

Transgender: Histories, Identities, Politics

Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, NYU

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Course Description:

In the past decade, the term "transgender" rapidly became a moniker for a range of social identities, a political movement, and a community that had no name until the early 1990s. Although transsexual, transvestite, drag queen, and many other identities (now grouped under transgender) have a long history in the West, and while non-normative genders have been recorded in many societies, "transgender" is a term with a very short history. Despite this, it is ubiquitous in the early twenty first century in a wide range of contexts: from grassroots activism and social service provision, to academic settings (such as courses like this one), to the U.S. Congress, and even in psychiatry and the medical community more broadly.

The main project of this course is to begin to map out the territory of "transgender," its current cultural and political articulations, as well as its historical evolution and global prevalence. Within that framework, we will address the following questions: What social, political, cultural and normative, historical changes produced "transgender?" What does it enable as a category? What does it obscure? Where is "transgender" located in the terms of American understandings of personhood? What are the problems and possibilities of using "transgender" to describe non-normative genders cross-culturally? What are the contexts within which "transgender" can be used to make claims of the state in a representative democracy? What possibilities and problems are presented by using the term to describe people who refuse it as descriptive of their experiences? What issues arise when non-transgender identified people investigate, and ask questions about, those who take this category to be meaningful about their lives? And what does "transgender" tell us about the organization of gender and sexuality in the contemporary United States?

This course will engage a multi-disciplinary literature to answer these questions, from medical sexology, to anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies, film and (auto)biography. We will engage topics from medical regulation to feminist understandings of gender variance to grassroots activism, law and public policy, drag and performance, and identities and community formation. In essence, we will attempt to use as many available resources as we can, to forge an understanding of what a "transgender studies" would look like.

Much like the field of "transgender studies" itself, this course is new and a work in progress. As such, I welcome suggestions for additions/revisions to the syllabus, as well as alternate ways to conceptualize the topics and projects.

Course Materials:

Please purchase the following texts, available at the NYU bookstore: (Note: For students for whom the cost of purchasing these texts is prohibitive, copies will be made available

at the reserve desk of the library. If possible, you should endeavor to buy all the books, as it will be useful to you to be able to reference them in class.)

Califia, Pat, (1997) *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. San Francisco: Cleis Press.

Kulick, Don, (1998) *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture Among Brazilian Transgender Prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meyerowitz, Joanne, (2002) *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Newton, Esther, 1979[1972] *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rubin, Henry, (2003) *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*. Vanderbilt University Press.

Wilchins, Riki Anne, (1997) *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.

A required **course packet** is also available at New University Copy, 11 Waverly Place. This packet will **not** be available on reserve and contains some materials that will be difficult or impossible for students to obtain from other sources.

A number of films will be shown in class. They will not be available for viewing at any other time.

Course Projects:

The success of this course depends almost entirely on the people who comprise its membership. Not only is it important that all class members take an active role in steering class discussions, but it is imperative that class members listen to, consider and respect the opinions and ideas of others. **You should only take this course if you feel you are able to engage in discussions of gender, sexuality, bodies, genitals and personal identities in a mature, intelligent and thoughtful way.** As a group, we will set down some ground rules for class discussion, during the first class period.

Reading Responses:

There are four response papers due during the course of the semester, an initial “position” paper and three responses to the weekly readings. Details and instructions for both will be handed out separately. Response papers are due **on or before** the class period in which we discuss the readings about which you choose to write. For students whose work is handed in on time, you will have the opportunity to re-write your papers for a higher grade.

Final Exam:

A final exam will be administered at the end of the semester. Details TBA..

Grading:

In general, success at achieving the goals of the course will be evaluated according to the following formula:

- Subject Position Paper = 5%
- Reading Responses and Discussion Leadership = 45%
 - 3 Individual Papers = 15% each
- Final Exam = 40%
- In-class Participation and Attendance = 10%

Course Outline:

Introduction: In-Roads, Beginnings, Ground Rules, etc.

What is “transgender?” Where did the term come from? What will we be learning about in a “transgender studies” course? How do these issues affect me?

- Hale, Jacob, “Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing About Transsexuals, Transexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans_____” available online at <http://www.transfeminism.org/nontrans-rules.html>.
- Wilchins, Riki Ann, (1997) “Why This Book” and “17 Things You Don't Say to a Transsexual,” in *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.
- Introduction to the Position Paper Assignment

Part 1: Policing from Without: Medicine, Sexology, Feminism

Medicine and Gender Variance I

How do doctors think about gender variance? How have their ideas evolved over time?

