

# The Transgender Studies Reader



Edited by  
Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle

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# Foreword

STEPHEN WHITTLE

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Trans identities were one of the most written about subjects of the late twentieth century. New communities of transgender and transsexual people have created new industries, a new academic discipline, new forms of entertainment; they offer new challenges to politics, government, and law, and new opportunities to broaden the horizons of everyone who has a trans person as their neighbor, coworker, friend, partner, parent, or child. Any Internet search, whether of Web sites, news articles, or academic papers, will produce thousands of results. A recent Google search for “transsexual” gave 3 million hits. Using the term “transgender” in an attempt to reduce the number porn sites actually retrieved far more: 7.5 million hits. The sites range from small personal projects to very large ones, such as the U.S. social organization Transgender Forum;<sup>1</sup> the UK’s political lobby group, Press for Change;<sup>2</sup> the educational site for those in the Far East, Transgender Asia;<sup>3</sup> sites for professional service providers such as the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association,<sup>4</sup> and many health reference sites such as Trans-health.<sup>5</sup>

A trans identity is now accessible almost anywhere, to anyone who does not feel comfortable in the gender role they were attributed with at birth, or who has a gender identity at odds with the labels “man” or “woman” credited to them by formal authorities. The identity can cover a variety of experiences. It can encompass discomfort with role expectations, being queer, occasional or more frequent cross-dressing, permanent cross-dressing and cross-gender living, through to accessing major health interventions such as hormonal therapy and surgical reassignment procedures. It can take up as little of your life as five minutes a week or as much as a life-long commitment to reconfiguring the body to match the inner self. Regardless of the fact that trans identities are now more available, the problems of being trans have by no means been resolved. In many parts of the world, having a trans identity still puts a person at risk of discrimination, violence, and even death.

A trans person might be a butch or a camp, a transgender or a transsexual, an MTF or FTM or a cross-dresser; they might, in some parts of the world, consider themselves a lady boy, *katoey*, or even the reclaimed Maori identities *whakawahine* or *whakatane*. Some communities and their terms are ancient, such as the Hijra from Northern India, but many are more modern. The word “trans,” referring to a “trans woman” or “trans man” (of whatever subtype of trans identity) is a very recent take on the umbrella term “transgender.” Although there had been some previous usage in the 1990s (e.g., in the creation of the online group Trans-Academics), “trans” as a stand-alone term did not come into formal usage until it was coined by a parliamentary discussion group in London in 1998, with the deliberate intention of being as inclusive as possible when negotiating equality legislation. Cultural spaces and historiographies are constantly reframing the community, the identities, the cultures, and the language. We see new language being developed constantly; for example “per” as a pronoun was

developed by UK community members with nonexistent gender identities, and similarly the U.S. term “hir” for those who have both.

The growth of home computer use in the 1990s, and the encouragement of many trans women at the forefront of information technology and Internet development, was crucial to the development of a new, geographically dispersed, diverse trans community in the 1990s (Whittle, 1998). Online, this newly formed community was able to discuss its experiences of fear, shame, and discrimination, and, as a result, many community members developed newly politicized personal identities. This new politicization forged a determination to change the world, by every means possible, for the next generation of trans youth. Significant changes have indeed taken place. At the very least, where once there was *pure* ignorance and prejudice of trans issues, we now see *informed* prejudice and discrimination, which is more easily addressed through the courts and legislature.

The work of trans activists and trans academics has always been linked, not least because of close communication within the new community, but also because of our shared experiences. In the 1970s and '80s, many trans people were unable to obtain or retain a job or a home, or to protect themselves from violence or discrimination. Yet the changes brought about in the '90s have enabled many of us to build new lives, families, and careers. As will be seen within this collection, in the 1990s trans became a cultural obsession, exerting a fascination across many scientific and humanities fields, and many communities of interest. It became an increasingly visible part of everyday life in diverse urban contemporary communities, as well as in some rural settings. It is now possible, simply by “telling” or theorizing my own life and the lives of other trans people, for me to build an academic career based on the fascination of the “Other” with people like me. It is their obsession that has given us the opportunity to use the power of the media to tell our stories, to theorize our lives, and to seek equality and justice.

In this collection we have included work from before the 1990s that is representative of the vast majority of work of those times, when the primary concern was the psychology and medicalization of transsexualism. In the 1990s, a new scholarship, informed by community activism, started from the premise that to be trans was not to have a mental or medical disorder. This fundamental shift was built upon within academia, and enabled trans men and women to reclaim the reality of their bodies, to create with them what they would, and to leave the linguistic determination of those bodies open to exploration and invention. To this extent, trans studies is a true linking of feminist and queer theory.

