, who are you? Why do you look like this? When I insisted that I had a condition, they set up a meeting for me with a doctor at Day Clinic [a top private clinic]. But the doctors’ treatment of me was unbelievable; it was gross. This was just the beginning of a series of arrests, questioning me over and over again. . . . Dr. Bahr al-Ulum and the director of Sida va Sima’s [the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, IRIB, previously the NIRPT] health clinic threatened me, saying they would set me on fire. Eventually they forced me to

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take male hormones and go into male clothes. . . . This kind of treatment continued until the early 1980s; these were bad years for gays and dau-jinsi people. I heard several were arrested and spent time at Evin prison.”

Mulk-ara was not the only woman-presenting male forced out of the nirt/IRIB. Haideh, now in her late forties, used to teach animation classes there before she was expelled. Eventually, she opted for sex change in the late 1990s and now has her own graphic design business. Natasha, a young makeup artist, similarly was forced out of the nirt/IRIB. For a while she tried to find jobs in private film studios, but these studios also were under increasing scrutiny for perceived immoral conduct. Eventually, she opened her own hairdressing salon and has since become quite well known in Tehran. Today, two other MtFs are employed in her salon.

In the early 1980s, as the Islamic Republic was taking shape, Maryam Mulk-ara began her persistent lobbying of various authorities to change the situation for woman-presenting males who did not wish to dress and live as men. Under the new regime, the moral purification of society became a systemic priority. Moral purification measures included closing down sites that were considered spaces of corruption, such as the businesses in the red-light district, bars, nightclubs, and many cafés and cinemas. It meant a series of horrifying public executions of women and men on charges of prostitution and sodomy. It meant intense scrutiny of all institutions, especially those such as the mass media and the universities, which were considered critical for the production of a new revolutionary Islamic culture and society but were thought to be populated by corrupt people who had to be purged. As Mulk-ara put it in her interview, these were indeed “bad years for gays and dau-jinsi people.”

The spectrum of non-normative, male-bodied persons in the 1970s had included woman-presenting males as well as males who did not dress as or present like women. The nonheteronormativity of the latter was focused on their desire for men, while they continued to live lives largely indistinguishable—to the uninitiated—from those of normative males. These males, some of whom now name themselves gay or are so named by others, had shared the increased visibility of nonheteronormative males of the 1970s. That visibility became dangerous in the years after the 1979 change of regime. These men had to adopt a more circumspect style of life, something that indeed had been a way of life for many of them already.

But while the sexual politics of the new government could be warded off by some nonheteronormative males simply by living more circumspect lives, woman-presenting males faced a particular challenge in the new republic when public gender separation emerged as an important ethical project. A
totally homosocial gendering of public spaces was seen as the ideal, although it was considered largely unachievable in practice. Nevertheless, strict codes of dress and gender presentation in public were put in place by a series of measures over the period of 1979–81.\textsuperscript{99} The self-perceptions and preferred styles of living for some nonheteronormative males included, and at times critically depended on, their ability to present themselves as women and to be visibly feminine in public, but the gender norms set in place in the early days of the Islamic Republic of Iran made that nearly impossible. As Mulk-ara and others explained, many people like her felt forced to grow mustaches and beards and live, at least during the day, as men. Living a double life by presenting as a woman at night, which was practiced by many woman-presenting males even in the 1970s, suddenly became much more hazardous, to the extent that it remained possible at all.

As we have seen, in the 1970s, woman-presenting males had carved for themselves spaces of relative acceptance in particular places and professions. The more public spaces of such “acceptability,” for instance, in the entertainment industry, were at once spaces of “disrepute” but also spaces in which nonnormative living could be safely cordoned off and marginalized. They provided not only a measure of safety for woman-presenting males, but also for their containment and confinement from the larger society. Woman-presenting males performed the vulgar and the deviant, and the deployment of these semilicit styles in the popular entertainment of the 1970s provided for partial tolerance of those deemed deviant.\textsuperscript{100} The 1979 revolution, particularly the cultural purification campaigns of the first few years of the new republic, ruptured this dynamic. The vulgar, taken in the Islamist discourse (and indeed on the political Left as well) to represent the extreme embodiment of late-Pahlavi corruption, became yet another ground for massive repression of social deviance.

