

Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender

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## Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender

**I**t is by now clear that feminist politics needs to speak to (and be spoken by) many more subjects than women and men, heterosexual women and lesbians. How—in theory and in practice—should feminism engage bisexuality, intersexuality, transsexuality,<sup>1</sup> transgender, and other emergent identities that reconfigure both conventional and conventionally feminist understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality?<sup>2</sup> For me this question takes its most pressing forms when I think about how effective alliances can be forged in feminist spaces. How should feminists imagine and create communities that take the institutions and practices of sex, gender, and sexuality to be politically relevant to liberation? How might such communities incorporate our manifest and intransigent diversity *and* build solidarity?

In this article I work through these questions with reference to the leitmotiv of transgender. Following Susan Stryker, in this article I use *trans* as a broad umbrella adjective intended to capture the multiple forms of sex and gender crossing and mixing that are taken by their practitioners to be significant life projects. I use *transgendered* to describe anyone who lives a gender they were not perinatally assigned or that is not publicly recognizable within Western cultures' binary gender systems, and I use *transsexed* to describe anyone who undergoes (or hopes to undergo) any

I would like to thank audiences at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Eastern Society for Women in Philosophy, and the Canadian Philosophical Association for their helpful comments and questions on papers that preceded this one. I thank April Herndon, David Kahane, and two anonymous *Signs* reviewers for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>1</sup> There is some political debate about whether “transsexual” is a spelling preferable to “transsexual.” Some critics have suggested that an integrated rather than a compound noun avoids the problematic implication that transsexuals “cross sexes.” See Wilchins 1997, 15. I will use the more familiar “ss” spelling throughout.

<sup>2</sup> The very separability and meaningfulness of the terms *sex*, *gender*, and *sexuality* are called into question by many of these identities. In particular, this article implicitly challenges the distinction between *sex* (the body as male or female) and *gender* (the social role of the individual as a man or a woman). Thus I will use the phrase *sex-gender identity* to avoid the impression that this distinction is being upheld.

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of a number of physical interventions to bring hir sexed body more closely into line with hir gender identity.<sup>3</sup>

Feminists of all stripes share the political goal of weakening the grip of oppressive sex and gender dimorphisms in Western cultures, with their concomitant devaluing of the lesser terms *female* and *feminine*. This move has opened up new possibilities for individuals, but it is also, over time, generating a whole new field of meaning within which some identities may eventually cease to exist while others are being created. At this very general level, a wide range of gendered subjects stand to gain from challenges to enforced binaries within the nexus of sex, gender, and sexuality. At a more specific level, however, the complexities of oppression and privilege, and conflicting ideological and strategic approaches to politics, have conspired to fracture feminist and queer communities along identity fault lines. Despite the fact that many transgendered people are daily the victims of the most intense and public attempts to discipline gender in ways feminists have long criticized, “trans liberation” and “feminism” have often been cast as opposing movements. I will seek to explain and argue against this division, without entirely conceding the normative concerns that motivate it.

However political resistance through transforming gender has been articulated, the struggle has been on the disputed terrain where the life of the individual meets its institutional and historical conditions of possibility. Part of feminism is changing those institutions and creating new history, but in the interim feminists must make sense of the scope and limits of our agency *within* structures of oppression and privilege. In this space, ethics meets politics: feminism entails not only organizing for change but also changing oneself. Another backdrop to this essay, then, is my larger interest in the ethics of self-transformation. Although gender is often experienced as a deeply authentic aspect of the individual self, many theorists have persuasively argued that gender identities must be understood as *relationally* formed. With theorists such as Jessica Benjamin (1995), I will start from the claim that gender is not best understood simply as an attribute of individuals but rather as a set of often hierarchical relations among differently gendered subjects. Thus any project that takes

<sup>3</sup> This usage follows Stryker 1994, 251–52, n. 2. Of course, these terms are contested within trans communities: see Prosser 1998, esp. 200–205, for an alternative reading; and Cromwell 1999, esp. 19–30, for yet another. Leslie Feinberg has introduced the pronouns *hir* (in place of her/his) and *ze* (in place of he/she) to describe himself; I will use them throughout this article.

up the ethics of self-transformation will be necessarily linked to the questions about community I want to raise.

Initially, I offer a critical analysis of two very different feminist texts: the 1994 reissue of Janice Raymond's notorious *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (originally published in 1979) and Bernice Hausman's 1995 book *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender*. Rather than understanding transgendered people as working within an ethics of self-transformation with which all feminists must grapple, Raymond and Hausman's otherwise theoretically contrasting texts represent the transsexual (qua monolithic representative of all transgender subjectivities) as uniquely mired in pathology. Both commentators draw on the classification of transsexuality as a mental "disorder" to make their case; by persistently foreclosing all possibilities for political resistance to a disease model, they construct trans people as lacking both agency and critical perspective. By showing in some detail how these strategies of foreclosure work, I hope, first, to develop the negative case presented by Sandy Stone (1991) that influential non-trans feminists have orientalized the trans subject and concomitantly failed to investigate their authorial locations as stably gendered subjects. This reductive characterization of the transsexual as the dupe of gender then permits the conclusion that transgender politics writ large have no feminist potential.

Charges of political quietism against transsexuals present one set of challenges to meaningful political alliances between trans and non-trans feminists. A second set of difficulties is raised by the genre of popular trans feminist polemic, epitomized by authors such as Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, and Riki Anne Wilchins. This literature voices the views of trans people with radical gender politics, moving beyond the traditional forums of sensationalized autobiography or objectifying psychological studies. These authors properly advocate the right to express and develop a gender identity not determinately linked to birth sex; however, I will argue that too often this literature falls back onto an implausibly atomistic self that is given normative free rein to assert its gender. Taking Feinberg's remarks in his recent book *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (1998) as exemplar, I will contest his implication that a feminist politics should tolerate any "gender expression." A failure to understand gender as relational (and hierarchical) leads Feinberg to elide certain normative implications of his account. Specifically, he does not examine the fact that the expression of one gender may limit the possible meanings or opportunities available to others. Adopting the language of individual freedom of expression with regard to gender, then, will sidestep important ethicopolitical questions that arise from gender relations and the demands of community.

Thus feminist writing about transgender needs to define and articulate a middle ground in which an ethics of self-fashioning can be developed. Such an ethics should recognize the discursive limits on individual self-transformation without denying agency to gendered subjects. It must also engage the politics of self-transformation in a broader field, where one's choices affect others' identities and possibilities.