Exploring personal knowledge of trans possibilities in the classroom is far from easy, when few students have ever had to critically address their own gendered self. However, we can surmise some things from this collection, when presenting the history of trans studies. Of central concern is the fact that the taxonomy of sex and gender seemingly has become disordered; sex and gender themselves no longer appear as stable external categories but rather appear embedded in the individuals who experience them. This concern has derived from the postmodern process of deconstruction, in which modernity and its values, including gender, have been stripped away. The question of postmodern analysis is whether any reconstructive process can exist. For the trans person's understanding of the self, the question becomes whether gender, at the heart of self-understanding, can be theoretically recuperated. It is all very well having no theoretical place within the current gendered world, but that is not the daily lived experience. Real life affords trans people constant stigma and oppression based on the apparently unreal concept of gender. This is one of the most significant issues that trans people have brought to feminist and queer theory. Homophobia and sexism are not based on your genitals or with whom you sleep, but on how you perform the self in ways that are contraindicative to the heteronormative framework.

This brings us to another challenge, which is perhaps the most controversial issue in sex and gender theory. Is the basis of gender identity essential and biologically based, or is it socially constructed? Frequently, many non-trans theorists have used trans identities to support constructivist arguments. But increasingly, trans people are questioning whether the deeply held self-understandings they have can be entirely due to nurture and environment. There have been endless reasons given by psychologists for why trans people exist, but these are almost always shown to be based upon poor experimental procedures, using narrowly defined subject groups without relevant control groups, and with emphasis on issues that trans people would argue are not relevant. As such, the formal psycho-medical theories are falling rapidly by the wayside, and nothing has appeared in their place except some very limited evidence of biological differentiation that is so problematic that it cannot yet be said to have any proof value (Zhou et al., 1997).

The work of trans academics and theorists is increasingly moving trans people away from the discredited status of being mentally disordered, towards having expert knowledge of those who struggle to maintain the current strict gender regime, referred to by Kate Bornstein (1997) as “gender defenders.” Finally being able to accept our own sanity, trans people have created gender disorder by becoming “gender outlaws.” Whilst we can determine that trans people have always existed (within understandings contingent on time, space, and culture) this begs the question of whether trans is a natural or unnatural phenomena. Can a trans person be classed as intersex, or should there be any sex classification at all? Having a sex is apparently a prior determinant of being human, but as such it begs the meaning of what “human” is. One of the arguments made in legal trans theory is that etiology is always irrelevant in the claim to rights. Of course it isn’t, because we do not afford rights to vegetable material, and we limit the rights of non-human animals. It is in the claim to human rights that the question of what is “human” becomes over-riding. Increasingly we presume that language, as another predeterminant of humanity, overrides the determinant of biological sex: that is, a person is the gender they claim to be, regardless of sex status. But the language of sex and gender is inherently limited. As trans people challenge their exclusion from language, and therefore from basic human rights, sex itself is increasingly becoming an unsafe foundation for the legal foundation of the order of human life.

Telling the trans story, as part of the academic project, has become a project of narrative repetition in which trans people have told of their anguish. In recent years, the constant clamoring of voices has finally been heard, and sympathetic listeners have worked with formerly excluded trans people to create broader access to social spaces that range from local LGBT support groups to the halls of senior government. The ongoing battle for inclusion, equality, and recognition of our diversity within politics, the courts, the media, and in many other parts of life, has made many of us public figures. Television chat shows and documentaries are still seeking out trans people to appear; films have been made, and, of course, books have been written. Even after my own very visible thirty years in the public arena, I was astonished to discover that after my appearance on a television show in 2003, a month-long discussion had taken place on an e-mail list for gay bears, in which the participants debated whether sleeping with me (or people like me) would call their own sexual orientation into question. (I was rather pleased to discover that overall they concluded I was rather attractive and that sleeping with me would apparently not make them any less gay.) But the questioning that trans people present to others’ identities is a growing challenge to all who place their confidence in the binary rules of sexed lives: man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine, straight/gay. We who are activists may think that the battle is being won, but perhaps it is not; recently, for example, religious and faith organizations have spent thousands of dollars trying to prevent legal advances for trans people.<sup>6</sup> Teaching about trans issues in this politicized context allows our students to understand that trans identities challenge the

core beliefs of some of society's most powerful groups, and highlight the extent to which those groups wish to dominate the thinking of us all.

