

General Editor's Introduction

PAISLEY CURRAH

In the last decade, movements for transgender equality appear to have advanced with astonishing speed, while other issues of concern to women's movements have largely stalled, either making little progress (equal pay) or suffering real setbacks (abortion access). From policy reforms to public opinion trends, it seems that the situation has changed faster, and in a more positive direction, on issues characterized as "transgender rights" than it has on those understood as "women's rights." This apparent gap may be exacerbated in the United States: at the conclusion of the culture wars of the last forty years, the almost inseparable bond between movements for sexual and gender freedom that marked liberationist discourse of the 1970s has been torn asunder, reconstituted through the logic of an identity politics that affirms the demands for recognition of sexual and gender minorities but finds the misogyny that still structures all women's lives largely unintelligible, outside the scope of the liberal project of inclusion. One poll, for example, found that 72 percent of the millennial generation in the United States favor laws banning discrimination against transgender people—a proportion very close to the 73 percent who support protections for gay and lesbian people. But only 55 percent of this generation, born between 1980 and 2000, say abortion should be legal in all (22 percent) or some (33 percent) cases (Jones and Cox 2015: 42, 3). In a three-month period ending July 31, 2015, when this introduction was written, the *New York Times* editorial board came out in support of transgender issues seven times—and that number does not include the several almost universally positive op-ed contributions published during the same period. (*Almost* denotes the exception of Elinor Burkett's op-ed "What Makes a Woman?" discussed by Susan Stryker and Talia Bettcher in their introduction to this special issue.) Describing "transgender Americans" as "among the nation's most marginalized citizens," the lead-off editorial outlined the topics to come in this series documenting "heartening stories" of acceptance as well as the policy challenges still facing this newest "civil rights movement" (*New York Times* 2015). During the

same three months, which included the passage of restrictions to abortion and contraception potentially affecting millions of people, the *Times* published only four editorials on the subject of access to reproductive services.

Given the apparent disparity between the velocities of the feminist and trans movements, it is not entirely surprising that a certain generational grouching toward trans people has emerged from a few redoubts of second-wave feminism, which Stryker and Bettcher document in their introduction. No doubt, this reaction is partly bound up with larger histories of feminist movements. To some, it must seem as if second-wave feminism was surpassed by the next wave before it had time to realize its goals: eliminating or radically reorganizing the economic structures (targeted by Marxist and socialist feminists) and institutions and norms (targeted by cultural feminists) responsible for the subjugation of women. But burdened internally by the racial and class hierarchies it reproduced, limited by an analytical framework that invariably prioritized the workings of the sex/gender binary over other oppressive processes, and confronted externally by emerging neoliberal technologies of governance that could accommodate new articulations of social difference without having to modify the fundamental algorithms for the distribution of inequality, second-wave feminism was not equipped to succeed. Certainly, the long-term transformative potential of the sex positive, trans-affirming, racially engaged, and more politically ecumenical third wave remains unknown, but there is some promise in the ways it has departed from the various grand narratives of the European Enlightenment, which include the third wave's refusal to accede to the ontological priority of any particular group; its capacity to make visible the effects of power on vastly different scales, from the molecular to the global; and its general rejection of traditional political forms (the nation, the party, legal institutions) in favor of situating resistance in cultural moments and provisional events.

The persistence of limited but recurring outbursts of feminist transphobia, however, cannot be explained away simply as a displacement of a more generalized generational antipathy between the second and third waves of feminism. Nor is it useful to dismiss these outbursts as minor atavistic eruptions in the greater march toward gender equality. Those who construe trans women as a part of a patriarchal assault on women, those who assign false gender consciousness to trans people, are certainly contesting the meanings of sex and gender that have gained so much currency as a result of third-wave feminism and trans activism and scholarship. But their insistence on the rigidity and stillness of the categories has other effects that we need to attend to. In the present political moment, we find ourselves stuck in the gridlock of a seemingly unmovable identity politics, one in which the very intelligibility of the categories we find ourselves fighting over masks the processes that distribute the possibilities, potentialities, and life

chances to bodies. Indeed, the narrative described in this introduction's opening paragraph, which compared political gains for "transgender people" with losses for "women," illustrates this faulty logic. It is vitally important that both feminists and communities now legible as trans also remain open to processual indeterminacies and the possibility that new formations, attachments, and opportunities for alliance might be more useful than insisting on a distinction based on whether one is in some way gender nonconforming or not. Indeed, we may have reached the point at which the transgender–cisgender binary (which implicitly structures the logic of the distinctions on which that feminist transphobia depends), the grid of intelligibility that has recently come to dominate much trans studies and advocacy, now may obscure more than it reveals. Indeed, as a category of increasing cultural currency in the language of diversity, "transgender" stitches together people whose principal commonality is that their gender didn't turn out as expected, given the sex to which they were assigned at birth. That "trans" or "transgender" purports to describe people who are so very differently situated in relation to their vulnerability to violence, to incarceration, to illness, to homelessness, and to slow death seems like one of the more miraculous feats of identity politics. For example, micha cárdenas's article in this issue, "Pregnancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism," demonstrates very concretely how a capacious understanding of reproductive justice can't be contained within the usual dividing lines—between trans and cis, between trans men and trans women, between men and women—that have tended to organize thought around access to abortion and to reproductive futures.

In the title of this issue, guest editors Talia Bettcher and Susan Stryker (who is also of course one of the journal's general coeditors), mark the trans/feminist relation with a slash, which signals both the connections and disjunctions between these two categories. The expansive collection of articles they've curated revisit, reframe, interrogate, unpack, upend, and confound expectations for both terms. But enough philosophizing on the question of trans's relation to feminism—all writers know the imperative is "Show, don't tell!" Take a look at the remarkable range of work collected in this issue of *TSQ* and find there, hopefully, something that helps further elaborate trans/feminist practices in positive new directions.

Paisley Currah teaches political science and women's and gender studies at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and is general coeditor of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*.

References

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