### Where is the author?

I am acutely aware of the pitfalls of writing about trans people from a vantage point as a non-trans woman and someone who is not actively involved with extra-academic trans communities.<sup>4</sup> Questions about the location of a non-trans author in an article primarily concerned with trans issues are important; my personal motivations are, as always, deeply intertwined with the structure of my arguments. This is perhaps especially important to acknowledge when much of what has been written about trans people by non-trans feminists has not only been hostile but has also taken an explicit *dis*identification with transsexuals' experiences as its critical standpoint.<sup>5</sup> This move runs counter to familiar feminist political commitments to respecting what the marginalized say about themselves and seems to ignore the risks of orientalism.<sup>6</sup> It also inhibits alliances between trans and non-trans feminists; theorists' inclination to stress deep differences between these groups attenuates the political motivation to investigate shared experiences. In fact, for a long time I sustained a marked feminist suspicion of transsexuality, based largely on popular (feminist) portrayals.<sup>7</sup> However, the first two transsexual people I came to know

<sup>4</sup> I have tried to write this article in the spirit of Jacob Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans—" (1997).

<sup>5</sup> In his critique of Bernice Hausman, Jay Prosser argues that Hausman "blocks out" her own gender identity and embodiment in order tacitly to justify her authorial location "outside of" transsexuality as "the authoritative site from which to speak" (1998, 132–33). Janice Raymond's text is similarly at pains to show that transsexuals' attitudes are fundamentally inimical to a particular kind of identity politics, while being devoid of any critical examination of the author's location and investments in the identity being defended.

<sup>6</sup> I am thinking here of "orientalism" in all of the senses invoked by Edward Said, but the most striking analogy with feminist treatments of transgender is perhaps with his claim that "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1978, 3).

<sup>7</sup> See Gamson 1998 for analysis of the intense manipulation of representations of trans people in U.S. talk shows. There is a remarkable continuity between some of the stereotypes Gamson discusses and those upheld within feminist contexts.

socially (one male-to-female [MTF], one female-to-male [FTM]) disrupted this suspicion: both were feminists, and both were involved (in very different ways) in queer communities.<sup>8</sup> I have since read, listened to, and corresponded with many more trans people in the context of my feminist theoretical work. I am not claiming any epistemic authority here, and this is certainly not a representative sample—any more than my genetic women colleagues in feminist studies are. However, I have also known a lot of other people who have struggled with gender—as butches, femmes, women working in male-dominated occupations, female and male survivors of sexual violence, male feminists, gay men, bisexual feminists, and so on. Over several years, I have come to see connections among these different people that make me less inclined to separate out transsexuals, or trans people in general, as traitors to a cause certain others share.

The two most salient personal aspects of this inquiry, however, have been, first, my visibility as a bisexual feminist woman, and, second, the alliances and conflicts this identification has produced. Despite my qualms about the term *bisexual*, this descriptor provides a kind of home for me, when everywhere else feels worse. Both heterosexual and lesbian spaces have their own comforts for women, and I have often been excluded from both. I have also been told that I needed to change to fit into those spaces—by acceding either to my true hetero- or homosexuality—and I have felt the moments of truth as well as the sometime hypocrisy and complacency of those demands. As I want to argue in this article, making oneself over into a more politically appealing subject—even (perhaps especially) if one is well-motivated by political theory to do so—cannot be accomplished by fiat. Sometimes, as Sandra Bartky points out, one's desires, pleasures, and aspirations will resist even the most determined attempts at refashioning (1990, 45–62). It is both necessary and troubling to seek out a home as a gendered or sexual being: necessary because community, recognition, and stability are essential to human flourishing and political resistance, and troubling because those very practices too often congeal into political ideologies and group formations that are exclusive or hegemonic. Non-trans feminists have a responsibility, I think, to consider trans issues in light of these social realities, which hit particularly hard for those who live along their fault lines.

My second, related, motivation comes from a deep sense of unease

<sup>8</sup> Again, the terms *MTF* and *FTM* are disputed in trans communities. For example, some prefer the terms *female-to-female* or *male-to-male* to capture the subjective experience of transition rather than its perception by others, while others use *mtf* or *ftm*, rejecting the capitalization as an acronym that misleadingly signals discrete identities.

with my own body. I am quite clear that I am not a transsexual, but I have often wished (including for periods of years at a time) to be in a different body. In some ways, I feel as though the body I have is the *wrong* body: too large, too female in some respects, too clumsy. Surely an incisive intellectual mind requires an equally lean and skillful body?<sup>9</sup> When it comes to the kind of body I most want, I feel quite ridiculously fearless in the face of the physical risks that attaining that body might necessitate, even though I am well aware of their practical and political perils. This is one of the reasons—for better or worse—that I am gripped by the phenomenology of transgender. Experiences like mine are at least partially explicable within the insightful feminist frameworks offered by commentators such as Susan Bordo (1993). If this is so, it would seem that the experience of one's body failing to conform to one's identity, and the conflicted desire to change that body, ought to be recognizable to non-trans women. Yet it is the demand for bodily modifications on the part of transsexed people that has most provoked feminist commentators and been characterized as the most politically regressive and *foreign* of desires. For example, in a startlingly dissociative moment Bernice Hausman speculates that "*those of us who are not transsexuals* may wonder what it is like to feel oneself 'in the wrong body'" (1995, 174; emphasis mine). In the first part of the article, I try to answer the question of why this phenomenological connection has seemed so unavailable to non-trans feminists.

### **Feminists construct transsexuality**

Whether appropriated to bolster queer theoretical claims, represented as the acid test of constructionism, or attacked for suspect political commitments, transgender has been colonized as a feminist theoretical testing ground. As subjects who explore what Michel Foucault (1988) called "technologies of the self" in particularly literal forms, transgendered people seem paradigmatic of many of the most pressing feminist anxieties about identity, gender, and personal transformation.

Janice Raymond's oeuvre is part of a tradition of radical feminism that

<sup>9</sup> Bordo (1993, 139–54) argues convincingly that what she labels the axes of dualism and control conspire to create social conditions in Western cultures where mental acuity, or the lack of it, is believed to be reflected in the body's form, especially for women. One implication that Bordo does not explore is that it is very difficult for fat women to be taken seriously as intellectuals; I am greatly indebted to April Herndon for her insightful analysis of this topic.

stressed the autonomy of women from men, using understandings of heterosexuality as a compulsory institution to bring relationships between women and men into the political sphere (e.g., Rich 1980). Stressing the realities of violence against women, economic dependence, unequal division of domestic labor, and an ideology of self-sacrifice, feminists denaturalized heterosexual relationships, recommending instead that women become “woman-identified.” In this context, early lesbian feminists created a new category of woman-identified women, resistant to the pull of compulsory heterosexuality and likely to generate liberatory spaces within which women could transform themselves (e.g., Radicalesbians 1988). This paradigm is conceptually and politically dependent on the radical separation of women from men, and indeed lesbian feminists have continued to emphasize the importance of self-definition and willful separation in creating feminist communities (e.g., Frye 1983, 95–109; Card 1990).

