

# Introduction

## *Trans/Feminisms*

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This special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* on trans/feminisms profiles the remarkable breadth of work being carried on at the intersections of transgender and feminist scholarship, activism, and cultural production, both in the United States as well as in many countries around the world. It emerged from discussions within the journal's editorial board about how to respond—if at all—to the April 2014 publication of Sheila Jeffreys's *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*. As feminist scholars ourselves, we were concerned that Jeffreys's work, published by a leading academic publisher and written by a well-known feminist activist and academic who has expressed hostility toward trans issues since the 1970s, might breathe new life into long-standing misrepresentations of individual trans experience and collective trans history and politics that have been circulated for decades by Mary Daly, Germaine Greer, Robin Morgan, Janice Raymond, and like-minded others. We wanted to trouble the transmission of those ideas—but how best to do so?

We were concerned as well that Jeffreys's book would add momentum to a wave of antitransgender discourse that has recently been gaining greater strength in certain corners of academia, some feminist circles, and in pockets of the mainstream liberal press.

We understand the current wave of antitransgender rhetoric to be in reaction to recent gains for transgender human and civil rights, a concomitant rise in visibility for transgender issues, and the vague sense that public opinion is shifting, however haltingly or unevenly, toward greater support of trans lives. Those of us who are old enough remember a similar wave in the early 1990s when the contemporary queer and trans movements first emerged in the United States; those of us who are older still, or who have studied our history, can speak of other antitransgender backlashes in the early 1970s—when the women's movement, gay

liberation, and the sexual revolution were all accelerating, and the role of trans people in these movements became a divisive issue. Simply put, we understand there to be a relationship between antitransgender scholarship and the concrete manifestation of antitransgender politics, such as the well-known controversy surrounding trans women's exclusion from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival that had raged beginning with Nancy Jean Burkholder's forcible expulsion in 1991 until 2015, the final year of the festival.

Whatever the cause, over the past few years we have indeed witnessed an escalating struggle over public speech, perhaps most vitriolic in the United Kingdom, in which transgender opposition to what many consider harmful speech from some feminists is perceived by others as an abrogation of the right to free speech by feminists hostile to transgender issues—a debate that engages arguments similar to those advanced regarding what some consider to be the disparagement of Islam within the context of what others consider to be protected political speech in the West. We have seen liberal publications such as the *New Yorker* magazine and the *Guardian* newspaper run features that characterize transgender people as censorious zealots when they protest the animus directed against them by some feminists. We have seen more than three dozen well-known feminists—including novelist Marge Piercy, black cultural studies scholar Michele Wallace, French feminist icon Christine Delphy, and radical feminist foremother Ti-Grace Atkinson—sign an open letter titled “Forbidden Discourse: The Silencing of Feminist Criticism of ‘Gender’” (Hanisch 2013) that complains, as does Jeffrey's book, that the very concept of gender (which they see as a depoliticizing substitution for the concept of sexism) is an ideological smokescreen that masks the persistence of male supremacy and oppression of women by men, and assert that “transgender” is the nonsensical and pernicious outcome of this politically spurious set of beliefs (a stance that places them in odd congruence with the conservative Christian position, espoused by the last three popes, that opposes the “ideology of gender,” which they have seen as offering support for unnatural interventions into reproductive biology, improper social roles for men and women, and assaults on heteronormative family life [McElwee 2015]). More recently, in the wake of the Caitlyn Jenner media barrage, the *New York Times* published an op-ed piece by Elinor Burkett, “What Makes a Woman?,” in which the author, a feminist filmmaker, assumed she was entitled to answer that question in a way that prevented transgender women from being included in her definition—for which feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling, author of the widely taught *Sexing the Body*, unexpectedly tweeted her enthusiastic support.

Given the broader context of a backlash against recent transgender gains among some feminists for which Jeffrey's *Gender Hurts* might conceivably become a standard-bearer or cause célèbre, it seemed important for *TSQ* to somehow

address that book and thereby intervene in the conversation about the vexed relationship between transgender and feminist movements, communities, and identities. We asked the editorial board: should the book be critiqued, reviewed, editorialized against, or simply ignored?

