

# Introduction

## *Mapping Trans Studies in Religion*

---

MAX STRASSFELD and ROBYN HENDERSON-ESPINOZA

In August 2013, H. Adam Ackley preached a sermon originally titled “The Genderqueer Gospel.” In the course of his sermon, Ackley publicly came out as transgender, drawing on canonical sources that supported his trans Christian theology, even citing conservative evangelical Pat Robertson’s support for trans Christians. At the time, Ackley was teaching at Azusa Pacific, an evangelical Christian comprehensive university that boasted among its trustees Raleigh Washington, a leader of the Promise Keepers.<sup>1</sup> Azusa Pacific noted that it had policies against lesbian and gay relationships on campus, but it did not have a specific policy against transition in its professoriate. This lack did not, ultimately, protect Ackley; in response to Ackley’s request that the university honor his pronouns and new name, he was asked to leave his position. Azusa Pacific’s decision garnered national media coverage.<sup>2</sup>

As coeditors of this special issue of *TSQ* on trans/religion, we turned away many worthy manuscripts because of space constraints, including several pieces that described the difficulties of building a professional life within the field of religious studies. Ackley’s story is, unfortunately, not unique in our field. Employment discrimination against trans people is certainly not confined either to the academy or to Christian evangelical institutions specifically; nor does employment discrimination primarily impact white transmasculine professors. Still, we begin with Ackley’s narrative to underscore that there can be particular tensions for those of us who teach while trans at seminaries or religious institutions. Many of our colleagues in religious studies are navigating complex dynamics in the classroom, in their research, and in their interactions with our field. The manufacturing of religion and trans as mutually antagonistic terms is well documented, and this antagonism has materially impacted our colleagues’ professional lives.<sup>3</sup>

While some trans scholars in the field of religious studies continue to negotiate transphobia, religious studies has recently become more interested in trans studies, as evidenced, for example, by the recent issue of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Pritchard and Ott 2018), which featured a roundtable and a literature review on the intersection of trans and religion.<sup>4</sup> From the first trans studies in religion panel at the American Academy of Religion in 2015, to the recent panel at the Society of Biblical Literature on trans hermeneutics, to the first annual conference “Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion” at University of California, Riverside, there is a burgeoning interest in the trans/religion nexus.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, trans studies has had little to say to date on the subject of religion. This can be accounted for, in part, by the historically fraught relationship between trans studies and religious studies, and the role theologians (such as Mary Daly), played in disseminating transmisogyny within some strands of lesbian feminism.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps understandably, therefore, trans studies has been reluctant to engage with the field of religious studies.<sup>7</sup>

This reluctance has led to a peculiar aporia within trans studies, whereby religious practices and texts find their way into the scholarship without acknowledgment of the framework of religion (Miranda 2010). Deborah Miranda, for example, has argued that the category of two-spirit needs to be understood within the context of Native religious traditions. Given the critique of the colonizing function transgender can sometimes perform in reorganizing discrete material practices of gender, and the way that many of these formulations of sex and gender occur within the context of religious traditions, a careful attention to the place of religion in the field is overdue.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, trans studies’ failure to address religion unwittingly participates in discursively marking transgender as secular. The investigation of the category of the secular, and the processes of secularization, has developed into a subfield in religious studies whose insights are of use for interrogating the trans/religion interface. As Talal Asad (2003: 15) writes:

We should look, therefore at *the politics* of national progress—including the politics of secularism—that flow from the multifaceted concept of modernity exemplified by “the West” (and especially by America as its leader and most advanced exemplar.) . . . As part of such an understanding I believe that we must try to unpack the various assumptions on which secularism—a modern doctrine of the world in the world—is based. For it is precisely the process by which these conceptual binaries are established or subverted that tells us how people live the secular—how they vindicate the essential freedom and responsibility of the sovereign in opposition to the constraints of that self by religious discourses.