On reflection, if I was not trans, I imagine I would have been an ordinary woman (though that is too difficult for me to imagine), perhaps with a teaching job, cooking the meals, doing the garden, and bringing up the kids. Instead, I am part of the cultural crisis of the new millennium. I can personally vouch for the fact that in the mid-1970s, being trans was extremely dangerous and unpleasant, and yet I know from experience that trans people still pursued their identities. In recent years, embracing the trans community and its culture has led us to an exciting position at the cusp of one of the most significant social and political changes in the postmodern world. The struggles of trans people could have significant impact on all of our freedoms, depending upon who wins the war of ideologies surrounding the meaning of gender and sex.

One of the problems in putting together this collection is the ongoing paucity of empirical analysis of gender diversity. When I started teaching in 1990, my proposal for a class in sex and gender law was laughed at by some colleagues. Five years later there was still little interest. It took another five years for a course that would include the law of sexual orientation and gender identity to be established. This was partly due to the fact that although there is a vast array of medical and cultural comment, there is little in terms of in-depth empirical scientific, sociological, and legal investigation. As a result, gender issues are still viewed as "minority interests" rather than a matter of concern to us all.

For some reason, it has really only been trans men who have published in-depth empirical and sociological analyses. Extensive and in-depth social and legal studies on what it means to be a trans man have come from Aaron Devor (1997), Jason Cromwell (1999), Henry Rubin (2003), Jamison Green (2004), and me (2002). This highlights the serious lack of such a body of work representing trans women's voices. Despite the significant theoretical perspectives from trans women such as Sandy Stone (1991), Vivian K. Namaste (2000), Riki Wilchins (1997), and Susan Stryker (1994) there is a need to analyze why there is the difference in discipline. It may well be that the difficulty in "passing" makes it easier said than done for trans women to access the academy. It might be that the poverty that comes from more often supporting a prior family makes it harder for trans women to put together a research career. Whatever the reason, it highlights what the community already knows: trans women are most frequently the victims of discrimination because of their visibility.

The empirical and sociological analyses undertaken have shown that it is only by understanding and accepting that linguistic barriers still exclude the vast diversities of trans and non-trans identities, that we can possibly begin to accept that gender, like race, simply does not exist other than as an idea that has gained immeasurable power within the economies of social discourse. As we move into a new world, trans academics and theorists are creating new discursive practices which are repositioning the power of gender(s) and allowing more of us to have a say in what gender means, and in what its powers should be.

The *Transgender Studies Reader* is an effort to afford the student and teacher with a passage through the complexities of gender theory. It illustrates how trans people were problematized by science and society, and how trans people have responded by using the same intellectual tools that have oppressed them to place the "Other" in the problematized position. This process has not been easy. Our collection also illustrates the call to arms that has been issued by activist trans academics to make the study of the self and the Objective Other a reputable field.

In trans theory there is an inherent recognition that the trans position is problematic. The labels "man" and "woman" are inadequate to describe the trans experience, as the trans person's history and knowledge of the world is so different from that of "men born men" or "women born women." Yet the responsibility to recognize and articulate that position is no one else's but the self's. Trans theorists,

who have been able to authenticate the actual spheres of pain within trans lives, in conjunction with critiquing existing commentary, have enabled the coherent voices of trans people to be heard throughout the academy. This task was not without risk. The willingness of trans academics and theorists to give up their hard-fought-for privacy in their new gender role has undoubtedly cost the pioneers in the field. However, it has been through this articulation of the imposition of gendering on us by others that the position of suffering of those with trans identities has been heard.

The public articulation of a trans voice and trans consciousness has not only influenced sex and gender studies, but it also impacted on trans people themselves, and has provided a collection of materials that coherently explain their own experiences as genuine. Amongst other things, it has created new ways in which to be an activist, as well as new ways of being trans. It is now possible:

- to acknowledge and fight the injustice of transphobia, and to be trans publicly in order to truly represent transphobia's victims;
- to be in charge of what we do to our own trans bodies, and to take risks in the art of our bodies;
- to become queer, by refusing gender ascription and by claiming the transsexualism of the self;
- to turn away, ultimately, from the relative safety of queerness and go beyond that to claim a unique position of suffering; and finally,
- to welcome the rage afforded by that experience of suffering, a suffering that is part and parcel of being trans.

Teaching transgender theory is itself an activist process as well as an explorative process. The field is expanding exponentially along with the cultural changes that accompany it. It also poses a daunting problem—in order to hear the voices of trans people, as justice demands, one has to acknowledge the limits of sex and gender and move into a new world in which any identity can be imagined, performed, and named.