Raymond’s work on transsexuality thus emerges from a paradigm in which dissociation from men and masculinity, combined with self-definition and control of women’s identity, are prime political values. *The Transsexual Empire* ([1979] 1994) has become the archetypal articulation of radical feminist hostility to transsexuality and has had a persistent influence on feminist perceptions of transgender.<sup>10</sup> Raymond’s early investigation of the

<sup>10</sup> For contemporaneous analyses that recapitulate some of Raymond’s theses, see Daly (1978) 1990, 67–68, 71–72 (and 238 and 287 for notes explicitly endorsing aspects of Raymond’s position); and Yudkin 1978. More recent endorsements: Claudia Card describes *The Transsexual Empire* as “the most powerful treatise on the ethics and politics of male-constructed female [*sic*] transsexualism” (Card 1994, xv). Alluding to Raymond’s work, Kathy Miriam writes that “recent ‘transgender’ militancy is a clear indication that feminist lesbian fears in the 1970’s were not paranoia, but a realistic apprehension of the significance of ‘lesbian’ transsexuals as a penetration of woman-only space by men” (Miriam 1993, 52, n. 116; emphasis in original). Sheila Jeffreys (1993, esp. 142–63) also endorses Raymond’s position, inverting the analysis to portray FTMs as lesbian deserters who mimic the misogynist aspects of gay male culture. In a recent *Village Voice* editorial, Norah Vincent attributes the legitimacy of transsexuality to the ascendancy of postmodern philosophy, in a way reminiscent of Raymond’s sarcastic treatment of Stone (Raymond [1979] 1994, xxii). Vincent writes: “[Transsexuality] signifies the death of the self, the soul, that good old-fashioned indubitable ‘I’ so beloved of Descartes, whose great adage ‘I think, therefore I am’ has become an ontological joke on the order of ‘I tinker, and there I am’” (2001). Other recent recapitulations of aspects of Raymond’s position (and critical responses) can be found in discussions surrounding organizers’ refusal to admit (openly) trans women to the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (MWMF). See Morris 1999, 171–74; the letters pages in the alternative magazine *Lesbian Connection*; and messages posted to the festival Web board at <http://www.michfest.com/>. I am indebted to Mary Gebhart for sharing her invaluable primary research and critical analysis of the rift between trans and lesbian feminists at MWMF (dis-

medical discourses and institutions that police transsexuality is a significant contribution to feminist scholarship, and her critical commentary on John Money's theories of gender identity remains valuable (and topical in light of recent media fascination with the cases he managed) (Raymond [1979] 1994, 43–68).<sup>11</sup> However, despite a number of critical analyses of Raymond's overall approach (such as Riddell 1996; Califa 1997, 86–108), no commentator pays sufficiently close attention to the details of her views, which are often defended by theorists who would eschew any overt connection with her approach. It is against this background that I take up the “new introduction on transgender” to the 1994 reissue of *The Transsexual Empire*. I suggest that Raymond's resistance to changing her position is not simply a principled refusal. Feminists writing about transgender are, as Ludwig Wittgenstein would say, held captive by a picture within which the history of fetishizing trans people combines with a lack of critical attention to the privilege of being stably gendered to erase the possibility of a trans feminist politics, and, hence, the possibility of alliance between trans and non-trans feminists. This picture needs to be made visible *as* a picture before it can be dispelled.<sup>12</sup>

In her 1994 introduction, Raymond again restricts membership in the category “women” to those with a shared female history, explicitly excluding MTF transsexuals. Raymond's ad hoc attempts to exclude MTFs while including all genetic women are rather unconvincing, and I will not

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sertation in progress, Michigan State University, American Studies Program). Finally, Raymondian understandings of MTF identity have been reiterated in debates in Canada around human rights claims brought by transsexuals against their exclusion from positions in feminist organizations reserved for women. See Michele Landsberg's commentary in the *Toronto Star* (2000).

<sup>11</sup> The cause célèbre that recently brought Money and his theories into the public eye is the John/Jean case, where a male infant was surgically altered to have feminized genitals following a botched circumcision. The child was raised as a girl, while his identical twin brother was raised as a boy. In adolescence and young adulthood John rejected his female gender identity and began to live as a man, demanding medical treatment to restore—insofar as this was possible—a male body, and eventually marrying and adopting children. Interestingly enough, in media exposés of this case, Money was portrayed as overly casual about the link between sex and gender, dogmatically insisting that early childhood socialization could imprint gender identity, regardless of biological sex. Predictably, the case has been taken to make the explicitly antifeminist point that boys and girls are born rather than made, although it has also provided some succor for opponents of damaging cosmetic genital surgeries on intersexed children. See Colapino 1997; and Chase 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein says “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (1958, sec. 115). For a detailed account of this Wittgensteinian approach to genealogy as political therapy, see Owen 2003.

elaborate or rebut them here.<sup>13</sup> At the root of her exclusion of transsexuals from the category women (and, hence, of course, from women-only spaces) is a critique of institutions that, Raymond argues, make transsexuality possible. On her reading, MTF transsexuals are artifacts of patriarchal medical practices that appropriate women's bodies and perpetuate gender essentialism and, hence, oppression; within this model, transsexuals themselves practice misogynist forms of femininity and deny their male privilege. Key to this construction is Raymond's critique of the medicalization of transsexuality, particularly of the classification of "gender identity disorder" as a pathology by the infamous *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association ("the DSM").<sup>14</sup> Raymond renders transsexuality co-causal with its disease classification and also suggests that transsexuals are complicitous with some medical experts' sexist norms ([1979] 1994, xvi, 34).<sup>15</sup> These conclusions depend on the validity of a number of controversial premises: first, that the identities of all trans people can be captured using a theoretical model avowedly based on a small sample of primarily MTF transsexuals; second, that all trans people are dependent on thoroughgoing sex reassignment surgery (SRS) for the successful expression of their identities; and third, that the desire to change one's body in order to accommodate one's identity in this way is conclusive evidence of antifeminist political commitments. This final premise is particularly interesting to me because so many non-trans women also undertake to dramatically change their bodies for reasons arguably connected to gender identity: bodybuilders, athletes, dieters, anorectics, and cosmetic surgery candidates, among others. Rather than exploring these analogies, Raymond emphasizes *disanalogies* with other social hierarchies—race, age, and class in particular.

<sup>13</sup> The essentialist claim that we can think of "women" as a category with necessary and sufficient conditions of membership has been widely challenged by feminists, including myself, who have recommended alternative forms of generalization. For example, I have argued that "women" should be understood as a Wittgensteinian family resemblance concept (Heyes 2000a). This approach precludes the kind of ad hoc boundary defense that ensnares Raymond; however, it still leaves many political questions unresolved.

<sup>14</sup> With its spiraling taxonomies of "mental disorders," almost invariably described as if they were psychic states entirely separable from cultural and historical context, the DSM-IV itself is not a document I want to defend. It uses the classification "gender identity disorder," for which the primary symptoms are "a strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex [*sic*])" and "persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex" (American Psychiatric Association 1994, 537).