For Asad, secularism is an essential part of the neoliberal project of modernity, which can be understood only through its (purported) rejection of religion in favor of a rational, post-Enlightenment, individuated secularism. Of course, secularism is not secular; rather (in the US context), secularism functions as an unmarked (and thereby naturalized) form of white Protestantism disciplining (premodern, irrational, racialized) religion.<sup>9</sup> To offer political critiques of secular neoliberal constructions of gender, trans studies must engage with religious studies. Otherwise, in our silence we risk colluding with the constitution of trans as secular. It was the secularization of transgender that conditioned the (evangelical) firing of H. Adam Ackley.<sup>10</sup>

### The Emergence of Trans Studies in Religion

In part because feminist studies of religion have been so indebted to the foundational work of Mary Daly, whose explicit transmisogyny was central to her ontology and theology, we want to ground trans religious studies in an alternative genealogy. On the one hand, it is undeniable that feminist, critical race, postcolonial, queer, and disability studies in religion inform the conditions of emergence of trans studies in religion. On the other hand, it is undeniable that trans studies challenges the enabling concepts of these approaches to the extent that it understands gender to operate differently, challenging—even displacing—the hegemony of a binary cisgender framework. Transgender does gender differently.

The telos of cisgender feminist studies in religion has assumed a normative orientation toward gender that posits gender as a social hierarchy of patriarchal origin. Its moral courage is to be found in addressing the unjust realities of patriarchal gender, and in contesting the manner in which various traditions have normalized this orientation by asserting its natural or God-given status. Trans studies of religion is well positioned to move outside or beyond the gender-abolitionist framework of cisgender feminist studies of religion when it imagines not that gender is something that will someday be overcome, but that gender is a form of assemblage within which new potentials for generativity and becoming can creatively emerge. Transgender in this sense is not a teleological development but a movement within an ever-unfolding arrangement of the material and immaterial realms, without a clear beginning or a knowable end, whose genesis and *eschaton* are just stories we can tell. Transgender emerges from the middle of things to approach *tehom*—the face of the deep that calls us to have an imagination for what is becoming—from another point of address.

In its becoming, trans studies in religion is a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage. An assemblage, according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987: 272) consists of “any number of ‘things’ or pieces of ‘things’ gathered into a single context” that

can bring about any number of “effects”—aesthetic, machinic, productive, destructive, consumptive, informatic, etc. Rather than conceive of the pieces of an assemblage as an organic whole, within which the specific elements are held in place by the organization of a unity, the process of “becoming” serves to account for relationships between the “discrete” elements of the assemblage. In “becoming” one piece of the assemblage is drawn into the territory of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new unity. An example of this principle might be best illustrated in the way in which atoms are drawn into an assemblage with nearby atoms through affinities rather than an organizational purpose. The process is one of deterritorialization in which the properties of the constituent element disappear and are replaced by the new properties of the assemblage—“becomings-molecular of all kinds, becomings-particles.”

Trans studies in religion embodies the sense of multiplicity and becoming that characterize “assemblage” as Deleuze and Guattari describe it. Grounded in the in/between philosophical domains of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, it participates in the shifting nature of reality, knowledge production, and social practices. Rhizomatic in nature, trans studies in religion opposes the idea that knowledge must always grow in an arboreal pattern, with new growth branching out from the trunk of previously accepted ideas. New thinking need not follow established patterns, and it can burst forth, rhizomatically, from any point in the assemblage. Trans studies in religion is rhizomatic in the sense that the particularity of this experimental and nonnormative work is located outside current disciplinary structures, and encourages work that has no proper or defined location within the study of religion. Trans studies in religion is rhizomatic, too, in the sense that this nascent field as we see it encourages migrations into new conceptual territories that result from unpredictable juxtapositions. Trans studies of religion may be assembled with, or proximate to, cisgender feminist, queer, postcolonial, critical race, or disability approaches; it certainly “becomes-with” these formations but does not “come-from” them in any linear or teleological manner.

Trans studies in religion takes seriously the manner in which multiple disciplines inform this nascent subject. The middle from which it emerges lies on the borderlands of innumerable disciplinary regimes. Its interstitial, in-between locus enables movements—intellectual, pragmatic, spiritual, and corporeal—that traverse multiple margins, taking us this way or that beyond the logic of the norm(ative). We draw inspiration here from Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) creative theorization of *mestizaje* and the New Mestiza, of *lanaguala* the shapeshifter, as a practice of embodied subjectivity, and as an aspect of *conocimiento*/knowing. Situated in the mixed, hybridized, borderland spaces where ontology, epistemology, and ethics intersect, trans studies in religion can create another fold in the becoming of the content that fills those shifting zones of in/betweenness.