## NOTES

1. Transgender Forum, available at <http://www.tgforum.com/>
2. Press for Change, available at <http://www.pfc.org.uk>
3. Transgender Asia <http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/>
4. Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, available at <http://www.hbigda.org>
5. Trans-health, available at <http://www.trans-health.com/>
6. See *The Liberator*: Staver, M. D. Legal Update, Sept 2004 for an account of the involvement of the Christian fundamentalist group, Liberty Counsel, in the child care case of *Kanteras v. Kanteras* in the Florida courts at <http://www.lc.org/newsletter/lib/2004/09update.htm>, and the Christian Institute's briefing on the UK's Gender Recognition Bill at [http://www.christian.org.uk/transsexualism/briefing\\_16jan04.pdf](http://www.christian.org.uk/transsexualism/briefing_16jan04.pdf)

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# *(De)Subjugated Knowledges*

## An Introduction to Transgender Studies

SUSAN STRYKER

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IN 1995, I FOUND MYSELF STANDING IN LINE FOR MY TURN at the microphone in the Proshansky Auditorium of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. I was attending a conference called “Lesbian and Gay History,” organized by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS). I had just attended a panel discussion on “Gender and the Homosexual Role,” moderated by Randolph Trumbach, whose speakers consisted of Will Roscoe, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey, Ramon Gutierrez, Elizabeth Kennedy, and Martin Manalansan. I had heard a great many interesting things about fairies and *berdaches* (as two-spirit Native Americans were still being called), Corn Mothers and molly-houses, passionate female friendships, butch-femme dyads, and the Southeast Asian gay diaspora, but I was nevertheless standing in line to register a protest. Each of the panelists was an intellectual star in his or her own right, but they were not, I thought, taken collectively, a very gender-diverse lot. From my perspective, with a recently claimed transsexual identity, they all looked pretty much the same: like nontransgender people. A new wave of transgender scholarship, part of a broader queer intellectual movement was, by that point in time, already a few years old. Why were there no transgender speakers on the panel? Why was the entire discussion of “gender diversity” subsumed within a discussion of sexual desire—as if the only reason to express gender was to signal the mode of one’s attractions and availabilities to potential sex partners?

As I stood in line, trying to marshal my thoughts and feelings into what I hoped would come across as an articulate and eloquent critique of gay historiography rather than a petulant complaint that nobody had asked *me* to be on that panel, a middle-aged white man on the other side of the auditorium reached the front of the other queue for the other microphone and began to speak. He had a serious issue he wanted to raise with the panelists, about a disturbing new trend he was beginning to observe. Transsexuals, he said, had started claiming that *they* were part of this new queer politics, which had to be stopped, of course, because everybody knew that transsexuals were profoundly psychopathological individuals who mutilated their bodies and believed in oppressive gender stereotypes and held reactionary political views, and they had been trying for years to infiltrate the gay and lesbian movement to destroy it and this was only the latest sick plot to...

It was an all-too-familiar diatribe—a line of thinking about transsexuality that passed at that time for a progressive point of view among many on the cultural left. At some point, in a fog of righteous anger, I leaned into the microphone on my side of the room and, interrupting, said, “I’m not sick.” The man across the auditorium stopped talking, and looked at me. I said, “I’m transsexual, and I’m not

sick. And I'm not going to listen to you say that about me, or people like me, any more." We locked eyes with each other for a few seconds, from opposite sides of the auditorium filled with a couple of hundred gay and lesbian scholars and activists (and a handful of trans people), until the man suddenly turned and huffed out of the room. I then proceeded to make what I still hoped was an eloquent and articulate critique of gay historiography. The man I interrupted, it turned out, was Jim Fouratt, a veteran of the 1969 gay rights riots at the Stonewall Inn, a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, and a fixture on the fading New Left fringe of New York progressive politics. I now look back on that exchange as one of the few iconic moments in my public life—a representative of the transgender *arrivistes* stared down a representative of the old gay liberation vanguard, who abandoned the field of queer scholarship to a new interpretation of gender diversity. Sweet.<sup>1</sup>