<sup>15</sup> References to Raymond's (1979) 1994 "new introduction on transgender" can be identified by page numbers in roman numerals.

What is interesting about these appeals, however, is that they seem to complicate rather than clarify the point she wants to make. Most purchasers of antiwrinkle creams, face-lifts, and related beauty treatments are expressing a relatively depoliticized “age dissatisfaction,” and the cosmetics and cosmetic surgery industries are engaged in constructing discourses that pathologize age. An increasingly common psychology in selling these products is to encourage potential consumers to think of themselves as young people trapped in an older person’s body—an uncanny echo of transsexual discourse (Morgan 1998, 327). Raymond asks, “Does a Black person who wants to be white suffer from the ‘disease’ of being a ‘transracial?’” and claims, “there is no demand for transracial medical intervention precisely *because* most Blacks recognize that it is their society, not their skin, that needs changing” ([1979] 1994, xvi). Yet her point about “transracial” medical intervention is simply false: cosmetic modifications that aim to make features of bodies less ethnically or racially marked abound, from hair-straightening treatments for African Americans, to nose jobs for Jews, to eyelid surgery for East Asians, to the ubiquitous skin-bleaching creams marketed to people of color. Where the disanalogy with other social groups seems most marked is in the case of socioeconomic class. Yet even here there are ways of expressing dissatisfaction with one’s class status that, for better or worse, seek their remedy in changes to the body: to the extent that obesity connotes “trashiness” in North America, for example, dieting has a socioeconomic subtext. Likewise, dieting is marketed to women in particular using the language of a thin person “just dying to get out” of her fat body.

While Raymond’s attempts at disanalogy may fail, she would be right to point out that these forms of self-fashioning are hardly random expressions of presocial desires and that all take place in larger political contexts. And while transsexuality often operates using a much more medicalized and depoliticized discourse than the other examples, to understand why, we need both a broader understanding of the history of sexuality and a more careful evaluation of how that history confronts individuals. To the extent that “sex,” “gender,” and “sexuality” have come to be thought of as core ontological facts about individuals, organized through a binary schema, discourses of transsexuality have an obvious foothold. One simply *is*, essentially, either male or female, and concomitantly heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the relation of sexual object choice to biological sex. This schema, while in some moments resistant to any crossing of categories, simultaneously creates conditions of possibility for transsexuality understood as a biological or pathological phenomenon.

If Raymond would agree with this synopsis, then she would have to concur that the history of race and its negotiation by individuals are significantly different. The category of “race” carries with it a (racist) biological baggage that gives related meaning to medical interventions: race, in one (misguided) part of the popular imagination, is a *natural* category that adheres to bodies rather than history; thus changing one’s body can change one’s race (or the *perception* of one’s race—the same thing, or not, depending how you think). However, a (differently racist) discourse understands race as a *superficial* aspect of identity: “we’re all the same underneath.” If we are, in some sense, “all the same” (where “same” is coded “white”), then “transracialism” makes no sense. This latter humanist position has more of a grip on our thinking about race, I would argue, than it does in the case of gender. Furthermore, race has an ambivalent relationship to dichotomy: while the politics of race often does operate to reduce racial conflict to “black versus white,” especially in U.S. contexts, dominant racial taxonomies all admit of several racial groups. Thus it is less clear what a transracial would cross between; there is more than one permutation.

Working out the analogies and disanalogies between “transsexualism” and “transracialism” is therefore going to require more than an assertion that the former exists while the latter does not, when this is itself arguable. An even less plausible contention is that transsexuals’ participation in the institution of transsexuality is evidence of their political naïveté and gender bad faith, while people of color (would) consciously and univocally resist “transracialism” because they are politically savvy to its actual (or potential) role in maintaining racism. What do transsexuals of color do on this model, I wonder? Raymond’s transsexual is decisively coded as white, precluding the possibility of a “double consciousness” within which these paradoxically divergent understandings of race and gender are potentially available to the transsexual (not just to the nontranssexual critic). Thus Raymond’s critique of medicalization, while accurately reflecting many of the conservative requirements imposed on transsexual “patients,” singles out transsexuals as uniquely implicated in politically regressive ideologies. This analysis leaves no space for recognition of the discontinuity between the expectations of non-trans medical practitioners and transsexuals themselves, and indeed for the very possibility of a feminist transsexual.

The picture of transsexuality I have been criticizing might seem like a throwback to the headier days of second-wave feminism, when women were women and generalizations were unqualified. But part of my argument is that this picture persists into recent interpretations of transgender identities, even when the explicit theoretical paradigm is not lesbian feminist. In

*Changing Sex*, for example, Bernice Hausman offers a Foucauldian genealogy of transsexuality; while we might hope that a constructionist historical analysis would be less likely to project negative moral qualities onto contemporary subjects without appreciating the complexity of their locations, Hausman reaches conclusions quite similar to Raymond's.

Hausman's primary thesis is "that the development of certain medical technologies made the advent of transsexualism possible" (1995, 7). She finds the conditions of possibility for the transsexual subject in a genealogy that grants "to the technology a relative autonomy from what are known as gender ideologies" (1995, 14, 117). I do not have space here to argue with Hausman's historical scholarship on the emergence of medical-technological discourses. While we might debate the causal mechanisms she identifies, I think she does show that the emergence of sexological discourse and, crucially, a supportive technological base for effecting SRS were key conditions of possibility for contemporary transsexual identity as a medicalized phenomenon.

However, like Raymond, Hausman explicitly disavows the possibility of trans subjects who challenge the epistemic priority of technological intervention mediated by medical professionals. The acting subject is subservient to emergent technology in her analysis:

By demanding technological intervention to "change sex," transsexuals demonstrate that their relationship to technology is a dependent one. Ostensibly, the demand for sex change represents the desperation of the transsexual condition: after all, who but a suffering individual would voluntarily request such severe physical transformation? Yet it is through this demand that the subject presents him/herself to the doctor as a transsexual subject; the demand for sex change is an enunciation that designates a desired action and identifies the speaker as the appropriate subject of that action. Demanding sex change is therefore part of what constructs the subject as a transsexual: it is the mechanism through which transsexuals come to identify themselves under the sign of transsexualism and construct themselves as its subjects. (Hausman 1995, 110)

Although much of her scholarship is based on the history of sexology, Hausman is also interested in what contemporary transsexuals have to say about this process. In a chapter devoted to transsexual autobiography, she first takes up Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," a well-known call to arms by and on behalf of radical transsexuals. Hausman endorses most of Stone's political aspirations, including

the desire to destabilize the official history of transsexuality and to offer dissident transsexual autobiographies that resist the allure of essentialism and passing (Hausman 1995, 143–45). However, Hausman also introduces a circularity that makes these goals impossible to meet. She suggests that Stone's overall goal is to liberate "suppressed stories, the 'truth' of the transsexual experience," and that, in the service of this goal, Stone represents "the power at work—the force that produces transsexual autobiography as singular and monolithic—as entirely repressive and negative, without any enabling function" (Hausman 1995, 146). This is a very odd interpretation of a text that professes a commitment to "constituting transsexuals as a *genre*—a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored" (Stone 1991, 296; emphases in original). I read Stone's allusions to "authentic experience" or "a true, effective and representational counterdiscourse" (1991, 295) as more literal calls to stop participating in the denials that conformity to clinical protocols requires. Stone is not suggesting that transsexual narratives have a univocal authenticity that has yet to be articulated but rather that whatever transgressive possibilities transsexuality might afford will not be generated by lying about basic aspects of one's lived experience (e.g., the fact that one was raised as a boy even though one currently lives as a woman).