### A Note on Theology

The question of whether the field of theology should be or is included in religious studies continues to be debated today, and some scholars insist that theology has no place in religious studies.<sup>11</sup> Our choice to include in this issue a roundtable on Joy Ladin's new monograph of trans exegesis and theology (discussed more fully below) thus requires some comment. Without rehashing the history or origins of religious studies or the longer debate over the place of theology in the field, we will elaborate some of the reasons we believe trans theology makes an important contribution to trans studies and religious studies.<sup>12</sup>

We have earlier alluded to the transmisogynist legacy of Mary Daly in the course of this introduction, as casting a long shadow over the relationship between trans studies and religious studies, and to our desire to chart a different story about the relationship between the two fields. Still, if the trouble between religious studies and trans studies lies originally in the field of theology, then its redress must come from within theology specifically; theology is an important tool for addressing the transmisogyny that inheres in classic feminist religious studies. Trans theology is also a field in which many trans-identified scholars and activists work: Joy Ladin, Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, and Justin Tanis, among others.<sup>13</sup> Theology is the grounds on which many trans religious practitioners and activists intervene in their traditions.<sup>14</sup>

There is an increasing popular interest in the theologies of trans embodiment, at a time when theology increasingly plays a role in political battles over the regulation of trans bodies.<sup>15</sup> The recent memo from the US Department of Health and Human Services that leaked to the *New York Times*, for example, seeks to define sex as immutable and assigned at birth (Green, Benner, and Pear 2018). This language is copied almost word-for-word from the so-called bathroom bills, many of which pair a definition of marriage as heterosexual and monogamous, with a definition of sex/gender. The pairing between heterosexual monogamy and binary sex/gender is not accidental—the regulation of sexed embodiment is necessitated by a complementarian theology, in which God creates two sexes that are counterparts in marriage in the figures of Adam and Eve. In the service of heterosexuality, the regulation of sexuality and gender identity must go hand in hand.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the inclusion of a definition of sex, in some contexts, seems to function as a corollary to the establishment of heterosexual monogamy does not, it should be noted, protect trans people from its effects.

Although the memo never mentions Genesis, this definition of sex is, in fact, theological. The legal language originates with the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a Christian legal organization that lists marriage, religious freedom, and the sanctity of life as core to their central agenda. An earlier version of the language is found in a proposed school policy on bathrooms that the ADF

distributed to school boards across the country, offering free legal counsel for any district sued as a result of adopting the policy.<sup>17</sup> The ADF, while based in the United States, also has international reach—the international branch has also filed with the European Court of Human Rights in support, for example, of laws prescribing mandatory sterilization as a prerequisite for obtaining changed identity documents.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the ADF is helping to write particular Christian evangelical theologies of the body and sexuality into law; theology has shaped legal debates over trans bodies.

A final note on the potential importance of the transing of theology: Eva Hayward has argued, citing Laverne Cox, that antiblack transmisogynist violence has created an imperative for trans black women: “Don’t exist.” In the face of that murderous imperative, which is accompanied by horrific levels of violence, Hayward (2017) asks us to push against ontology itself as the ultimate architect of the mandate “don’t exist.” Might not trans theology be one technology by which trans activists, theologians, and scholars are reimagining both cosmology and ontology? Theology can function as a method of rethinking materiality and the conditions of embodiment outside its current constraints, which is part of what made it so attractive to early feminist theologians. This is not an escape from the conditions that punish trans people, nor is it an evasion of the homicidal effects of what could accurately be called “transmisogynoir” (see Krell 2017). Rather, against the backdrop of a constrained and regulated materiality, trans theology is one tactic of reimagining the world and its reigning ontologies. We fervently hope that this issue constitutes the beginning of a conversation whose contours we cannot yet fully imagine—a conversation that will change our perceptions of the terms of trans religion itself.