The enforcement of public gender codes in the years after 1979 disrupted the old continuum of male nonheteronormativity. While it was possible to be a closeted gay man, living openly as a woman-presenting male became increasingly impossible. Woman-presenting males not only carried the stigma of male same-sex practices, they also transgressed the newly imposed regulations of gendered dressing and presentation in public. They were always assumed to be “passive homosexuals,” facing the same severe interrogations, sometimes anal rape, imprisonment, or death. Trans-dressed males walking in the streets would be arrested on charges of prostitution. Some, like Mulk-ara, were forced to take male hormones and change into male clothing and could no longer go to work looking “like that.” One key effect of the policies of the early 1980s was thus the categorical bifurcation of gay and transsexual. The practices of everyday
life within both categories depended on the public disavowal of homosexuality, and likewise both were predicated on the public expression of gender normativity. Given the religious sanction to sex change offered by Ayatollah Khomeini, the categorical bifurcation of nonheteronormative maleness played out quite differently in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the years ahead, than it did in Europe and the United States. Being transsexual, rather than gay, emerged as the more socially acceptable way of being a nonheteronormative male.
gories was in general circulation in Iran at the time. As we have seen, homosexuality was beginning to acquire a place, but since men who had same-sex relations often would at some point marry women, the category of “two personality” worked to capture this phenomenon.

I will discuss Farrukhzad and the emerging “gay and transwomen” life in Tehran of the 1970s in the next chapter.

55 Ittila’at, July 22, 1974, 4.
56 Zan-i ruz, July 27, 1974, 12.
57 For a full articulation of the stance of the press on this issue, see Zan-i ruz, August 10, 1974, 10–11, 84, 86–88.
58 Ittila’at, July 21, 1974, 54.
59 Ittila’at, July 27, 1974, 16.
60 See, for instance, Ittila’at, July 27, 1974, 18, with the huge headline: “Razzaq-manish appeals his sentence” and a smaller item: “Mahin’s appeal was submitted to the court.”
61 See Kayhan, October 16, 1973, 8. This case took up the full “Events” page on two subsequent days. Its coverage slowly received less space, but it continued for the next three days. Once the prosecutor asked for a death sentence in mid-November, it regained its news prominence.
62 Ittila’at-i banwan, July 24, 1974, 85.
63 My thanks to Mali Kigasari for making this account, which had been reported to her, available to me. Several other self-identified lesbians, now in their late forties and early fifties, similarly recalled how this episode and the press reports had made a lasting impression on them. Another writer, twenty years old at the time of the event, wrote a barely fictionalized account with a somewhat different plot line, in which Mahin (named “Moheen” in the novel) is helped by a female lawyer who goes from Tehran to Rasht and finds out that the actual murderer was a young man who was supposed to marry Zahra. The spurned lover-turned-murderer theme is thus preserved, but with a heterosexual twist. Nonetheless, because of the corruption of the courts, Moheen is convicted, only to be rescued from imprisonment through an elaborate escape from jail. See Behjat Riza’ee, The Moonlike (London: Bra Books, 1991). For a review of this book, see Nilgun, Homan, no. 9 (November 1994): 43.

Chapter 4: “Around” 1979

3 David Reed, “The Persian Boy Today: Sexual Politics in Teheran,” Christopher Street, August 1978, 14–17. As the title of his report indicates, the search for a gay paradise...


7 For reports of persecutions and executions in the early months and years of the establishment of the Islamic Republic, see *The Advocate* 266, May 3, 1979, 7; 267, May 17, 1979, 7, 12–13; 276, September 20, 1979, 17; 281, November 29, 1979, 12; 283, December 27, 1979, 8; and 293, May 29, 1980, 12. See also Homan 16 (spring 2000): 16–17 for Iranian newspaper clips of executions from this period on the charge of lavat (sodomy). See also Afary, *Sexual Politics*, 265. In much of such coverage, it is routinely said that Islamic law prohibits homosexuality—even though there is no notion of homosexuality in Islamic law—or that the Islamic Republic made homosexuality a capital offense and that gay men are executed in Iran on charges of or for open expressions of homosexuality. On this issue, as far as recent executions and the international campaigns are concerned, see Scott Long, “Unbearable witness: How Western activists (mis)recognize sexuality in Iran.” *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (March 2009): 119–36. The slippage is important for contemporary politics of sexuality in Iran. I will come back to further discussion of this issue in the final chapter.

8 The two domains are highly interactive: Jerry Zarit’s article in *GPU News* was translated and published in one of the earliest diasporic Iranian gay journals, *Homan*, published first in Sweden (the first issue dated May/June 1991) and later in the United States. See *Homan* 5 (April/May 1992): 2–5.