Ten years later, in 2005, I found myself once again in the Proshansky Auditorium, for another CLAGS conference. This one was called "Trans Politics, Social Change, and Justice."<sup>2</sup> The room was filled with a couple of hundred transgender activists and academics, and a smattering of nontransgender gay, lesbian, bisexual, and straight people. CLAGS itself was no longer being run by its founder, the eminent gay historian Martin Duberman, but by transgender legal studies scholar Paisley Currah. I was there to show *Screaming Queens*, my recently completed public television documentary on the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot, a transgender revolt that took place in San Francisco three years before Stonewall.<sup>3</sup> Rather than struggling merely to speak and be heard during the closing plenary session, transgender voices engaged in a lively, sometimes acrimonious, debate. In the middle of a heated verbal exchange between radicals and centrists, a middle-aged white man patiently worked his way up the speaker's queue to the microphone. It was Jim Fouratt, of course. He complained that a new transgender hegemony was marginalizing and erasing the experiences of people like himself, that a revisionist history of sexual liberation and civil rights movement was rewriting the past in an Orwellian fashion, and—he would no doubt have continued with a further list of similar grievances had not numerous members of the audience shouted for him to sit down and shut up. He paused for a moment, gave up his struggle to be heard, and left the auditorium in a huff. Sad.

Those two moments in the Proshansky auditorium are, for me personally, bookends for a phase in the development of the field of transgender studies—a phase that Stephen Whittle and I have attempted, in a necessarily partial fashion that will unavoidably invite criticism, to document in *The Transgender Studies Reader*. What began with the efforts of emerging and marginally situated scholars and activists such as ourselves to be taken seriously on our own terms, and not pathologized and dismissed, has helped foster a sea-change in the academic study of gender, sex, sexuality, identity, desire, and embodiment. Histories have in fact been rewritten; the relationships with prior gay, lesbian, and feminist scholarship have been addressed; new modes of gendered subjectivity have emerged, and new discourses and lines of critical inquiry have been launched. Academic attention to transgender issues has shifted over the span of those ten years from the field of abnormal psychology, which imagined transgender phenomena as expressions of mental illness, and from the field of literary criticism, which was fascinated with representations of cross-dressing that it fancied to be merely symbolic, into fields that concern themselves with the day-to-day workings of the material world. "Transgender" moved from the clinics to the streets over the course of that decade, and from representation to reality.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the whole transgender thing back in the 1990s was the startling rapidity with which the term itself took root, and was applied to (if not always welcomed by) the sociocultural and critical-intellectual formations that were caught up in, or suddenly crystallized by, its wake.<sup>5</sup> Given the struggles that have attended the advent of "transgender" as a descriptive term for a heterogeneous class of phenomena, merely to use the word is to take up a polemical and politicized position. In the end, we took the easy way out and pragmatically acknowledged that the term

“transgender,” for all its limitations and masked agendas, was the term in most common usage that best fit what we were trying to talk about. What began as a buzzword of the early 1990s has established itself as the term of choice, in both popular parlance and a variety of specialist discourses, for a wide range of phenomena that call attention to the fact that “gender,” as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity.

Transgender studies, as we understand it, is the academic field that claims as its purview transsexuality and cross-dressing, some aspects of intersexuality and homosexuality, cross-cultural and historical investigations of human gender diversity, myriad specific subcultural expressions of “gender atypicality,” theories of sexed embodiment and subjective gender identity development, law and public policy related to the regulation of gender expression, and many other similar issues. It is an interdisciplinary field that draws upon the social sciences and psychology, the physical and life sciences, and the humanities and arts. It is as concerned with material conditions as it is with representational practices, and often pays particularly close attention to the interface between the two. The frameworks for analyzing and interpreting gender, desire, embodiment, and identity now taking shape in the field of transgender studies have radical implications for a wide range of subject areas. Transgender phenomena have become a topical focus in fields ranging from musicology to religious studies to digital media; a theme in the visual, plastic, and performing arts; and a matter of practical concern in such fields as public health, plastic surgery, criminal justice, family law, and immigration.

Most broadly conceived, the field of transgender studies is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood. The field of transgender studies seeks not only to understand the contents and mechanisms of those linkages and assumptions about sex and gender, biology and culture; it also asks who “we” are—we who make those assumptions and forge those links—and who “they” are, who seem to “us” to break them. The field asks why it should matter, ethically and morally, that people experience and express their gender in fundamentally different ways. It concerns itself with what we—we who have a passionate stake in such things—are going to do, politically, about the injustices and violence that often attend the perception of gender nonnormativity and atypicality, whether in ourselves or in others.