### **Staging the Conversation between Trans Studies and Religious Studies**

We contend that religious studies has the potential to rework fundamental categories within trans studies in productive ways. Mariecke van den Berg, for example, is currently working to connect the two genres of transition narrative and conversion narrative in an analysis of the ways religious and trans subjectivities can follow similar scripts.<sup>19</sup> Conversion and transition function as fundamental categories in their respective fields, and this work has the potential to reshape discussions of both.<sup>20</sup>

In trans studies, the history of autobiographical writing has most often been linked to the legacy of the sexological movement, and the continued imperative that, in many places, trans people must produce a coherent autobiographical narrative to attempt to gain access to medical interventions. What happens, however, if we contextualize transition narratives within the scholarship of religious studies? Classic twentieth-century scholarship on the genre of autobiography

claimed that autobiography is an essentially Christian and Western genre.<sup>21</sup> As scholars in Arabic literature have pointed out, historically, this research has been used to argue that other bodies of literature (peoples, religions, etc.) do not contain a concept of the self. Do transition narratives participate in this (religious and colonial) construction of the self? In turn, do Christian notions of the self and embodiment shape the trajectory and conventions of trans autobiography?<sup>22</sup>

We highlight this example to point to the potential of a closer attention to religion in trans studies to destabilize categorical assumptions in both fields. It is in this entanglement between the two fields that we find the most exciting opportunities to push both fields in new directions. As editors of this special issue, we sought scholarship that critically interrogates the relationship between transgender and religion, understanding both terms broadly. Both religion and religious studies can offer intellectual, conceptual, and affective resources for a transgender critique of oppressive forms of power/knowledge invested in the medico-scientific worldview of secular Western modernity. We wished to emphasize work that focuses on transnational instantiations of the trans/religion interface, that decenters Christianity and US-based expressions of both trans and religion, and that features a sustained focus on trans women of color. We wanted to highlight gender-nonconforming subjects in Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and native and indigenous religions (among other traditions); explore specific religious taxonomies of sex and gender (and their relationship to the frame of transgender or intersex); and situate our readers within different historical traditions, from the Buddhist Pali canon to early modern colonial encounters that cast indigenous Americans as sodomites. We sought responses to the current political moment: the entanglement of “religious liberty” rhetoric and the regulation of transgender embodiment; the growth of right-wing movements; the role of religion in fostering both trans precarity and trans resilience; and the intersection of religion with the increasing level of violence directed against trans people, particularly trans women of color. We wanted to foster discussions of transing religion and secularity: the transing of specific rituals, theologies, canons, ethics, moralities, and texts, as well as a transing of these categories, or a transing of the religious/secular distinction itself. We wished to explore the religious dimensions of trans embodiment: the relationship between cosmologies of gender and trans embodiments in various traditions, discourses of materiality and vitalism, the ontology of human and/or divine bodies, and the role of the non-human in the constitution of gendered embodiment. We wished to highlight work by academics, but also by artists, activists, artists, poets, and religious practitioners; we wanted to include trans rituals and trans theologies.

We tried, in short, to highlight many different approaches to the question of trans/religion. While we were thrilled to receive more than fifty submissions,

we were nevertheless sobered by the recognition that the submissions fell short of covering the breadth that we imagined. The issue that emerged has notable gaps in coverage, both methodological and in terms of the traditions that are not addressed in the included articles. We nevertheless feel we have selected articles that deepen the conversation in trans studies about religion.

Claire Pamment, in “Performing Piety in Pakistan’s Transgender Rights Movement,” positions the ritual performances of the *khwaja siras* as a subaltern embodied activism that negotiates multiple layers of exclusion. Employing a performance studies perspective on Muslim ritual, Pamment describes the effects of a libertarian rights-based project on *hijras* in Pakistan. In contrast to scholarship that has argued that *hijras/khwaja siras* have rejected Sufism in favor of the liberal language of human rights, Pamment argues that ritual performance remains at the heart of activism in Pakistan.

In “Histrionics of the Pulpit: Trans Tonalities of Religious Enthusiasm,” Scott Larson explores the beginnings of revival preaching in evangelical Christianity in the eighteenth century. While this new form of preaching would later become mainstreamed, in its inception it radically destabilized the social and political order, upending expectations of gender. Larson explores how revival preaching was a trans tonal practice that transformed normatively gendered bodily sensation.