9 In these distinctions, what is often lost is the very modernity of hamjins-bazi itself. The nineteenth-century vocabulary of what is at times conceived of as the prehistory of modern same-sex relations—such as *amrad-bazi* (“playing” with a male adolescent), *‘ubnah-‘i* (“afflicted” with a desire for anal penetration), and *bachchah-bazi* (“playing” with a young person)—did not place the two sides in a single category (jins) of person, whether in a pejorative sense (same-sex player) or in its more recent recuperation as same-sex orientation. Only in the twentieth century did jins come to mean sex as well as its earlier meaning of genus, so “hamjins” became a term that doubled the sense of sameness, as “of the same kind and of the same sex.” Even today, some people in same-sex relationships do not recognize themselves to be of the same kind. As Mahan, a young man in an intimate relationship with another man, reacted to hearing their relationship referred to by a self-identified gay man as hamjins-gara (same-sex oriented), “But we are not of the same jins, we are not of the same kind [nau’]. We are so different” (conversation with author, June 2007).

10 See, for instance, Avaz, “Tafavut-i ‘hamjins-gara’ ba ‘hamjins-baz’ va ‘bachchah-baz’ dar chist?” (What is the difference between the “same-sex inclined” and the “same-sex-player” and “child-player”), *Homan* 9 (October/November 1994): 27–33. Avaz seems unaware of emergence of the concept of hamjins-gara in the Iranian discourses of psychiatry and criminology of the 1960s and 1970s (as we saw in chapter 2) and suggests that hamjins-gara is a new expression of unknown origin in Per-
sian (29, 32). My point is not to criticize the adoption (consciously or otherwise) of the concept from this earlier discourse for one’s own identification, but rather that the ahistorical consciousness may have contributed to the progressivist invocation of hamjins-gara against hamjins-baz and bachchah-baz. For a more recent example, see Payman, “Hamjins-gara’i ya hamjins-bazi?!” (Same-sex-orientation or same-sex-playing?!), Neda 19 (June 2010): 14–15.


13 Khvandaniha, June 30, 1956, 29 (reprinted from Payam). For other reports of women opting to live and work as men, see Ittila‘at-i banuwan, June 17, 1963, 12, 75; Zan-i ru, special New Year’s issue, March 1965, 12–14.

14 Tse-lan D. Sang, The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 92–95. I thank Martha Vicinus for bringing Sang’s work to my attention.


16 See chapter 2 of Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) for some examples of “keeping a young man” (amrad-dari, adam-dari), as it was then called.


19 See chapter 2 for further discussion of these cases.


25 Zan-push, literally meaning “dressed in women’s clothes,” refers to male actors who played women’s roles in traditional theatrical performances, whether in passion plays (ta’ziah) or in ruhauzi plays (literally “over the pond,” because the stage was provided by covering a garden pond with planks of wood) at celebratory occasions. For an important analysis of different styles of enacting female personas in these plays, see William O. Beeman, “Mimesis and Travesty in Iranian Traditional Theatre,” in Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts, edited by Laurence Senelick, 14–25 (Medford, MA: Tufts University Press, 2002). The expression zan-push has now become part of trans vocabulary for MtFs who change to female clothes. I will discuss these transplantations in chapter 7.

26 Khvandaniha, October 1, 1955, 37. Parenthetical asides in the original. Other issues of this journal similarly carried news and photographs of male actors in female
roles. See the October 13, 1955, issue 37 for a picture of Majid Muhsini (an actor) in women's clothes, replacing a female actress who was sick on that performance day. See also the issues of December 22, 1955 (39), for a picture of another male actor, Mr. Hushmand, in another production of the play *Charley's Aunt* in Rasht; of January 12, 1956 (39), for Tabish again as Charley's aunt; and of March 21, 1961 (98), for pictures of four male actors, Tabish, Vahdat, Qanbari, and Bahmanyar, all in female roles. The journal had similar brief reports on non-Iranian performances of male actors in female roles. See September 1, 1959, 16 (Jack Lemon and Tony Curtis trans-dressed as female musicians in *Some Like It Hot*); June 11, 1960, 19 (picture of an Italian male actor in a female role); December 19, 1961, 39 (another picture of female-dressed Tony Curtis), among many similar others.


28 ‘Ali Sha’bani, “Gardishi dar kafah-ha va risturanha-yi Tehran” (A tour of Tehran’s cafés and restaurants), *Khvandiha*, September 25, 1954, 22–25, 36–37. Such reports continued to appear in the 1960s and 1970s. The emphasis, however, shifted to highlighting the growth of dance clubs as part of the “cultural turn” to dance among the youth. For one example, see Gregory Lamya, “Raqqas-khanah-ha-yi zirznamin-i Tehran bazar-yi vaftagh-and” (Tehran’s underground dance dens have a heated market), *Kayhan*, January 25, 1969, 16. See also *Ittila’at*, October 6, 1976 (7) for a report on a Turkish singer appearing in women’s clothes and makeup.