Transgender studies, at its best, is like other socially engaged interdisciplinary academic fields such as disability studies or critical race theory that investigate questions of embodied difference, and analyze how such differences are transformed into social hierarchies—without ever losing sight of the fact that “difference” and “hierarchy” are never mere abstractions; they are systems of power that operate on actual bodies, capable of producing pain and pleasure, health and sickness, punishment and reward, life and death. Transgender studies has a deep stake in showing how the seemingly anomalous, minor, exotic, or strange qualities of transgender phenomena are in fact effects of the relationship constructed between those phenomena and sets of norms that are themselves culturally produced and enforced. Transgender studies enables a critique of the conditions that cause transgender phenomena to stand out in the first place, and that allow gender normativity to disappear into the unanalyzed, ambient background. Ultimately, it is not just transgender phenomena per se that are of interest, but rather the manner in which these phenomena reveal the operations of systems and institutions that simultaneously produce various possibilities of viable personhood, and eliminate others. Thus the field of transgender studies, far from being an inconsequentially narrow specialization dealing *only* with a

rarified population of transgender individuals, or with an eclectic collection of esoteric transgender practices, represents a significant and ongoing critical engagement with some of the most trenchant issues in contemporary humanities, social science, and biomedical research.

### A LITTLE BACKGROUND

The word “transgender” itself, which seems to have been coined in the 1980s, took on its current meaning in 1992 after appearing in the title of a small but influential pamphlet by Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come*.<sup>6</sup> First usage of the term “transgender” is generally attributed to Virginia Prince, a Southern California advocate for freedom of gender expression.<sup>7</sup> Prince used the term to refer to individuals like herself whose personal identities she considered to fall somewhere on a spectrum between “transvestite” (a term coined in 1910 by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld) and “transsexual” (a term popularized in the 1950s by Dr. Harry Benjamin).<sup>8</sup> If a *transvestite* was somebody who episodically changed into the clothes of the so-called “other sex,” and a *transsexual* was somebody who permanently changed genitals in order to claim membership in a gender other than the one assigned at birth, then a *transgender* was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation.

In Feinberg’s usage, transgender came to mean something else entirely—an adjective rather than a noun. Feinberg called for a political alliance between all individuals who were marginalized or oppressed due to their difference from social norms of gendered embodiment, and who should therefore band together in a struggle for social, political, and economic justice. Transgender, in this sense, was a “pangender” umbrella term for an imagined community encompassing transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anybody else willing to be interpolated by the term, who felt compelled to answer the call to mobilization. In the wake of Feinberg’s pamphlet, a movement did indeed take shape under that rubric; it has gradually won new civil and human rights for transgender people, and has influenced the tenor of public debate on transgender issues for more than a decade.

Feinberg’s call to arms for a transgender liberation movement followed close on the heels of another watershed publication that laid an important cornerstone for transgender studies, Sandy Stone’s 1991 “posttranssexual manifesto.”<sup>9</sup> Stone wrote against a line of thought in second-wave feminism, common since the early 1970s and articulated most vehemently by feminist ethicist Janice Raymond, which considered transsexuality to be a form of false consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Transsexuals, in this view, failed to properly analyze the social sources of gender oppression. Rather than working to create equality by overthrowing the gender system itself, they internalized outmoded masculine or feminine stereotypes and did harm to their bodies in order to appear as the men and women they considered themselves to be, but that others did not. In this view, transsexuals were the visible symptoms of a disturbed gender system. By altering the surface appearance of their bodies, such feminists contended, transsexuals alienated themselves from their own lived history, and placed themselves in an inauthentic position that misrepresented their “true selves” to others. Stone called upon transsexuals to critically refigure the notion of authenticity by abandoning the practice of passing as nontranssexual (and therefore “real”) men and women, much as gays and lesbians a generation earlier had been called to come out of their self-protective but ultimately suffocating closets. Stone sought to combat the anti-transsexual moralism embedded in certain strands of feminist thought by soliciting a new corpus of intellectual and creative work capable of analyzing and communicating to others the concrete realities of “changing sex.” To a significant degree, Feinberg’s “transgender” came to name the ensemble of critical practices called for by Stone’s “posttranssexual” manifesto.