Ido Katri’s article, “Trans-Arab-Jew: A Look beyond the Boundaries of In-Between Identities,” thinks trans identity alongside Mizrahi (Arab-Jewish) identity. Katri charts the emergence of Mizrahi identity as a by-product of producing the “new Jew” as a normative Western subject, predicated on a violent suppression of the Palestinians. In Katri’s formulation, both trans and Mizrahi identity work to simultaneously signify and eradicate difference. In their in-betweenness, they can challenge the coherence of identitarian frames.

Max Thornton, in “Trans/Criptions: Gender, Disability, and Liturgical Experience,” provides a critical turn in trans studies and its intersection with the study of religion. Thornton introduces a phenomenological fold to this burgeoning discourse and also entangles the importance of ritualized experience as not only a kind of script but also an embodied reality. With the braiding of crip theory with trans theory and phenomenological theology, he introduces a new plane to trans studies in religion, one that is bordered by the disabled body and the tactic of microresistance that create the experiential conditions within which transcendence can burst forth. His evocative and methodologically nuanced article welcomes new forms of interdisciplinary inquiry to trans studies in religion.

“The Muslim *Waria* of Yogyakarta: Finding Agency within Submission,” Diego Garcia Rodriguez’s contribution to this issue, seeks both to intervene in the construction of Islam as particularly oppressive along gendered vectors and



(drawing on Saba Mahmood) to reposition Islam as a source of agentic subjectivity for the *waria* of Indonesia. While as editors we might take issue with the framing of the *waria* as “queer” religious subjects, Garcia Rodriguez helpfully foregrounds *waria* self-descriptions of identity and embodiment and describes the politics of the frame of “transgender” in the Indonesian context.

Alejandro Stephano Escalante contributes a thought-provoking essay in “Trans\* Atlantic Religion: Spirit Possession and Gender Ideology in Cuban Santería,” which transes concepts of gender and spirit possession. Escalante explores cross-gendered relationships between the orisha and the devotee and how these connections challenge religious and gendered boundaries, creating a trans\* Atlantic religion. Demonstrating the fluid nature of gender in Afro-Caribbean religions, Escalante builds on the ever-expanding nature of trans\* and facilitates an approach to the becoming nature of gender.

In the “Artifacts” section, we have highlighted two Jewish trans artists producing Jewish ritual objects and exploring embodied ritual practice. Tobaron Waxman’s Levush Project is a series of men’s Jewish ritual garments, woven from the artist’s collection of his testosterone packaging, bottles, inserts, and syringes collected from 2003, which he wears in his performance art. Waxman’s work comments on the accessibility of trans health care, changes in laws, and changes to the practices of taking hormones over time—some of the testosterone treatments were obtained via the “gray market” or barter or were donated from those with access to health care—but the work also repurposes medicalized materials into fabric, creating a sense of potential for the artist’s transformation of materiality.

Nicki Green’s art is featured alongside a conversation between the artist and scholar of contemporary trans Judaism, S. J. Crasnow. Green innovatively reinterprets ritual bathing practices (traditionally used both for conversion and to instill ritual purity) as a type of fermentation that allows for bodily transformation. Her *bedikah* quilt topper, which is traditionally used to check when menstruation has ended, instead has been used to stop the blood after injections of estrogen. Crasnow and Green contextualize Green’s reinterpretation of Judaism’s embodied rituals and explore the possibilities of bodily transformation through ritual and mechanisms of community witness.

Our “Roundtable” section features prominent scholars of religion commenting on an excerpt of Joy Ladin’s 2019 book *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*. In the context of contemporary antitrans theologies that draw heavily on Genesis, Ladin’s decision to grapple with the creation story as a site of trans theological intervention is essential and timely. Ladin takes up precisely those texts that have been used to argue that trans people do not exist, to construct a trans exegesis; it offers a bold recontextualization of contemporary readings of this text that naturalize gender. The roundtable

discussants—Linn Marie Tonstad, Damien Pascal Domenack, Judith Plaskow, Joseph N. Goh, and M. W. Bychowski—all take up Ladin’s provocation, engaging and challenging her exegesis from their own theological frames. In staging this conversation, we hope to encourage the continued flourishing of trans theology as a part of planting the seeds for a more sustained and enriching collaboration between the fields of trans studies and religious studies.