30 ‘Ali Sha’bani, “Gardishi dar kafah-ha va risturanha-yi Tehran” (A tour of Tehran’s cafés and restaurants), *Khvandiha*, September 25, 1954, 22–25, 36–37. Such reports continued to appear in the 1960s and 1970s. The emphasis, however, shifted to highlighting the growth of dance clubs as part of the “cultural turn” to dance among the youth. For one example, see Gregory Lamya, “Raqqas-khanah-ha-yi zirznamin-i Tehran bazar-yi vaftagh-and” (Tehran’s underground dance dens have a heated market), *Kayhan*, January 25, 1969, 16. See also *Ittila’at*, October 6, 1976 (7) for a report on a Turkish singer appearing in women’s clothes and makeup.

31 *Kayhan*, April 19, 1973, 22. For another similar report, see *Kayhan*, October 11, 1973, 22. This was the case of two young males, eighteen and nineteen years of age, “in women’s clothes and make-up,” who were arrested on Tehran-Saveh road and charged with fooling men and stealing their money. The men denied the charges and stated that they were music performers (*mutrib*) working in the area villages. “We make up ourselves as women and in weddings make the guests laugh and be amused by imitating women’s movements.” Both reports carry photographs of arrested woman-presenting males.

32 I specifically have opted not to name this category of males living as women “trans-women” because of the specific meaning of that word in today’s English-speaking context.


34 The latter’s style is seen as a signal to men who desire nonmasculine males, despite whether they are for hire. The stigma of that kind of MtF-ness is elaborated in terms of its collapse into sex work; it is assumed that an exaggerated female appearance is
always a sign of commercial availability. It demarcates one style of MtF-ness as virtuous, presssing the other to the outside of the domain of acceptability for community membership—this other is not seen as truly trans. It is marked by the weight of social shame associated with “passive” homosexuality. Among self-identified gay men, on the other hand, the distancing is seen as a defense against the bodily changes that would turn a gay man into a deformed woman. As one self-identified gay man explained, “I do my best to stop gay men going that way by pointing out to them that Tehran is full of beautiful lovely girls; if his lover wanted a girl, he could find thousands; he wants his partner to be a ‘male girl’” (interview with Behzad, June 2006).

The presumption that most, if not all, MtFs are sex workers runs through much of the literature on Iranian (and not only Iranian) MtFs. The presumption, to the extent that it could possibly be documented sociologically (and it usually is not backed up with any data at all), depends on publicly noticeable MtF life. Those who work, for instance, as tailors, hairdressers, lawyers, and graphic designers (among the occupations of those I met in Iran) are invisible to the public eye.

Khanum is a generic form of address for an adult female. I, for instance, am often addressed as “Khanum Najmabadi” in Iran. In this period, the term also was used as an insider designation for males living as women. Information presented here about this subculture of Tehran life in the 1970s is based on conversations with several men in their fifties who now identify as gay and several who now identify as MtF.

It is more common today, especially in middle-class urban circles, for men-loving men to self-reference themselves as gay (the English word pronounced exactly the same in Persian). This was rare in the 1970s.

One self-identified gay man reported noticing a growing presence of what he referred to as trans women in these gatherings (interview with Behzad, June 2006); evidently this observation was from the vantage point of 2006 within a conversation about transsexuality today.

For a sensitive depiction of one such life, see Farhad Rastakhiz, “Mardi dar hashiah” (A man on the margin) (in Mardi dar hashiah [Hamburg: Nashr.i Kalagh, n.d.]), in which the main character/narrator, Mr. Qurayshi, is an assistant principal in a high school by day and lives a lonely, womanly life at home. I am grateful to Elham Gheytanchi for bringing this story to my attention and providing me with a copy of it.

Interview with Behzad, July 2007; Mark Johnson, in the context of the southern Philippines, has noted, “most find repulsive the idea that one would have sex with their ‘own kind’” (Beauty and Power: Transgendering and Cultural Transformation in the Southern Philippines [Oxford: Berg, 1997], 90).

Interview with Cyrus, October 2007.