Driving a wedge between Stone's account and her own enables Hausman to make what she presents as a counterargument: "Another way to examine these autobiographies is to use a Foucauldian model to analyze the statements made in transsexual autobiographies and thereby to examine the forms of subjectivity and experience made possible by these statements. This approach would enable us to gauge the ways in which transsexual autobiographies function as enabling—and not merely repressive—narratives" (1995, 147). So far, so good. What Hausman does with this "Foucauldian model," however, is to read a number of popular testimonials as "closed texts" within which "alternate interpretations are at times suggested, but immediately foreclosed by the author": "For the reader interested in verifying his or her own gender confusions, these narratives provide ample opportunity for identification and mirroring. For a critical reader, on the other hand, the reading process can be confining, especially as the author makes blanket statements concerning sex, gender, and sexuality. The purpose of the narratives is to force the reader to comply with the author's experience" (156). For Hausman, this "interpretive foreclosure" is reiterated in the encounter between the would-be transsexual and the clinician (157). Her organizing thesis is that the trans subject must necessarily reiterate central tropes of autobiographical and

medical narratives of transsexuality in order to exist. For Hausman, the transsexual author is an agent *only* to the extent that she or he works to foreclose interpretations of her/his story as evidence of anything other than authentic “mistaken identity” requiring SRS.

The question, then, is what Hausman can make of the agency of transsexuals in authoring their own narratives. Her historical work not only describes the conditions of possibility for a certain articulation of transsexual identity but goes on to tautologically present the class of transsexuals as coterminous with those who uncritically accede to the terms of contemporary technological intervention. If technology overdetermines the transsexual, and the demand for medical-technological intervention overdetermines these “confining” personal narratives, then any conceptual space for resistance to the medical-technological complex has also been foreclosed. Thus Hausman suggests that transsexuals have agency only in their complicity: “By making their desired treatment absolutely clear, transsexuals encouraged a therapeutic response on the part of clinicians. In this way, transsexuals were actively engaged in defining their position within medical discourses” (1995, 129; see also 130). As Jay Prosser points out (referring to Hausman’s quote from 156 above): “The ‘critical reader’ is set up in opposition to ‘the reader interested in verifying his or her gender confusion’ . . . Whereas the gender-confused use transsexual autobiography to verify their gender confusion, critical readers (presumably having no gender confusion to verify) apparently get to see through to the internal problematics of these texts: as if transsexuals were not critical thinkers and readers; indeed, as if one couldn’t be a transsexual and a critic at the same time” (1998, 132). Thus in Hausman’s reduction the transsexual is defined, tautologically, as the individual who accedes to the terms of the discourse that generated a particular subject position.

**(The same) feminists construct transgender (the same way)**

Having thus shown how both Raymond’s and Hausman’s analyses conspire to preclude agential resistance on the part of transsexuals, I want now to turn to their strikingly similar feminist analyses of the limitations of the contemporary trans liberation movement. Both authors anticipate the objection that their emphasis on the surgically (re)constructed transsexual obscures the multiplicity of transgendered lives, and both respond to trans critics articulating new narratives and political strategies. This rhetorical work is accomplished, in both cases, in relatively brief ripostes appended to larger analyses—in Raymond’s case, in the “new introduction on transgender” discussed above, and in Hausman’s, in a six-page epilogue

to *Changing Sex*. Both authors argue that their analyses need not change in the face of trans people who do not appear to fit. In these passages, we see how both authors' skepticism about the feminist implications of transsexuality is extended to transgender more broadly, thus dismissing transgender activism as irrelevant to feminist politics.

Throughout the main text of *The Transsexual Empire*, Raymond reduces "transsexual" to "seeking total sex reassignment surgery," which she takes to imply specific ideological commitments to essentialist and antifeminist understandings of gender. When it comes to "transgender," however, Raymond offers a capacious definition: "The term, transgender, covers preoperative and postoperative transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, cross dressers, gays and lesbians, bisexuals, and straights who exhibit any kind of dress and/or behavior interpreted as 'transgressing' gender roles" (Raymond [1979] 1994, xxv). This definition enables Raymond to attack the more ephemeral and often less politicized performances of celebrities such as RuPaul and k. d. lang (being "shaved" by Cindy Crawford on the 1993 cover of *Vanity Fair*). She suggests that "the ideal of transgender is provocative. On a personal level, it allows for a continuum of gendered expression. On a political level, it never moves off this continuum to an existence in which gender is truly transcended. Its supposedly iconoclastic rebellion against traditional gender confinement is more style than substance" ([1979] 1994, xxxv). One might legitimately retort here that the personal *is* the political and that Raymond's point trades on a false dichotomy; however, a more charitable interpretation would have her arguing that popular representations of single acts are a poor substitute for collective action against gender norms. In fact, many trans activists agree and see themselves as part of a political movement working toward new legal, institutional, and cultural norms that do not embody compulsory, binary gender roles (e.g., Bornstein 1997; Wilchins 1997).

However, even when the form of transgender in question seems more overtly controversial and transgressive, Raymond still sees a necessarily misogynist politics: "It is interesting that, like transsexuals, the majority of transgenderists are men who, rather than transcending, i.e., dismantling and going beyond gender roles, seek to combine aspects of traditional femininity with traditional masculinity" ([1979] 1994, xxv). She provides no support for the empirical aspect of this claim, and in fact there is only very sketchy and largely anecdotal evidence about the proportions of genetic males and females who might be described as "transgendered," however defined (partly because these statistics are in rapid flux). Raymond is theoretically motivated to emphasize the role of genetic men by her

desire to safeguard the integrity of the category “woman-identified women.” Genetic women who might plausibly be described as “trans” are explained within a binary gender system—albeit a critical feminist model. It is clearly a parallel oversimplification to insist on including any masculine woman in the category “trans,” but whatever answers are offered to these methodological (and historical) questions need to make both problem and solution explicit (see Halberstam 1998). Even in her critique of *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg 1993), Raymond is critical of what she sees as the “politically disappointing” retreat of the protagonist, Jess, into “a long-suffering self-surrender to being *other*—not a woman who is a butch and not a woman who tries to pass as a man with the help of hormones and surgery, but a transgendered individual who identifies as simply ‘other.’ In fact, Jess’s final transformation is *from being woman-identified to being other-identified*” (Raymond [1979] 1994, xxxii; emphases in original).