Finally, the cover image for this issue is by Arjae Thompson, a black queer muralist and public artist with the Nashville-based Norf Art Collective, a multimedia creative team based in the historically black “Norf” neighborhood of North Nashville, Tennessee, which hosts a wide range of social and interactive arts events that engage the surrounding community. The image is of a nonbinary human subject and intends to evoke the immanent plane of divinity that enfolds a transcendent human subject. As such, it expresses the insight that guides our framing of this special issue of *TSQ*, that the specificity of “becoming trans” manifests a more general “trans-becoming,” which trans studies of religion can help elucidate and enact.

---

**Max Strassfeld** is assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Arizona. He is currently completing his manuscript “Transing the Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature.”

**Robyn Henderson-Espinoza** is visiting professor at Duke Divinity School and visiting scholar at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. They are the author of *Activist Theology* (2019) and are currently revising their dissertation for publication; it investigates the body as a material reality that creates conditions for an ontology of becoming.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the general editors of *TSQ* for their feedback on the call for papers, the issue, and this introduction, and in particular Susan Stryker, who generously gave her time to read early drafts. We would also like to thank Abe Weil, whose indefatigable work navigating the technical aspects of collecting the materials and putting the issue together was invaluable. Finally, we would like to thank the authors who submitted to this issue and the reviewers who generously gave feedback for the more than fifty articles we received. Collectively, you have all helped to further the conversation between trans studies and religious studies, and we are grateful to you all for lending us your expertise.

### Notes

1. The Promise Keepers is a Christian men’s movement that particularly advocates gendered family values to build the Christian family. See James Poling and Evelyn Kirkley’s (2000) article, which argues that the Promise Keepers participate in a larger men’s movement in evangelical Christianity that promotes masculinist theologies.

2. For Ackley's account of this conflict, see Ackley, Ladin, and Partridge 2014. Ackley's (2013) original sermon is available on YouTube under the title "Come as You Are! God's Good News for All People." For a fuller account of Joy Ladin's well-publicized fight for her position at Yeshiva University, see her memoir *Through the Door of Life* (2012).
3. For important research on the cisgendering of reality and the manufacturing of the conflict between religion and trans, see the work of J. E. Sumerau, Ryan Cragun, and Lain A. B. Mathers (2016), which describes the mechanism by which religion acts as a cisgendering ordering force. This article focuses specifically on Mormonism, although their research agenda more broadly addresses a variety of religious traditions in different articles. I (Strassfeld) regret that I did not see this important work before publishing my piece in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, where it would have enriched my analysis of the cisgendering of religion.
4. Many of the pieces in that special issue will be discussed in this introduction.
5. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first panel at AAR: "Engaging Trans Studies in Religion: Scholarship, Teaching, and the Intersectionalities of Trans Lived Experience," American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta, November 21, 2015; "Trans Hermeneutics," Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Denver, November 19, 2018.
6. Cameron Partridge (2018) discusses the transmisogyny in Mary Daly's use of the category of androgyny.
7. In the first *Transgender Studies Reader* the only piece that deals with religion at length is Leslie Feinberg's (2006) "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come." Feinberg has been critiqued for the piece's co-optation of a variety of cultural and historical practices. In the piece, Feinberg mostly relegates religion to history, describing, for example, the death of Joan of Arc at the hands of the inquisitors. When Feinberg arrives at contemporary times, religion is consigned to the section on "transgender around the world." Thus Feinberg's work betrays the underlying assumption that religion is practiced elsewhere or else-when. This understanding of religion (of which Feinberg is an exemplar in trans studies but certainly not the only culprit), participates in the construction of a racialized neoliberal narrative about the Modern West as rational and secular. For a critique of Feinberg's treatment of history (that touches on similar points) see DeVun and Tortorici (2018), and their citation of the critique by Evan Towle and Lynn Morgan (2002). *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* has several pieces that address religion and reflects the more recent development of the field. In this regard, Afsaneh Najmabadi's (2014) work is particularly important.
8. There are a variety of critiques of the term *transgender*—the most famous, perhaps, is David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* (2007).
9. The scholarship on this point is also vast. For a discussion of the way that secularism has enforced particular relations of sexuality, see Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004. See also Mahmood 2006 for the way that secularism functions to discipline Islam in US politics.
10. For a provocation from within trans studies to disrupt the binary of secularism and religion, see Savci 2018.
11. The literature on the relationship between religious studies and theology is too extensive to summarize. For example, Jonathan Z. Smith's essay "Map Is Not Territory" ([1978] 1993) asserts that scholars within the field are like historians, choosing a particular point in history to enter in and draw our contingent maps of the territory, as opposed to acting as theologians.