After we actually read Jeffreys's text, the prevailing opinion was that the work lacked scholarly merit (a view shared by the few reviews that the book has garnered in academic journals). It completely ignores the question of transgender agency—that is, of trans people making conscious, informed choices about the best way to live their own embodied lives—and instead represents trans people as having no will of their own; for Jeffreys, they serve only as tools or victims of a patriarchal conspiracy to destroy feminism and harm girls and women. Rather than review or editorialize against *Gender Hurts*, the board suggested, we should instead publish a special issue on feminist transgender scholarship that recontextualizes and reframes the terms of the conflict. Rather than cede the label *feminist* to a minority of feminists who hold a particular set of negative opinions about trans people, and rather than reducing all transgender engagement with feminism to the strategy embraced by some trans people of vigorously challenging certain forms of antitransgender feminist speech, we should instead demonstrate the range and complexity of trans/feminist relationships. Rather than fighting a battle on the same terrain that has been contested in Anglo-US feminist movements and in English-language feminist literature for decades, we should contextualize the battle lines within a far richer and more complicated world history of trans/feminist engagement. As white North American anglophone feminist scholars, we see promoting a more global perspective on trans/feminisms as being particularly important for decentering the linguistic, cultural, racial, and national hegemony of anglocentric trans studies and politics. So that's what we set out to do.

As noted in our call for papers (CFP):

In *Trans/Feminisms*, a special double-issue of *TSQ*, we will explore feminist work taking place within trans studies; trans and genderqueer activism; cultural production in trans, genderqueer, and nonbinary gender communities; and in communities and cultures across the globe that find the modern Western gender system alien and ill-fitting to their own self-understanding. Simultaneously, we want to explore as well the ways in which trans issues are addressed within broader feminist and women's organizations and social movements around the world. We want this issue to expand the discussion beyond the familiar and overly simplistic dichotomy often drawn between an exclusionary transphobic feminism and an inclusive trans-affirming feminism. We seek to highlight the many feminisms that are trans inclusive and that affirm the diversity of gender expression, in order to document the reality that feminist transphobia is not universal nor is living a trans

life, or a life that contests the gender binary, antithetical to feminist politics. How are trans, genderqueer, and non-binary issues related to feminist movements today? What kind of work is currently being undertaken in the name of trans/feminism? What new paradigms and visions are emerging? What issues still need to be addressed? Central to this project is the recognition that multiple oppressions (not just trans and sexist oppressions) intersect, converge, overlap, and sometimes diverge in complex ways, and that trans/feminist politics cannot restrict itself to the domain of gender alone.

We could not be more pleased with the response to this CFP, or with the thirty-four feature article authors from seventeen different countries we have been able to publish.

Perhaps the clearest theme to emerge in reviewing and selecting this work is the tremendous worldwide effect of “intersectional” feminisms promulgated by US feminists of color in the 1980s. Although Kimberlé Crenshaw is most often cited as the point of origin and point of departure for the concept of intersectionality, we could not help but think—when reflecting on the rationales by means of which trans people, particularly trans women, have been excluded from feminism—of the Combahee River Collective Statement; after first criticizing “how men have been socialized to be in this society” and “what they support, how they act, and how they oppress,” the collective went on to note:

We do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women’s oppression, negating the facts of class and race. (Combahee River Collective [1977] 1983)

In foregrounding the necessity of attending to class and race as well as sex and gender, intersectional feminism raised the question of whether “woman” itself was a sufficient analytical category capable of accounting for the various forms of oppression that women can experience in a sexist society, which in turn opened the question of whether it was sufficient to talk about sexual “difference” in the singular, between men and women, or whether instead feminism called for an account of multiple “differences” of embodied personhood along many different but interrelated axes. This intersectional version of feminism laid the foundation for transfeminist theories and practices in the 1990s and subsequently. Another clear theme to emerge was the importance of queer and poststructuralist

approaches to gender and feminism that enabled a more varied understanding of the complex and ever-shifting processes through which identity, embodiment, sexuality, and gender can be configured.