Jess’s transgendered life seems as close as it is possible to get to surviving on a discursive fault line—psychologically and quite literally. Yet, as I have shown, Raymond is also disappointed with the inability of transgendered people to “transcend” gender roles and with transgendered practices that only “combine aspects of traditional femininity with traditional masculinity.” As she herself asks rhetorically, “What good is a gender outlaw who is still abiding by the law of gender?” ([1979] 1994, xxxv). Some transgendered people are criticized for mixing still identifiably gendered aesthetics or behaviors and thus failing to “transcend” gender; some are criticized for failing to occupy a gender home (even when neither “woman” nor “man” seems welcoming). The hypothesis that transgender is antifeminist seems unfalsifiable, and one is left wondering if there could be *any* kind of trans life that would satisfy Raymond with its feminist credentials and contribution to social transformation. I suspect the answer to this is no, because Raymond’s brand of feminism requires only one subject: the woman-identified woman. Indeed, Raymond famously states that “the problem of transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence” ([1979] 1994, 178).

Hausman’s critique of the trans movement is remarkably similar. Her epilogue briefly considers how to make sense of those transgendered people, including some transsexuals, who have started to publicly repudiate the conservative politics of transsexuality espoused by clinicians and popular media (1995, 195). In answer, Hausman discusses Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw* (1995), arguing for the conclusion that “the contradictions that emerge from her arguments . . . demonstrate the extent to which the transgender movement bases its claims within the conventional

parameters of the gender identity paradigm rather than transgressing that paradigm, as it claims to do” (Hausman 1995, 197). This conclusion is supported with the premise that any attempt to proliferate genders (as Bornstein wants to do) will always relate back to the binary: “In Raymond’s argument—and my own—one cannot ‘escape’ gender by switching roles or performances and thereby confuse the binary logic, because that logic defines the possibility of the switching in the first place. ‘Transcending’ gender (Raymond’s words) involves a more critical project, as well as the possibility of unsettling the stability of those who see themselves as ‘normally sexed’” (1995, 198). To support this claim, Hausman reiterates her argument that medicotechnological treatment is inseparable from all trans identities: “Transgenderism, even with limited technological intervention, usually involves hormone treatment, and taking hormones, even in small doses, is risky. Taking hormones in the dosages necessary to maintain the opposite sex’s morphology is not something that should be done without proper medical treatment and supervision. To ignore these facts is to discount the significance of technological intervention on the body’s tissue and function, which is precisely one goal of the transsexual—to forget or dismiss the technological intervention necessary to maintain his or her chosen sex” (200). In the passage just quoted, the object of discussion again slips from the transgendered individual seeking “limited technological intervention” to the transsexual who is ideologically dependent on denying that such intervention has occurred. Like Raymond, Hausman attributes to all trans people not just a pragmatic dependence on medical services but also a wholesale adoption of a particular diagnosis and its concomitant politics. In this context it is unclear what the “more critical project” Hausman alludes to could be. Certainly every attempt by a self-identified trans person to unsettle the stability of the normally sexed and gendered, or to articulate ways of being that exceed the binary logic, will risk rejection by Hausman as well as by Raymond.

### **Trans liberation?**

The rhetorical strategies of Raymond and Hausman thus inhibit community building by defining feminist transgender politics as an oxymoron. Non-trans feminists who are convinced by these arguments will not be motivated to explore alliances—indeed, they provide justifications for actively resisting transgender expression and inclusion. I now want to take up the second horn of the dilemma I identified at the beginning of the article and turn to trans feminist writing—specifically, Feinberg’s *Trans Liberation*. In this text I identify an understanding of gender as a property

of individuals rather than relations that hampers the development of feminist community in which agents are held morally accountable for the consequences of their gender expression for others.

In the emerging genre of popular trans feminist polemic (as in much of popular feminist writing) the rhetorical emphasis is squarely on the right of individuals to express their gender as they choose or to engage in free gender play. Hausman's brief critique of Bornstein finds fault with the "liberal humanist" model of the self such claims imply, and, philosophically speaking, I concur that Bornstein risks eliding a number of concerns about the embeddedness of gendered subjects. However, I see gender voluntarism as playing an important rhetorical role for transgendered intellectuals. Until very recently, the public trans person was most often manipulated as a talk-show gimmick, sexual fetish, or tell-all sensationalist. These images are still there, but there is also now a genre of writing by feminist activists such as Stone (1991), Stryker (1994), Bornstein (1995, 1997), Wilchins (1997), and Feinberg (1998), who use both first-person narratives and polemical commentary on gender to motivate more critical understandings of what trans liberation might mean.<sup>16</sup> This is an emerging genre, and interpreting *Gender Outlaw* or *Read My Lips* as the final word in trans politics is rather like seeing *The Female Eunuch* or *The Beauty Myth* as the epitome of feminism—each text captures particular moments of a political movement, defends particular theses perhaps, but need not define the scope of critique or remedy.

Feinberg's work on trans liberation as a political movement "capable of fighting for justice" must be read against this background.<sup>17</sup> This movement, on Feinberg's account, includes "masculine females and feminine males, cross-dressers, transsexual men and women, intersexuals born on the anatomical sweep between female and male, gender-blenders, many other sex and gender-variant people, and our significant others" (1998, 5). Indeed, in the short "portraits" by other contributors, an impressively wide range of queer identities and stories inflected by class, race, and age are represented: from a male transvestite who became a full-time transgendered woman talking with her wife about their relationship, to a drag queen recalling New York street life and Stonewall, to a gay transman on the significance of his native heritage, to an intersexed activist discussing the emergence of the intersex movement. Feinberg never hesitates to draw parallels with the oppression of women, and his extensive connections to

<sup>16</sup> Two books that complicate this genre were published too late to be discussed in this essay, which was written in 2000. See Namaste 2000 and Haynes and McKenna 2001.

<sup>17</sup> An earlier version of this critique of Feinberg was first published in Heyes 2000b.

feminist activism are made explicit throughout hir writing. Hir stated primary goal is to “refocus on defending the [gender] diversity in the world that already exists, and creating room for even more possibilities” (28), with a particular emphasis on rupturing the connection between sexed bodies and gender identities.