Due: “Subject Position” paper

- Hirschfeld, Magnus, 1991[1910] *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress*. Translated by Michael A. Lombardi-Nash. Buffalo: Prometheus Books. (pp.17-32, 124-154, 417-424)
- Weeks, Jeffrey, (1985) *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities*. London and New York: Routledge. (chapter 4)
- Hekma, Gert, (1994) "A Female Soul in a Male Body": Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology. In Herdt Gilbert, (ed.) *Third Sex, Third*

Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History. New York: Zone Books. pp.213-239).

Medicine and Gender Variance II

- APA (2000) “Gender Identity Disorder” from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*. American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne (2002) *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2)

Medicine and Gender Variance III

- Meyerowitz, Joanne (2002) *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Chapters 3 and 4)
- Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBI-GDA) (1985) “Standards of Care: The Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment of Gender Dysphoric Persons.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 14(1):79-90
- Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBI-GDA) (1998) *The Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders*. Fifth Edition. Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, (<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~colem001/hbigda/hstndrd.htm>)

Feminist Accounts of Transgenderism I

What do the debates between different types of feminists and trans activists look like? What are the issues they invoke? How do each employ different ideas of what “feminism” is take make their case?

- Rubin, Henry, (2003) *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*. Vanderbilt University Press. (Chapter 3)
- Raymond, Janice, (1996) “The Politics of Transgenderism,” in Richard Ekins and Dave King (eds). *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing*. New York: Routledge.
- Jeffreys, Sheila, (1996) “Heterosexuality and the Desire for Gender,” in Diane Richardson (ed.), *Theorizing Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Feminist Accounts of Transgenderism II

- Wilchins, Riki Ann, (1997) “The Menace Statement to Janice Raymond,” in *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*. Ithaca: Firebrand books
- Stone, Sandy, (1991) “The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual Manifesto,” in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (eds). *Body Guards: the Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*. New York: Routledge.
- Heyes, Cressida J. (2003) “Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender.” *Signs* 28(4):1093-1120.

Policing Transexuality/Homosexuality in Children

How do doctors differentiate between homosexuality (sexuality) and transgender (gender) in children? What kinds of anxieties do we see them responding to? What do those responses look like?

- Skim: APA (2000) “Gender Identity Disorder” from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*. American Psychiatric Publishing. **and** APA (1968) “Homosexuality” from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II*. American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Feder, Ellen, (1997) “Disciplining the Family: the Case of Gender Identity Disorder.” *Philosophical Studies* 85:195-211.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, (1993) “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” in Michael Warner (ed), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Minter, Shannon, (1997) “Diagnosis and Treatment of Gender Identity Disorder in Children,” in Matthew Rottnek (ed.) *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Non-Conformity and Homosexual Childhood*. New York: New York University Press.

Part II: Borders and Differences

Still Sorting “Out:” Who's "Gay" and Who's "Transgender"

Continuing with the questions raised in the last section...

- Meyerowitz, Joanne (2002) *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 5).
- Valentine, David, (2002) “We’re Not About Gender: the Uses of ‘Transgender’.” in Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap (eds), *Out in Theory: the Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Butch/FTM Border Wars

- Halberstam, Judith, (1998) “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum.” *GLQ* 4(2):287-310.
- E. Kennedy and M. Davis, “Now you get this spot right here: Butch-Fem Sexuality in the 1940s and 1950s,” in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, pp. 191-230

FTMs and Transmen I

Film: *You Don’t Know Dick*

- Hale, Jacob, (1998) “Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands.” *GLQ* 4(2):311-348.

- Riki Anne Wilchins, “Deconstructing Trans,” in *Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, pp. 55-63.

FTMs and Transmen II

- Rubin, Henry, (2003) *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*. Vanderbilt University Press. (Selections)

Part III: From Within: Transgender(?) Voices

Activism and Meaning Making I: Historical Overview

What counts as “trans” activism? How has it changed over time?

- Meyerowitz, Joanne, (2002) *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 6 and 7)

Activism and Meaning Making II: Who Defines Transgender?

Who controls the meanings associated with trans identities? Using the example of transphobic violence, think about how are they mobilized differently by different groups.