Clear, too, is the recognition that transfeminist perspectives have a decades-long history within intersectional feminisms and were crucial to early formulations of transgender studies. As one contribution to this issue of *TSQ* notes, trans issues played a role in the life of Dr. Pauli Murray, a black gender-nonconforming woman who explored hormonal masculinization in the 1940s, and whose legal activism in the 1950s and 1960s helped lay a conceptual foundation for intersectional feminist theory; other contributors note that trans people played active roles in second-wave feminist groups in the 1960s and 1970s, many of which were actively welcoming of trans people.

Angela Douglas, for example, founded the Transsexual/Transvestite Activist Organization (TAO) in 1970 in Los Angeles, while “crashing” for a few months at the Women’s Center, where she immersed herself in the feminist literature in the center’s library, attended classes, and participated in the Lesbian Feminist organization that met in the building—noting (with her characteristic self-aggrandizement), “To some, I was a walking monument to the women’s movement, a man who had voluntarily given up male privilege to be a woman—and was now fighting for women’s rights” (Douglas 1983: 31). In 1973, when Sylvia Rivera—Stonewall veteran and cofounder of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR)—fought her way onto the stage of the Christopher Street Liberation Day rally in New York, after having first been blocked by anti-trans lesbian feminists and their gay male supporters, she spoke defiantly of her own experiences of being raped and beaten by predatory heterosexual men she had been incarcerated with, and of the work that she and others in STAR were doing to support other incarcerated trans women. She chastised the crowd for not being more supportive of trans people who experienced exactly the sort of gendered violence that feminists typically decried and asserted, with her own characteristic brio, that “the women who have tried to fight for their sex changes, or to become women, *are* the women’s liberation” (Rivera 1973). The point here is not to debate how well or how deeply early trans radicals like Douglas and Rivera understood or engaged with feminism and the women’s movement, but rather simply to document that second-wave feminist spaces in the United States could be inclusive of trans activism, and that radical trans activism drew upon tenets of the women’s movement, perhaps even more than it did from gay liberation rhetoric.

Suzan Cooke, one of the first peer counselors at the path-breaking National Transsexual Counseling Unit established in San Francisco in 1968, moved to Los Angeles in the mid-1970s and became a staff photographer at the *Lesbian Tide*, a lesbian feminist publication. Early US female-to-male community

organizer Lou Sullivan ([1974] 2006) tackled feminist transphobia head-on in his 1974 article “A Transvestite Answers a Feminist,” while Margo Schuller (1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c), a self-proclaimed lesbian feminist transsexual living in Boston in the late 1960s and early 1970s, penned a series of remarkably astute articles in the gay and feminist press on what she called “the lesbian/transsexual misunderstanding.” As the next decade dawned, Carol Riddell, a feminist transsexual woman and radical professor of sociology at Lancaster University, authored *Divided Sisterhood*, published in 1980, the first feminist rebuttal of Janice Raymond’s notorious 1979 publication *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Riddell’s leftist scholarship—such as a 1972 conference paper titled “Transvestism and the Tyranny of Gender,” which characterized the two-gender system as an oppressive feature of capitalism—influenced Richard Ekins and David King, two of the leading academic researchers of transgender phenomena in the 1980s and 1990s (*Gender Variance Who’s Who* 2008).