In the 1970s, when the word gay was not a dominant self-reference, few would use “homosexual” (in its French pronunciation in Persian—humausiksual) either. The term was largely used in psycho-medical discourse. In recent decades, gay has become a more acceptable word, although its meaning, as the above articulations indicate, is not identical with its usage in English. Persian words often are used as in-words, which if used to refer to someone would be recognized by another knowing person, but would be safely assumed to mean something different by the unknowing audience. Because these words continue to be used in Iran today, I have

42 Interview with Behzad, July 2007. Whatever the meaning of these rumored “gay weddings” may have been at the time, today in both Iran and the Iranian diasporic gay and lesbian communities they are considered “gay weddings” in a more recent sense and an indication of the lively “gay culture” of the 1970s. When Leila and her partner Minu (more on them in chapter 7) had gone to a dental appointment in summer 2007 and the elderly doctor had noticed their intimacy and their identical rings, he immediately began reminiscing about “the public gay marriage of the 1970s.” The event narrated by Behzad is now included in a proto-official publication, Ruhallah Husaynian, Fisad-i darbar-i Pahlavi (Corruption of Pahlavi Court), Markaz-i Asnad-i Inqilab-i Islami (Islamic Revolution Documentation Center), Part 3. Online edition; http://www.irdc.ir/fa/content/4915/default.aspx, last accessed July 19, 2009. The same section includes a host of other named individuals, all marked as sexually corrupt because they are “hamjins-baz.” This sensibility about hamjins-bazi as a singularly significant sign of political corruption of the old regime is shared by some of the post-1979 critical rethinking of the 1970s penned by the members of that elite. The memoir of Queen Farah’s mother, Farideh Diba, for example, persistently talks about ‘Abbas Huvayda as a mukhannas (effeminate man) and a hamjins-baz. She names other men around the Court in similar terms. See Dukhtaram Farah (My Daughter Farah), trans. Ilahieh Rai’s Firuz (Tehran: Bih-Afarin, 2000; 12th reprint 2004), 116, 295, 300, 304, 313, 314, 320, 322, 325. The circulation of hamjins-baz through these stories about the culture of the old regime is not limited to ideologically shaped proto-official histories and exiled recollections of “things gone wrong.” In a recent literary history of male-male love as celebrated in Persian literature, the author suggests that “as a result of cultural growth and presence of women in society, [the older style of male-male love] had disappeared from the customary practice of the population, until its coming to Iran in late-Pahlavi period in its foreign [European, farangi] form of two men marrying each other, which caused a great deal of public commotion.” Sirous Shamissa, Sodomy: Based on Persian literature (Tehran: Firdaws, 2002), 256. (This is the way his name and book title appear in the book itself; the Persian title is Shahidbazi dar adabiyat-i Farsi. Translating shahidbazi into “sodomy” is itself a major translation problem!)

43 Martha Vicinus has suggested that these marriages are reminiscent of “what went on in the early 18th-century London molly houses” (e-mail communication, September 28, 2009). One difference, however, seems to be that the marriages in molly houses seem to have been about ceremonies for two men who would possibly be sexual partners even if for a brief time. See Alan Bray, Homosexuality in Renaissance England (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), chapter 4. Marriages between two khanums seem to have excluded that possibility.

44 See Layla S. Diba’s introductory note to illustrations nos. 78 and 79 in Royal Persian

45 Connecting with the nineteenth-century painting tradition in Hajizadeh’s work goes beyond working off photographs; several themes from Qajar paintings, particularly the lion and sun emblem, similarly find “unrealistic” reproductions in many of Hajizadeh's paintings.

46 Johnson (Beauty and Power) introduces the concept of “transgenderally identified men” for men whose public self-presentation seems to have a great deal in common with the mard-i zan-numa I am discussing here. I have opted to keep the notion of -numa (-presenting) because it retains the performativity (numayish) of self-presentation.

47 Brad Epps, unpublished discussant’s comments on a draft of this chapter, presented at the Harvard Humanities Center’s Gender and Sexuality Seminar, Cambridge, Massachusetts, September 30, 2009.

48 See, for instance, the anonymous report, “Yadi az jashn-i hunar-i Shiraz va barrisi-i iftizahat-i ‘an...” [Notes on the Shiraz Art Festival and its scandalous embarrassments], in which one of the criticisms is of the explicit talk of homosexuality in one of the plays (Khvandaniha, November 21, 1972, 13, 54–55). The Shiraz Art Festival and the many controversies it generated are covered in several oral histories, including those of Fereyduhn Av, Bijan Saffari, and Farrokh Ghaffari, all at the Oral History project of Foundation for Iranian Studies. For a post-1979 Islamist perspective on the Shiraz Arts Festival, see the introduction and commentaries on documents that The Center for Research of Historical Documents (Ministry of Intelligence) has published: Jashn-i hunar-i Shiraz bah rivayat-i asnad-i savak (Shiraz Art Festival according to savak documents) (Tehran: Center for Research of Historical Documents, 2003). See also a shorter and popularized version, Fatimah Shirin, Bazichah-i Shahbanu (The Queen’s plaything) (Tehran: Center for Research of Historical Documents, 2005). For a recent appreciative overview, see Robert Gluck, “The Shiraz Arts Festival: Western Avant-Garde Arts in 1970s Iran,” Leonardo 40, no. 1 (2007): 20–28.