The confluence of a few other major events in 1991 conspired to create and circulate new debates and discourses about transgender issues—and to revive some old ones. That year, the Michigan Women’s Music Festival, a women-only event with deep roots in the lesbian feminist community, expelled a postoperative transsexual woman, Nancy Jean Burkholder, claiming she was “actually” a man.<sup>11</sup> This incident became a flashpoint in the United States and Canada for transgender people and their allies, many of whom had been radicalized by opposition to the Gulf War, the right-wing assault on public arts funding in the United States, and by the Reagan-Bush administrations’ decade-long history of neglect of the AIDS crisis.<sup>12</sup> A provocative and intelligent performance artist named Kate Bornstein was tweaking the consciousness of audiences on both coasts of North America with confessional works that explored her tortured personal history with the word “transsexual.”<sup>13</sup> Some of the more academically-minded members of these grassroots communities were reading a recent book by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, and an older book by Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.<sup>14</sup> A Routledge anthology published that year, Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub’s *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, which included Sandy Stone’s pivotal essay, offered an early map of the terrain transgender studies would soon claim as its own.<sup>15</sup>

By 1992, the tenuous beginnings of the field were taking shape where the margins of the academy overlapped with politicized communities of identity. The activist group Transgender Nation—whose formation in 1992 as a focus group of the San Francisco chapter of Queer Nation marks the emergence of a specifically transgender politics within the broader queer movement of the early 1990s—generated scholarly work as part of its protest against the inclusion of “gender identity disorder” in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.<sup>16</sup> New ‘zines like *Gender Trash*, *TransSisters*, *Rites of Passage*, and *TNT: The Transsexual News Telegraph* combined community-based cultural production with academically-informed critical gender theory. In Houston, legal activist Phyllis R. Frye organized the first professional conference on transgender law and employment policies. Building on the solid foundation built by female-to-male transsexual Lou Sullivan, a community-based historian and activist whose untimely death from AIDS-related illnesses tragically cut short an important career, Jamison Green transformed a local San Francisco FTM support group into FTM International, whose newsletter became a vital outlet for discussing myriad forms of female masculinity. Members of such organizations, some of whom were also graduate students and young academic faculty members, began forming informal personal and professional networks during the 1993 March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi Rights—which explicitly voted *not* to include “transgender” in its title.

A similar ferment was brewing in the United Kingdom. As in the United States, Europe had seen little formal transgender activism between the heyday of the sexual liberation movements and the early 1990s. In 1992, the political activist group Press for Change was founded in response to the defeat of an application at the European Court of Human Rights by Mark Rees, a transsexual man, for recognition of his rights to privacy and to marry. Unlike the political and theoretical developments in the United States, however, which represented something of a generational break between established and emerging communities of gender-diverse people, the Press For Change campaign included as strategic activists trans people who had been working on trans issues since the mid-1970s. These activists all had experience participating in local support groups affiliated in some fashion with the national Beaumont Society, which itself ultimately derived from Virginia Prince’s Hose and Heels Club, founded in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Although these support groups typically catered to the needs of heterosexual male transvestites, there was a significant history in the UK of mixed groups whose membership included not only part-time cross-dressers, but also postoperative transsexuals, and various others who occupied diverse niches within the gender system.

In 1975, a network of local support group leaders loosely affiliated themselves with the U.S. activist group TAO (Transsexual Action Organization). TAO-UK was a short-lived group devoted to anti-sexism, anti-racism, and peace campaigns that also specifically sought the right of self-determined medical treatment for transsexual people. These early activists became the core of Press for Change in 1992, whose signal victory has been passage of the national Gender Recognition Act in 2004—an accomplishment without parallel in the United States. Partly as a result of Press for Change's efficacy in leveraging the mechanism of institutional power, and partly as a result of profoundly different healthcare delivery systems, transgender academic work in the UK tended from the outset to be more policy-oriented, and more focused on medical and legal issues, than work originating in the United States, which has tended to be more concerned with queer and feminist identity politics. The differences between two such closely related bodies of scholarship highlights the need for careful attention to national contexts, not only when attempting to understand transgender phenomena themselves, but also when trying to understand how transgender phenomena have been interpreted and represented.<sup>17</sup>

The 1994 Queer Studies Conference at the University of Iowa fostered the first truly international network of emerging transgender scholars, and resulted in the formation of the still extant trans-academic listserv. The First International Conference on Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender, held in 1995 at California State University at Northridge, represented another benchmark in the development of the transgender studies field. For the first time at a professional meeting, an older generation of (primarily nontransgender) academic specialists who studied transgender phenomena was confronted by a significant number of academically trained specialists who also happened to be transgender people themselves. Transgender attendees angrily protested conference policies that marginalized and stigmatized transgender participants, such as asking transgender people to use separate toilet facilities from the other attendees, or scheduling presentations by transgender scholars exclusively in the "community track" rather than the "professional track."