12. For an intervention into this ontological division between religion and not-religion (or between theology and religious studies), see Armour 2018.
13. This list is not exhaustive of every work of trans theology, but it does contain a representative sample. See Ladin 2018; Sabia-Tanis 2003; Henderson-Espinoza 2015. See also Cornwall (2010) 2014; and DeFranza 2015. We are including on this list theologians who work on intersex theology as well—our intention is not to claim these intersex theologies under the rubric of trans theology but rather to note the way these authors are often drawing connections between the two themselves. We have already discussed H. Adam Ackley’s work in the introduction. See also Mollenkott 2007. The importance of her work was discussed in the *JFSR* special issue. See Mollenkott 2018.
14. See, for example, websites like [transfaithonline.org](http://transfaithonline.org) or [transtorah.org](http://transtorah.org).
15. One need only do an internet search for the phrase “God made me trans” to find countless news stories on the subject.
16. While the bill does not directly cite Genesis (for obvious reasons), there are enough other explicit formulations by Christian conservatives so that it is not a reach to interpret the connection between the two clauses of the bill in this manner. For an example of conservative applications of complementarian theology, see Focus on the Family (n.d.): “Focus on the family is dedicated to defending the inherent honor, dignity, value, and equality of the two sexes as created in God’s image—intentionally male and female—each bringing unique and complementary qualities to sexuality and relationships.” For the way complementarian thought has been marshaled to address intersex communities, see Cornwall (2010) 2014 and DeFranza 2015.
17. *Mother Jones* publicized the connection between the ADF’s model legislation and the bathroom bills, arguing that the ADF’s wording has been the template for many law-makers who are crafting antitransgender bills (Michaels 2016).
18. ADF International filed with the court in 2015 in support for allowing member states to make their own decisions about the prerequisites for transition. This was explicitly argued to allow nations that required sterilization surgeries to continue the requirement, in opposition to the argument on the other side that this violated the human rights of trans subjects in the European Union.
19. Van den Berg (2018) does a beautiful job reading the religious rhetoric of Jay Prosser’s seminal scholarship on trans narrative.
20. In religious studies, perhaps the most famous work on the category of conversion is William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* ([1902] 1997). James also develops the notion of the self in this and other works. In trans studies, the most famous work on narrative is Jay Prosser’s *Second Skins* (1998). In both cases, an entire subfield on the question has developed since the publication of these works.
21. The classic scholarship tends to date the origins of autobiography to Augustine’s *Confessions*, while arguing that the genre (along with the concept of the self) does not begin to reach its apex until the Enlightenment. For the critique of this classic scholarship, see Reynolds 2001, particularly the chapter titled “The Fallacy of Western Origins.”
22. Siobhan Kelly (2018), in a literature review of the current state of the field of trans/religion, also raises some concerns about the way autotheory or autobiography can work to consolidate particular confessional and gendered identities. At the same time, Kelly also cites theologian Jakob Hero’s concern that transition narratives can invoke language of salvation. In Hero’s analysis, some trans autobiographies can function as narratives of being “saved,” with the medical establishment in the role of savior. Kelly is citing Jakob Hero’s piece “Toward a Queer Theology of Flourishing” (2012).