Despite the book’s many virtues, there are interesting dissonances between Feinberg’s analysis of trans oppression and hir emphasis on freedom of individual self-expression: “Each person’s expression of their gender or genders is their own and equally beautiful. To refer to anyone’s gender expression as exaggerated is insulting and restricts gender freedom” (1998, 24). And, “since I don’t accept negative judgments about my own gender articulation, I avoid judgments about others. People of all sexes have the right to explore femininity, masculinity—and the infinite variations between—without criticism or ridicule” (25). This freedom is characterized very much as a property of individuals, and the language of choice appears throughout the book in slogans such as, “every person should have the right to choose between pink or blue tinted gender categories, as well as all the other hues of the palette”; “These ideas of what a ‘real’ woman or man should be straightjacket the freedom of individual self-expression” (4). In certain contexts Feinberg’s appeal for blanket tolerance of all and any gender expressions is appropriate. The notion of gender freedom ze espouses speaks against both the crushing weight of the dominant culture’s gender discipline and some of feminism’s more doctrinaire moments: “There are no rights or wrongs in the ways people express their own gender style. No one’s lipstick or flattop is hurting us. . . . Each person has the right to express their gender in any way that feels most comfortable” (53).

This approach, however, avoids important normative questions. In particular, the privilege of white bourgeois male masculinity is implicated in the cultural visibility of minority male masculinities, cultural disdain for femininity, and cultural intolerance and disgust directed against any gender “deviance.” These social structures inform and support normative heterosexuality and white bourgeois patriarchy. Gender expression is thus not only an aesthetic choice about cosmetics or hairstyle, skirts or suits. It is also implicated in politically fraught behaviors, economic marginalization and exploitation, and political consciousness. So even if the aesthetic choices of individuals are not up for moral grabs (as I agree they should not be), “gender expression” must surely (on Feinberg’s own account) occupy a normative terrain.

For example, many feminists have argued that misogynist violence is constitutive of certain kinds of masculinity, but it is hardly a form of gender

expression that Feinberg can condone. When ze discusses hir experience of police brutality against gay drag kings and drag queens, ze concludes: “I believe that we need to sharpen our view of how repression by the police, courts, and prisons, as well as all forms of racism and bigotry, operates as gears in the machinery of the economic and social system that governs our lives” (1998, 11). Such analysis should also include critique of the gender work accomplished by male police officers who assault gender-queers. Their self-expression may be deeply felt or essential to maintaining a gendered identity, but it clearly needs to be fought against. To express masculinity (no matter what one’s birth sex) is often to despise femininity, just as to express femininity is often to implicate oneself in one’s own oppression. With this problem in mind, I once asked Feinberg, “What’s good about masculinity?” Ze referred in hir answer to the diversity of masculinities across and within time and place and to the freedom of individuals to express their gender without fear of reprisal. This is an important goal, but in posing the question I was thinking more of the ethical dilemmas faced by men who want to avoid participating in sexism (Kahane 1998). It is perhaps even more difficult to combine the demands of maintaining a public identity as a transman with a commitment to feminism (Hale 1998).

Feinberg thus seems to sidestep the ethical field into which one invariably stumbles when talking about the merits of various “gender expressions.” This elision comes from hir willingness to treat gender as an *individual* matter rather than as a web of relations in ongoing tension and negotiation. It is not so clear that, as Feinberg likes to think, ending gender oppression will benefit everyone. Implicitly addressing hir non-trans readers, ze says: “All your life you’ve heard such dogma about what it means to be a ‘real’ woman or a ‘real’ man. And chances are you’ve choked on some of it” (1998, 3). The chances of this are far greater, however, if one is either a woman or a trans person; Feinberg does not acknowledge that far from “choking,” there are many people who lap up gender ideology precisely because it supports their privilege. This refusal to pass judgment on others’ choices contributes to the appeal of Feinberg’s rhetoric throughout hir work, in the same way that Raymond’s dogmatism detracts from hers. But it also sometimes evades hard political questions about who is damaged and privileged by configurations of gender that themselves need to be transformed, sometimes from within the subject’s own political consciousness. In other words, Feinberg’s approach here elides a crucial aspect of progressive gender politics: the demand that we change ourselves. No doubt ze would resist such a demand on the reasonable grounds that trans people have too often been forced to conform to damaging gender norms or been oppressively criticized—as I have

already shown—for having the “wrong” sort of consciousness. But this response does not allow for important political distinctions between progressive transformations of consciousness initiated from within marginalized communities and disciplining moves that attempt only to reinforce established divisions. Missing from this rhetoric is any rich account of the ethics of self-transformation, which would be informed by consideration of how specific gendered ways of being fit into a web of possibilities and repressions. Filling in this gap might mitigate some of the legitimate anxieties of non-trans feminists (including Raymond and Hausman) that transgender politics will be inattentive to the relations that hold stigmatized concepts of “woman” in place.

#### **“Us and them”: Feminist solidarity and transgender**

Thus either feminists elide, with Feinberg, the ethical questions that are raised by self-fashioning in the context of gender relations, or, with Hausman and Raymond, we condemn any trans move as merely another iteration of oppressive norms. One important characteristic of the middle ground excluded by these positions is a relational, historicized model of the self that broadens the scope of Foucauldian analysis to encompass “technologies of the self”—“matrices of practical reason” that “permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves” (Foucault 1988, 18). In the case of trans identities, I have pointed out that these technologies are unusually literal, and the stakes are particularly high for subjects often denied any gender home unless they undertake them. Rather than treating transgender as a special case, however, we might see SRS as one technology of the self among many others implicated in gender identity and oppression.

How might non-trans feminists temper critique of trans identities without adopting a laissez-faire account of gender and while recognizing our own parallel struggles with identity? In the context of her critique of transgender politics, Hausman asks—supposedly rhetorically—“are subjects who change their sex in order to make their bodies ‘match’ some kind of internal experience of the self defined as gender really able to question the ‘system’ that so clearly demarcates their choices?” (1995, 199). It is not clear why the theoretical parameters of this question specifically limit the critical faculties of transsexuals. We might equally ask: “Are subjects who identify unquestioningly as ‘heterosexual’ in order to accommodate the demands of heteropatriarchy really able to question the

'system' that so clearly demarcates their choices?" Adopting a radical framework in which choice must be understood through the deep construction of subjects cannot apply only to the construction of transsexuals. The categories "women," "men," "lesbian," "gay," and "heterosexual" have their own histories that congeal in contemporary individuals, structuring consciousness and determining possibilities.<sup>18</sup>

To make this point more forcefully, imagine Q, a lesbian feminist who subscribes enthusiastically to the notion that her life constitutes a resistance to institutionalized heterosexuality, yet who in autobiographical moments resorts to the language of "I've always known I was a lesbian." Q recalls a childhood fraught with ambivalence and trauma: she had unrequited crushes on other girls, she experimented briefly and unsuccessfully with dating boys, and she agonized over imagining herself the married mother that her culture expected her to become. After years in the closet, trying to pass as heterosexual, she finally decided that she would "come out" and create a life as a lesbian. This caused her family a great deal of anguish, and many people tried to persuade her that sexuality was quite malleable, and in fact she could continue simply to pass as heterosexual. Q was well aware that she lived in a culture where "sexuality" is treated ahistorically and quasi-scientifically as a core ontological fact about individuals. As a devotee of Foucauldian feminism, she was convinced, by contrast, that "lesbian" is in fact a relatively recent category of being, created by economic change, urbanization, shifting kinship relations, and feminist social movement. This intellectual attitude, while it shaped her way of being in the world, nonetheless coexisted uneasily with her sense that things could not have been otherwise except at the cost of great anguish and self-deception.