50 Another difference between baruni and kuni is that kuni is used to designate an individual man; baruni is used within the context of a relationship between at least two women, as in “so-and-so is so-and-so’s baruni.”

51 Interview with Behzad, July 2007.

52 The need for a word that is not derogatory but also not an in-word signifies the emergence of a broader semi-open circulation of these conversations. For that reason, circulation of gay also marks the space of this semi-openness. For a similar dynamic between gay and bantut in the Philippines, see Johnson, Beauty and Power, 89;

53 Literally “o’sister.” According to Maryam Khatun Mulk-ara, this expression came from an Italian film, possibly in the 1950s or 1960s. In this film, she explained, there were two soldiers “afflicted with this problem” who called each other “iva’khvar” (in the Persian-dubbed version, that is), which is how it became a popular designation. See the interview with Hamid Riza Khalidi in *I’timad*, May 8, 2005, 7.


55 Farrukhzad was also a poet, but that remained largely unacknowledged during this period, possibly because, as a poet, he was overshadowed by his more famous sister, Furugh Farrukhzad. Much of his early poetry was in German and published in Germany, where he was studying.

56 Literally “felt-making workshop.” Namadmali also is used to imply wringing out the hidden essence of something.


59 *Khvandaniha*, June 15, 1974, 16. The column was occasioned by reports of aid to African famine victims. For a similar column suggesting that some television personalities could aid the African victims “in-kind,” see *Khvandaniha*, June 29, 1974, 17.

60 Even a popular tour guide to Iran cannot avoid noting this phenomenon. In a boxed paragraph, appearing only on the page on Qazvin and titled “Butt of the Joke” (surely an intended pun), the authors write: “‘If you drop your wallet in Qazvin, don’t bend down to pick it up!’ Political correctness has yet to touch the Iranian sense of humour and poor Qazvin, ‘where birds fly on one wing’ [the other wing folded over their anus, it is said], suffers constantly from jibes of predatory homosexuality. Other regions are equally unfairly stereotyped for jocular effect. Men from Rasht are portrayed as sexually liberal and constant cuckolders, Esfahanis as mean and cunning, Shirazis as lazy and fun-loving, Turkmen as vengeful, Kurds as hot-blooded and the Loris of Lorestan as congenitally untrustworthy. In common jokes, Azaris are supposedly slow-witted yet cash-canny, with Tabrizis surly and religious but those from Orumieh contrastingly relaxed and open-minded. Within their loose-fitting dishdasha robes, Iranian Arab men are whispered to be endowed with an especially impressive set of wedding tackle” (Andrew Burke et al., *Iran* [London: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004], 163).


63 The anus under consideration in such accounts is that of a male body. A woman’s anus does not have the same sanctity because a husband, according to some Islamic jurisprudents (though not all), can have anal intercourse with his wife. For further discussion of this point see my essay, “Types, Acts, or What? Regulation of Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Iran,” in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal...
For a different reading of the significance of this kind of humor in the 1970s, see Afary, Sexual Politics: “While condescending and disparaging, these references suggested at least a small degree of acceptance for a gay lifestyle” (244).

See Mirza Aqa (Mani) ‘Asgari, Khunyagar dar khun: dar shinakht va buzurgdasht-i Faridun Farrukhzad (Musician/singer in blood: in recognition of Faridun Farrukhzad) (Germany: Human, 2005). In addition to the book, Mani has set up an information site for Farrukhzad, http://www.farrokhzad.info/. His book has been criticized for its virtual silence on Farrukhzad’s nonheteronormative sexuality; some of the ensuing debate is available on the site. In an interview with MAHA, Mani stated that he considered “homosexuality against nature and in contradiction with reproductive process,” but that sexual matters were a private issue in which no government should intervene. See MAHA, no. 4 (January/February 2005): 4–11 (the quote is from pages 4–5). For another contribution, see Majid Nafisi, “Hamjinsgara’i va Faridun Farrukhzad” (Homosexuality and Faridun Farrukhzad), Cheraq, no. 34 (November 2007): 56–57.

A self-identified Iranian gay man abroad, reminiscing about when he was around twelve years of age, writes, “The other thing that I remember from this period is Faridun Farrukhzad. He is responsible for my understanding of the rightness of my deep feelings. At that time, Faridun Farrukhzad had a weekly television show. Everyone I knew would watch this show. Sometimes, in parties while watching the show, people would crack jokes about him and everyone would laugh. I did not fully understand the jokes yet. But when someone would say ‘he/she is a woman herself, why has he/she got him/herself a wife?’ or ‘he/she is looking for a husband’ I knew what they meant. I heard these jokes about Faridun Farrukhzad but never laughed and didn’t know at the time that in four-five years I would have a conversation with him about homosexuality and he would tell me that ‘what matters is to love. A man or a woman, that doesn’t matter in loving. If you one day find a young man [pisar] who loves you as much as you love him, don’t lose him.’” Qubad, “An ruzha [Those days],” Homan, no. 13 (summer 1998): 25–27 (the quote is from page 26).