## References

- Ackley, H. Adam. 2013. "Come As You Are! God's Good News for All People." YouTube, 40:21. Posted August 27. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y\\_Hns6IYT4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y_Hns6IYT4).
- Ackley, H. Adam, Joy Ladin, and Cameron Partridge. 2014. "Trans\*Formative Teaching." *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 25, no. 1: 86–100.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Armour, Ellen. 2018. "Transing the Study of Religion: A (Christian) Theological Response." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1: 58–63.
- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cornwall, Susannah. (2010) 2014. *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology*. New York: Routledge.
- DeFranza, Megan. 2015. *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- DeVun, Leah, and Zeb Tortorici. 2018. "Trans, Time, and History." *TSQ* 5, no. 4: 518–39.
- Feinberg, Leslie. 2006. "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 205–20. New York: Routledge.
- Focus on the Family. n.d. "Transgenderism—Our Position." [www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/sexuality/transgenderism/transgenderism-our-position](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/sexuality/transgenderism/transgenderism-our-position) (accessed March 28, 2019).
- Green, Erica, Katie Benner, and Robert Pear. 2018. "'Transgender' Could Be Defined out of Existence under Trump Administration." *New York Times*, October 21. [www.nytimes.com/2018/10/21/us/politics/transgender-trump-administration-sex-definition.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/21/us/politics/transgender-trump-administration-sex-definition.html).
- Hayward, Eva. 2017. "Don't Exist." *TSQ* 4, no. 2: 191–94.
- Henderson-Espinoza, Robyn. 2015. "Queer Theory and Latina/o Theologizing." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín, 329–46. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Hero, Jakob. 2012. "Toward a Queer Theology of Flourishing: Transsexual Embodiment, Subjectivity, and Moral Agency." In *Queer Religion: Homosexuality in Modern Religious History*, vol. 2, edited by Daniel Boisvert and Jay Emerson Johnson, 143–65. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Jakobsen, Janet, and Ann Pellegrini. 2004. *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. Boston: Beacon.
- James, William. (1902) 1997. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Touchstone.
- Kelly, Siobhan. 2018. "Multiplicity and Contradiction: A Literature Review of Trans\* Studies in Religion." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1: 7–23.
- Krell, Elías Costanza. 2017. "Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color? Black Trans Feminisms and the Exigencies of White Femininity." *TSQ* 4, no. 2: 226–42.
- Ladin, Joy. 2012. *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey between Genders*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ladin, Joy. 2018. *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2006. "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of the Islamic Reformation." *Public Culture* 18, no. 2: 323–47.

- Michaels, Samantha. 2016. "We Tracked Down the Lawyers behind the Recent Wave of Anti-transgender Bills." *Mother Jones*, April 25. [www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/04/alliance-defending-freedom-lobbies-anti-lgbt-bathroom-bills/](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/04/alliance-defending-freedom-lobbies-anti-lgbt-bathroom-bills/).
- Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. 2007. *Omni-Gender: A Trans-Religious Approach*. Cleveland: Pilgrim.
- Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. 2018. "Becoming Grateful Allies: An Interview with Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott." Interview by David Weekley. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1: 25–36.
- Miranda, Deborah. 2010. "Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California." *GLQ* 16, nos. 1–2: 253–84.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2014. *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Partridge, Cameron. 2018. "'Scotch-Taped Together': Anti-'Androgyny' Rhetoric, Transmisogyny, and the Transing of Religious Studies." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1: 68–75.
- Poling, James, and Evelyn Kirkley. 2000. "Phallic Spirituality: Masculinities in Promise Keepers, the Million Man March, and Sex Panic." *Theology and Sexuality* 6, no. 12: 19–25.
- Pritchard, Elizabeth, and Kate M. Ott, eds. 2018. "Transing and Queering Feminist Studies and Practices of Religion." Special issue, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1.
- Prosser, Jay. 1998. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reynolds, Dwight. 2001. *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sabia-Tanis, Justin. 2003. *Transgender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- Savci, Evren. 2018. "Transing Religious Studies: Beyond the Secular/Religious Binary." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1: 63–68.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. (1978) 1993. "Map Is Not Territory." In *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, 289–311. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sumerau, J. E., Ryan Cragun, and Lain A. B. Mathers. 2016. "Contemporary Religion and the Cisgendering of Reality." *Social Currents* 3, no. 3: 293–311.
- Towle, Evan B., and Lynn M. Morgan. 2002. "Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the 'Third Gender' Concept." *GLQ* 8, no. 4: 469–97.
- Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Van den Berg, Mariecke. 2018. "Trajectories of Transformation: Religious and Gender Transitions in Jewish Autobiography." Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Denver, November 19.