It is, however, Sandy Stone’s “Posttranssexual Manifesto” ([1992] 2006) often credited as the founding document of contemporary trans studies, that most fully activates the protean relationship between trans and feminist theorizing. Written in response to the trans-exclusionary radical feminist activism that resulted in Stone’s leaving the Olivia women’s music collective where she had been working as a recording engineer in the 1970s, Stone’s manifesto integrated many different strands of feminist, queer, and trans analysis into a potent conceptual tool kit that remains vital for the field today. The manifesto, first published in 1991, was originally presented at “Other Voices, Other Worlds: Questioning Gender and Ethnicity,” a conference on intersectional feminism held in 1988 at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where Stone was then a doctoral student in the history of consciousness at a time when that program boasted such faculty members as Angela Davis, Gloria Anzaldúa, Donna Haraway, and Teresa de Lauretis. It bears mentioning that Stone’s formulation of a “posttranssexual” politics took shape in the same milieu that generated Anzaldúa’s “new mestiza,” Haraway’s “cyborg,” and de Lauretis’s coinage of *queer theory*. Like its contemporaneous figurations, Stone’s “posttranssexual” offered a compelling new way to think in the interstices of gender, embodiment, and sexuality.

Since the early 1990s, a distinct body of transfeminist literature has taken shape. Stone’s manifesto provided the impetus for Davina Anne Gabriel’s *TransSisters: A Journal of Transsexual Feminism* (1993–95), which explored the underarticulated middle ground between medicalized transsexuality and radical feminism that Stone’s essay had pointed toward. Other contemporary ’zines expressing similar transfeminist perspectives include Anne Ogborne’s *Rites of Passage* (1991–92) and Gail Sondergaard’s *TNT: Transsexual News Telegraph* (1992–2000), both from San Francisco; and Mirha-Soleil Ross and Xanthra McKay’s

*Gendertrash*, from Montreal (1992–95). The first significant wave of peer-reviewed transgender studies scholarship to wash ashore in academia, in 1998, in special issues of such journals as *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *Social Text*, *Sexualities*, and *Velvet Light-Trap*, also produced a special issue of the British feminist *Journal of Gender Studies* (guest edited by Stephen Whittle). US activists Diana Courvant and Emi Koyama are generally credited with coining the term *transfeminism* itself circa 1992, in the context of their intersectional work on trans, intersex, disability, and survivorship of sexual violence. Although various other writers were using the term by the late 1990s, including Patrick Califia and Jessica Xavier, it was Koyama's "Transfeminist Manifesto," published on her *Transfeminism.org* website in 2001, that gave it a greater reach. Her earlier *Whose Feminism Is It Anyway?* (2000) is also of particular note in its explicit discussion of the intersections of race and class in the debates over the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

The first anthology of explicitly transfeminist writing, Krista Scott-Dixon's *Trans/Forming Feminisms: Trans/feminist Voices Speak Out*, was published in 2006, a year before Julia Serano's influential *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007) brought transfeminist concepts into even wider circulation. Since then, at least three special issues of leading English-language feminist journals have engaged with trans studies. In 2008, *WSQ* published "Trans-" (edited by Paisley Currah, Lisa Jean Moore, and Susan Stryker); in 2009, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* published "Transgender Studies and Feminism: Theory, Politics, and Gender Realities" (edited by Talia Bettcher and Ann Garry); and in 2011, Matt Richardson and Leisa Meyers, on behalf of the editorial collective of *Feminist Studies*, issued "Race and Transgender Studies." More recently, A. Finn Enke's 2013 Lambda Literary Award-winning edited volume, *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies* (Temple University Press) has been reaching students in feminist classrooms throughout the anglophone academy. Beyond the United States, important transfeminist writings include Ray Tanaka's work on the intersection of trans and feminist concerns in antidomestic violence activism in Japan, *Toransujendā feminizumu (Transgender Feminism)*; 2006); Miriam Solá and Elena Urko's *Transfeminismos: Epistemes, fricciones y flujos (Transfeminisms: Epistemes, Frictions, and Flows)*; 2013), and Jaqueline Gomes de Jesus et al., *Transfeminismo: Teorias e práticas (Transfeminism: Theory and Practice)*; 2014).