Sadiq Hidayat (1903–51) is one of the most important modern writers of twentieth-century Iran. For information on his life and work see several entries in the Encyclopaedia Iranica (online edition); http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hedayat-sadeq. His sexuality has long been a subject of speculation and discussion. In more recent years, Hidayat has been appropriated as part of the literary figures with possibly homosexual orientation, in the tradition of Oscar Wilde and others. See “Girayish-i jinsi-i Sadiq Hidayat” (Sadiq Hidayat’s sexual orientation), Cekaf, no. 30, topic number 17. Cekaf is an electronic journal. Their archive is available through the irqo site (my source; accessed on July 29, 2009). This article has no author and was republished in another electronic journal, MAHA, no. 3 (January/February 2005): 18–23. See also Afary, Sexual Politics, 169–73.

Faridun Kar (b. 1928) is a poet and literary scholar.
70 Khvandaniha, May 11, 1968, 39–40. When Isma’il Jamshidi interviewed Farrukhzad in July 1970 and asked him about “the many pieces of gossip that circulate” about him, he did not confirm or deny any of them. He simply indicated that he was aware of these circulations and felt sorry for people who engage in their production. This interview was republished in the Iranian gay monthly literary web journal Dilkadah, published from December 2005 to December 2006. See no. 8 (July/August 2006): 11–13.

71 Khvandaniha, June 16, 1970, 58.

72 Khvandaniha, August 22, 1972, 12–13, 48–49.

73 Ittila’at-i banuwan, January 2, 1974, 81. Although we do not have any sustained research on Farrukhzad and his life, from anecdotal information it seems that the attraction-repulsion nexus was tilted differently along gender lines. His performances seem to have been a lot more popular among women who heartily would laugh at his parodies of manhood, while adult men expressed disdain and repulsion, at least in the presence of women. Behzad (interviewed in June 2006 and July 2007) talked about how his mother would defend Farrukhzad’s performances every time men of the family disparaged him, a defense that Behzad perceived as her support of himself.

74 See the report in Ittila’at-i banuwan, December 12, 1973, 21. They were married on January 20, 1974. See Ittila’at, January 21, 1974, 4.

75 Ittila’at-i banuwan, “Yik guftigu-yi jalib ba Faridun Farrukhzad va hamsarash Taraneh: ma ‘ashiq-i ham nistim!” (An interesting conversation with Faridun Farrukhzad and his spouse Taraneh: We are not in love with each other!), January 2, 1974, 13, 80–81. Taraneh Sunduzi was always referred to in the press by her first name only. This was common practice when referring to female celebrities, such as actors, performers, and poets. Furugh Farrukhzad, for instance, was usually referred to only as “Furugh.” For men, there was a distinction: some, such as male singers, were usually referred to only by first name; artists who were considered “more respectable” had both their first and family names used, as was the case for male literati who usually were referred to by their full name, family name, or poetic name.

76 Ittila’at-i banuwan, June 25, 1974, 20. According to her father, Taraneh had already left Farrukhzad two months earlier and moved back in with her family. Ittila’at-i banuwan, July 3, 1974, 22.

77 Kayhan, June 19, 1974, 18.

78 No author, “Javan-i ma chizi mian-i dukhtar va pisar hastand!” (Our youth are something between girls and boys!), Khvandaniha, March 6, 1971, 18 (reprinted from Khurasan).


80 Khvandaniha, “Khatar-i hamrīkht-i zanan va mardan” (The danger of women and men looking alike), trans. by Dr. Kuhsar, April 6, 1973, 36–38 (no original author or source of translation is specified). Reprinted from Danishmand, a general science journal.

81 Ittila’at-i banuwan, January 9, 1974, 12–13, 81; January 16, 1974, 12–13, 80; January
Attempts to form an association of health professionals had a much longer history. See Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 54–60. The more recent legislation had been submitted to the Majlis in 1960, revised in 1967, and finally ratified in 1969. See *Kayhan*, June 8, 1969 (19) for the full text of the legislation and the council regulations. See also *Kayhan*, July 27, 1969 (2), for the report of the council’s inaugural meeting. The MC1 also published the *Journal of the Medical Council of Iran* (Majallah-i ‘ilmī), which was focused on research articles, and a more informational newsletter (*Nashriyah-i khabari*) in which regular reports on complaint cases and decisions reached by its board of directors were published. These reports were often reprinted in more popular journals. See, for instance, *Khvandaniha*, June 23, 1970, 20–22, and April 3, 1971, 12–15.