The situation improved dramatically within a few short years. The astonishingly rapid rise of the term "transgender" seems to have increased exponentially around 1995 (fueled in part by the simultaneous, and even more astonishing, expansion of the World Wide Web). By the late 1990s a number of transgender studies special issues of peer-reviewed academic journals had appeared, as well as transgender-themed anthologies from academic publishers. Even the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, the old-guard professional organization for medical and psychotherapeutic service-providers to gender-questioning people, capitulated to the new nomenclature by naming its in-house publication the *International Journal of Transgenderism*. Increasingly, courses in transgender studies were taught at universities across North America and Europe, and transgender scholarship and cultural production were integrated into sexuality and gender studies curricula, as well as within general courses in such disciplines as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law. Graduate students began writing theses and dissertations on transgender topics—more than 300 to date. The new interdisciplinary field gained coverage in the U.S. *Chronicle of Higher Education* and, in the UK, the *Guardian's* Higher Education supplement.<sup>18</sup> By the end of the last century, transgender studies could make a fair claim to being an established discipline, though one with relatively scant institutional support.

This is the body of intellectual work that *The Transgender Studies Reader* seeks to sample and contextualize. It is intended to provide a convenient introduction to the field as it has developed over the past decade, an overview of some of the earlier work that informed this scholarship, and a jumping-off point for more sophisticated analyses in the next generation of inquiry.

## BROADER CONTEXTS

The emergence of transgender studies has closely paralleled the rise of queer studies, with which it has enjoyed a close and sometimes vexed relationship. One influential interpretation of queer studies' appearance in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s is that the AIDS crisis necessitated a profound rethinking of the relationship between sexuality, identity, and the public sphere. Countering the homophobic characterization of AIDS as a "gay disease" required a postidentity sexual politics that simultaneously acknowledged the specificity of various bodies and sexualities (such as gay men), while also fostering strategic political alliances between other, sometimes overlapping, constituencies similarly affected by the epidemic (initially African refugees in Europe, Haitians in the United States, hemophiliacs, and injection drug users). This new "queer" politics, based on an array of oppositions to "heteronormative" social oppression rather than a set of protections for specific kinds of minorities that were vulnerable to discrimination, radically transformed the homosexual rights movement in Europe and America.<sup>19</sup> The queer movement allowed transgender people to make compelling claims that they, too, had political grievances against an oppressive heteronormative regime. Transgender studies initially took shape in that political and intellectual ferment.

Neither feminism nor queer studies, at whose intersection transgender studies first emerged in the academy, were quite up to the task of making sense of the lived complexity of contemporary gender at the close of the last century. First-wave African-American feminist Sojourner Truth's famous question, "Ain't I a Woman?," should serve as a powerful reminder that fighting for representation within the term "woman" has been as much a part of the feminist tradition as has asserting the value of womanhood and fighting for social equality between women and men.<sup>20</sup> "Woman" typically has been mobilized in ways that advance the specific class, racial, national, religious, and ideological agendas of some feminists at the expense of other women; the fight over transgender inclusion within feminism is not significantly different, in many respects, from other fights involving working-class women, women of color, lesbian women, disabled women, women who produce or consume pornography, and women who practice consensual sadomasochism. Just as in these other struggles, grappling with transgender issues requires that some feminists re-examine, or perhaps examine for the first time, some of the exclusionary assumptions they embed within the fundamental conceptual underpinnings of feminism. Transgender phenomena challenge the unifying potential of the category "woman," and call for new analyses, new strategies and practices, for combating discrimination and injustice based on gender inequality.<sup>21</sup>

Like recent feminism and feminist scholarship, queer politics and queer studies also remain invested, to a significant extent, in an underlying conceptual framework that is problematized by transgender phenomena. "Sexual object choice," the very concept used to distinguish "hetero" from "homo" sexuality, loses coherence to the precise extent that the "sex" of the "object" is called into question, particularly in relation to the object's "gender." Queer studies, though putatively antiheteronormative, sometimes fails to acknowledge that same-sex object choice is not the only way to differ from heterosexist cultural norms, that transgender phenomena can also be antiheteronormative, or that transgender phenomena constitute an axis of difference that cannot be subsumed to an object-choice model of antiheteronormativity. As a result, queer studies sometimes perpetuates what might be called "homonormativity," that is, a privileging of homosexual ways of differing from heterosocial norms, and an antipathy (or at least an unthinking blindness) toward other modes of queer difference. Transgender studies is in many ways more attuned to questions of embodiment and identity than to those of desire and sexuality, and is akin to other efforts to insist upon the salience of cross-cutting issues such as race, class, age, disability, and nationality within identity-based movements and communities.



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