In English, *transfeminism*, written all as one word, usually connotes a "third wave" feminist sensibility that focuses on the personal empowerment of women and girls, embraced in an expansive way that includes trans women and girls. It is adept at online activism and makes sophisticated use of social media and Internet technologies; it typically promotes sex positivity (such as support for

kink and fetish practices, sex-worker rights, and opposition to “slut shaming”) and espouses affirming attitudes toward stigmatized body types (such as fat, disabled, racialized, or trans bodies); it often analyzes and interprets pop cultural texts and artifacts and critiques consumption practices, particularly as they relate to feminine beauty culture. In Spanish and Latin American contexts, *transfeminismo* carries many of these connotations as well, but it has also become closely associated with the “postporn” performance art scene, squatter subcultures, antiausterity politics, post-*Indignado* and post-Occupy “leaderless revolt” movements, and support for immigrants, refugees, and the undocumented; in some contexts, it is understood as a substitute for, and successor to, an anglophone queer theory and activism deemed too disembodied, and too linguistically foreign, to be culturally relevant. *Transfeminismo*, rather than imagining itself as the articulation of a new form of postidentitarian sociality (as queer did), is considered a polemical appropriation of, and a refusal of exclusion from, existing feminist frameworks that remain vitally necessary; the *trans-* prefix not only signals the inclusion of trans\* people as political subjects within feminism but also performs the lexical operation of attaching to, dynamizing, and transforming an existing entity, pulling it in new directions, bringing it into new arrangements with other entities.

The “Trans/Feminisms” issue of *TSQ* includes a number of articles by authors who consider themselves transfeminist in the ways just described and that chronicle self-styled transfeminist practices and theories in the United States, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Spain, France, Russia, and Turkey. By choosing the forward slash (/) to mark a break between the two halves of the neologistic portmanteau *transfeminism*, however, we intend to make space for a wider range of work that explores the many ways that transgender and feminist work can relate to one another. Some pieces are historical, looking back at trans/feminist interactions over the past half-century, in Italy as well as the United States. Others critique the contemporary upsurge of transphobia in some feminist circles, such as Sara Ahmed’s analysis of the “no-platforming” debate in the United Kingdom. Still others chart the tentative emerging dialogs between established feminist cultures and newer transgender perspectives in such locations as francophone Canada, South Korea, and mainland China. Transfeminist heuristic lenses are applied to feminist science studies in the biological sciences, the relevance of the new materialism for trans studies, *khwaja sira* activism in Pakistan, radical hip-hop in Germany, grass-roots health activism in the United States and Latin America, questions of assisted reproduction for trans women of color in the United States, decolonial readings of gender diversity in South America, and the resurgence of two-spirit perspectives on erotic sovereignty. We make room as well for more disciplinary sorts of work, such as a sociological account of feminist



attitudes among a cohort of trans men in the United States; whimsical cartoon artwork; work that offers personal reflections on the authors' participation in, or experience of, trans and feminist scholarship and activism; and documents of transfeminist activism.

Finally, we also include interviews—both original and archival—that help round out the scope of trans/feminisms we wish to represent. Tommi Avicoli Mecca discusses the history of the Radical Queens Collective in Philadelphia in the 1970s and their relationship with the lesbian separatist DYKETACTICS group, and long-time Los Angeles butch, lesbian, and feminist activist Jeanne Córdova recalls the 1973 Lesbian Conference that witnessed the controversy surrounding Beth Elliott's performance and discusses the trans-inclusive politic of the *Lesbian Tide*. We are also pleased to include an edited version of a 1995 interview with Sandy Stone, portions of which originally appeared in *Wired* magazine (Stryker 1996), that help document the social, political, and intellectual contexts of early transfeminist theorizing.

In bringing together this unprecedented collection of transnational trans/feminist work, we hope to counter the most vituperative and sadly persistent forms of feminist transphobia by showcasing the truly inspiring work currently being undertaken around the world under the banner of transfeminism, as well as by documenting the already long history of transfeminist activism. We hope as well to foster even more radical visions of a social order that makes room for all of us regardless of race, class, sex, gender, sexuality, ability, language, nation, or any other status that now renders us vulnerable to violence and injustice. Transfeminism is a part, but only a part, of this larger struggle.

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