*Newsletter of the Medical Council of Iran*, no. 12 (July 23, 1979): 29 (quotation marks in original).

Interview, December 2007. When I asked about the operation reported in the press in February 1973 that took place in Namazi Hospital of Shiraz, he thought that was a possibility since that hospital had American and American-trained doctors. Doctors trained by Dr. Salih were trained to refuse sex surgeries except for intersex ones. Information about Dr. Behjatinia in the following section is based on my December 2007 interview and on his biographical entry in Muvahhidi, *Zindigi-namahi-pizishkan-i nam-avar-i mu’asiri Iran* (Biographies of famous contemporary Iranian physicians), Tehran: Abrun, 2000, 2: 61–64.

Information about Dr. Amir-Movahedi is based on my December 2007 interview and on his biographical entry in Muvahhidi, *Zindigi-namahi-pizishkan*, volume 2, 53–59.


*Itila’at*, October 11, 1976, 2. Were the clerical authorities in Iran, like doctors, ignorant of Khomeini’s 1964 fatwa (on the permissibility of sex change) or did they choose to ignore it?

*Kayhan*, October 11, 1976, 5.

*Kayhan*, October 16, 1976, 2.

I was unable to find any reports of the murder of surgeons who performed these operations. This could very well have been “attempted murders” or even total hype. See, for example, “Akhlaq-i pizishki dar barabar-i pizishki-i nuvin: masa’il-i ikhtisasi-i akhlaq-i pizishki” (Medical ethics confronting new medicine: special problems of medical ethics), *Journal of Medical Council of Iran* 6, no. 5 (March 1978): 445–47.

Interview, August 2007.

Interview, August 2007. The experience was a harrowing one; bad surgeries occurred in several countries over many years, and the process was interrupted by the revolution and the closing of borders in the early years of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88).
Mulk-ara has been the subject of numerous interviews and reports in Iran and internationally, both in print and film, about Iranian transsexuals.

I have depended on the following sources for this sketch of Mulk-ara’s life. By far, the most extensive interview with her (and the only one in which she talked at length about her life in the 1970s) appeared as part of a four-page social reportage in the daily I’timad (May 8, 2005, 7–10). Mulk-ara, including a picture of her at the center of page 7, was featured on pages 7 and 10 (interview by Hamid Riza Khalidi; the total page coverage was over a fourth of the full dossier). Unless noted otherwise, the quotes in this section are all from this interview. This dossier remains the most substantive and serious press coverage of transsexuality in the Iranian press, although many other newspapers and magazines have covered various aspects of the issues, as I noted in the introduction. Other sources on Mulk-ara I have used are a short interview with her that formed part of a dossier on transsexuals in the popular weekly Chilchiraq (May 26, 2007, 7–13, interview on page 11) and my several phone conversations with her during the summer and fall of 2006.

In my conversations with her, Mulk-ara spoke about two circles in which she socialized in this period: one she called “darbariha,” the Court circle, which according to her included the Shah’s cousin, his chief of staff, and several others she named. The other circle she referred to as lower-middle-class “zir-i mutavassit.” The two circles overlapped in that many of the women most desired in the courtly circles were from the lower-middle-class circles and would be brought to parties.

The account of how and when she first identified herself, or was identified by a doctor, as a transsexual differed in this conversation from the accounts reported in the interviews with I’timad and Chilchiraq, in which she said she was sent to a specialist by the National Iranian Radio and Television, who diagnosed her as transsexual and suggested she should go for surgery.

“Taghyir-i jinsiyat bilamani’ ast va ba’d az ‘amal taklifi yik zan bar shuma vajib ast.” Noushin and two other MtFs I interviewed each claimed that it was they who had obtained the first fatwa from Ayatollah Khomeini on permissibility of changing sex (interviews, summer 2006 and 2007).

There is a huge literature on this period’s state policies and resistance by large sections of women against it. Although successfully implemented by the early 1980s, the public dress code for women has remained a perennial source of contestation between sections of the government, dissenting women, and, at times, young male youth. See Parvin Paidar, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-century Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Minoo Moallem, Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Hamideh Sedghi, Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Johnson also discusses, in a different context, the paradox of the gay/bantut being “both celebrated as masters of beauty and style and circumscribed as deviant and vulgar” and notes “the historical significance of the beauty parlours as both the site and means for gays’ successful occupational reinvention of themselves” (Beauty and Power, 146–47). One could argue that in 1970s Iran, the entertainment industry