Q's story bears a striking resemblance to the autobiographies of many trans people. Of course, just as there is a standard "coming out" story for gays and lesbians, so, as I have discussed, there is a set of tropes that define the genre of (transsexual) autobiography.<sup>19</sup> These tropes may well inspire post hoc interpretations. But just as non-trans feminists take seriously the experience of "growing up as a lesbian," so there is no less of

<sup>18</sup> When Foucault was asked whether he had any conviction one way or another on the distinction between innate predisposition to homosexual behavior and social conditioning, he replied "On this question I have absolutely nothing to say. 'No comment.'" He goes on to say that this is "not my problem" and "not really the object of my work" (1997, 142). I read Foucault not simply as demurring due to lack of expertise (as if the question had a correct answer that he did not know) but also as shifting the focus of political conversation, as I would like to, away from the allure of causal pictures.

<sup>19</sup> Martin 1988; Phelan 1993; Mason-Schrock 1996; Prosser 1998.

an onus to respect the testimony of those who describe early lives marked out by gender confusion and distress:

As our (modern Western) world is now, failure to conform to the norms of gender is socially stigmatizing to an unbearable extent: To be human just is to be male or female, a girl or a boy or a man or a woman. Those who cannot readily be classified by everyone they encounter are not only subject to physically violent assaults, but, perhaps even more wounding, are taken to be impossible to relate to humanly. . . . In such a world, boundary blurring carries psychic costs no one can be asked to pay, and the apparently conservative gender-boundary-preserving choices (surgical, hormonal, and behavioral) of many transsexuals have to be read in full appreciation of what the real options are. (Scheman 1997, 132–33)

It may well be the case that a larger institutional history creates those subjects, but that does not make their experience any less real or deeply felt on an individual level.

Raymond recognizes that denial is very deeply built into the structure of privilege and, hence, that people read as men are likely to underestimate the significance of their male privilege.<sup>20</sup> I have certainly seen transsexuals act in ways that I thought showed poor political judgment on matters of oppression and privilege, but I have seen lesbians misstep, too, and increasingly I have been impressed by the political commitment and sophistication of many trans activists. The politically resistant choices that trans people are making often do challenge the terms of medical practice, as well as the depoliticized queer aestheticism that some feminists find objectionable (Bolin 1994; Califia 1997, 221–44; Feinberg 1998). Many FTMs in particular refuse surgeries, especially lower-body surgeries. The cosmetic and functional inadequacy of phalloplastic techniques is undoubtedly a major element of this resistance (and a valid one: who wants a lousy outcome to their surgery?), but resistance is also motivated by the feminist recognition that the penis does not make the man (Devor 1998, 405–13; Cromwell 1999, 112–17, 138–40). Many MTF transsexuals are developing their own forms of feminist consciousness and expressing their politics by both refusing certain medical interventions and asserting their rights to transform medical requirements. For example, many MTFs who do not want to engage in penile-vaginal intercourse after SRS resist the

<sup>20</sup> Certainly in the literature on passing and on transgender there are numerous allusions to the shock of losing or gaining male privilege that was previously taken for granted or unknown.

heterosexist demand to excessively dilate or surgically extend their newly constructed vaginas, or even to have one constructed in the first place (Bornstein 1995, 15–19, 118–21). In general, it seems as though increased access to critical information about medical procedures, a growing political consciousness, and expanded community has caused those trans people who do seek medical services to be increasingly concerned with the *limits* of SRS as a route to an authentic identity.

I have shown that Hausman's and Raymond's claims that transsexual identity is overdetermined by its medicalization are, conceptually speaking, tautological and, empirically speaking, false. Rather, transgendered people face a complex set of choices about which, if any, medically managed changes to the body they want to make. At the very end of her book Hausman claims that "the transgenderist[']s . . . ingestion of hormones, or participation in other procedures such as plastic surgery, merit medical attention because of the inherent dangers of reconfiguring the body's tissues" (1995, 200). In a similar vein, Raymond states that "medicalized intervention produces harmful effects in the transsexual's body that negate bodily integrity, wholeness, and be-ing" ([1979] 1994, 18). Both critics are right that such interventions carry medical risks not yet fully understood, and one of the frustrations of much philosophy of the body is precisely that it treats flesh as infinitely malleable, bloodless, and acquiescent. Yet it is precisely those people who must grapple with the pros and cons—physically as well as politically—of hormone treatments and surgeries who are most aware of the trauma and risks of changing one's body. These pros and cons include consideration of how desperately uncomfortable, unsafe, or unhappy one would be without altering one's body. In making decisions about hormones, surgery, passing, and gender conformity, trans people—especially if they are feminists—face ethical and political dilemmas. These dilemmas, again, might be best understood as related to others faced by non-trans feminists. Much more can be said here, but I hope to show only that trans people face complex choices about if and how to modify their bodies, which they may approach with more or less information, political acumen, or psychic need. In this regard, genetic women who ponder the wisdom of breast implants, crash diets, or bodybuilding are hardly different.

### **Feminist solidarity after queer theory**

My feminist utopia definitely does not include rigid disciplining of dimorphic sex and gender categories, an enforced normative ideal body type, objectification, or abjection. In this I am joined by all of the authors

I have discussed in this article, and sharing these goals for me defines a potential for feminist solidarity. The approaches I have criticized may say more about non-trans feminists' failure to interrogate our own identities, and our comfort with our own gender, than they do about the realities of trans communities or political movements. Acknowledging this, I have argued, leads us toward the recognition of political common ground and thus to the question of how feminist alliances can be formed. Very different experiences and identities can motivate similar feminist goals, and the political zeitgeist is such that solidarity must, of necessity, start from the deep diversity of agents. As Naomi Scheman puts it, "The issue . . . is not who is or is not really whatever, but who can be counted on when they come for any one of us: the solid ground is not identity but loyalty and solidarity" (1997, 152–53). Solidarity will founder, however, if we detach ourselves from each other and our mutual implication in favor of a demand for individual freedom. If we are all individuals making normatively equal gender choices, then where is oppression? The answer to this question looks more complicated now, but, hopefully, more honest.

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