- Wilchins, Riki Anne, (1997) *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books. (pp. 33-124, 185-221)
- Cartwright, Donna, “Remembering Falls City: the Death of Brandon Teena and the Resurgence of Transgender Activism.”
- Reading packet on the GenderPAC controversy.

Activism and Meaning Making III: Law and Public Policy

How do/should transpeople attempt to use the law to gain social rights? How does the law address concerns voices by transpeople?

- Flynn, T., (2001) “Transforming the Debate: Why We Need to Include Transgender Rights in the Struggles for Sex and Sexual Orientation Equality. *Columbia Law Review* (101)2: 392-420.
- Minter, S., (2000) Do Transsexuals Dream of Gay Rights? Getting Real About Transgender Inclusion in the Gay Rights Movement. *17 New York Law School Journal of Human Rights*, p. 589.

Part IV: History and Anthropology

Autobiography and History I

How has autobiography been integral to consolidating trans communities and making trans identities visible in the larger culture? (Think back to Rubin.)

- Califia, Pat, (1997) *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. San Francisco: Cleis Press (chapters 1 and 5).

Autobiography and History II

- Feinberg, Leslie, (1996) *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston: Beacon. (parts 2 and 3)

Speaking in/to the Academy I

How does the academy “Study” and use trans concepts to further intellectual and political goals? How can transpeople use the academy for similar ends?

- Stryker, Susan, (1998) The Transgender Issue: An Introduction. *GLQ* 4(2):145-158.
- Namaste, Viviane K., (2000) *Invisible Lives: the Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (chapter 1 and 2).

Speaking in/to the Academy II

- Califia, Pat, (1997) *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. San Francisco: Cleis Press (chapter 4).
- Towle, Evan B. and Lynn M. Morgan, (2002) “Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the "Third Gender" Concept. *GLQ* 8(4):469-497.

Using Transgender in Cross-Cultural Description I

How are trans identities generalizable across lines of culture and place? What are the common themes across cultures and what are the differences? What can we glean from the readings in this section about the ways in which “gender” and “sexuality” are complex and place-specific?

Film: *Travesti*

- Kulick, Don. 1998. *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Using Transgender in Cross-Cultural Description II

- Kulick, Don. 1998. *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Continued)

Using Transgender in Cross-Cultural Description III

- Blackwood, Evelyn, (1999) “Tombois in West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire,” in Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa (eds.), *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Johnson, Mark, (1998) “Global Desirings and Translocal Loves: Transgendering and Same-Sex Sexualities in the Southern Philippines.” *American Ethnologist* 25(4): 695.

Part V: Interrogating Transgender: Gender, Race, Class, Sexuality, Embodiment

Transgender, Economy and Class

How do issues of class play out in specific ways in trans communities? How is gender variance implicated in larger discussion of class politics?

Guest Lecturer: Dean Spade, Esq. Founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project

- Spade, Dean. “Compliance is Gendered: Struggling for Self-Determination in a Hostile Economy” (forthcoming).

Intersexuality I

What are the commonalities between trans and intersex identities? What are the differences? What has been the particular trajectory of intersex activism over the last century; how does it influence and how is it influenced by struggles for trans rights?

- Dreger, Alice Domurat, (1995) “Doubtful Sex: The Fate of the Hermaphrodite in Victorian England.” *Victorian Studies* 38(3):335.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne, (2000) *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books (chapter 3)
- Suzanne Kessler, “The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants,” *Signs* 16, n.1 (1990):3-26.

Intersexuality II

- Chase, Cheryl, (1998) Hermaphrodites With Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism. *GLQ* 4(2):189-211.
- Valentine, David and Riki Anne Wilchins, (1997) “One Percent on the Burn Chart: Gender, Genitals and Hermaphrodites with Attitude.” *Social Text* 52/53:215-222.

Drag I

What can we learn about gender performance and the politics of race and gender from looking at these canonical representations of drag culture? How do they inform the larger issues explored in this course?

Film: *Paris is Burning*

- Halberstam, Judith, (1997) “Mackdaddy, Superbly, Rapper: Gender, Race, and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene.” *Social Text* 52/53:104-131.
- hooks, bell, (1992) “Is Paris Burning?” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Drag II

- Newton, Esther, 1979[1972] *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Exam Review and Conclusions