

Pedagogies of Becoming

Trans Inclusivity and the Crafting of Being

HILARY MALATINO

Abstract Conventional approaches to trans inclusion in the women’s, gender, and sexuality studies classroom often involve what Diana Courvant has called the “special guest” approach of bringing in trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming folk to represent and authenticate trans experiences, perspectives, and political engagements. This essay argues for the inadequacy of this pedagogical strategy, focusing on its complicity with a neoliberal politics of inclusion that fails to move students to deal with their own deep complicities in upholding understandings of sex and gender that are fundamentally transphobic, as well as its failure to prompt pragmatic understanding and address of the maldistribution of life chances for trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming subjects. I offer several alternative strategies aimed at producing more deeply transformative types of trans inclusion in WGSS classrooms. These strategies focus on mapping connections between cis and trans experiences of gendered transformation in order to produce an alternative understanding of gender as process, craft, and becoming.

Keywords pedagogy, trans inclusion, trans pedagogy, intersex studies, transfeminism

We must create a specific trans pedagogy.

—Diana Courvant, “Strip!”

Over a decade ago, I received a phone call from my best friend, asking me to speak on intersex issues at his college. The college was Smith; it was the historical moment when trans and gender-nonconforming students were beginning to push the women’s college to revise the gender-specific language in its charter. This rhetorical shift was envisioned as a potential symbolic victory, as the revised language would more closely approximate the gender diversity of the student body and serve as an institutional declaration of trans inclusivity. My best friend was at the embattled vanguard of this struggle, a well-known trans man on campus and president of one of Smith’s queer and trans student organizations. The agitated-for change has still not happened—to date, Smith has not changed

its charter, staunchly articulating itself as a *women's* college and recently drawing scores of negative press on account of a refusal to admit trans women if their application materials identify them, wrongly, as male. The recent publicity began in 2013 when Calliope Wong, a trans woman, was denied admittance because of gender discontinuity in her application materials (her letters of recommendation and transcripts identified her as female, but her FAFSA did not). Smith eventually shifted its policy, detailing that federal forms would “no longer be included on the list of documents needed to consistently reflect the candidate’s status as woman” (Waldman 2014). What Smith didn’t do, and what student activists, trans folk, and trans allies across the country are still calling for, is an end to the demand for gender continuity across identity documents. The demand for consistency ignores the difficult terrain trans folk—especially younger trans folk—must navigate in order to have their gender identities dignified by teachers, administrators, employers, and state institutions. While other women’s colleges—Mills and Mount Holyoke among them—have ruled in favor of admission policies inclusive of trans women that do not rely on continuity of identification, Smith has yet to follow suit.

My visit to Smith in 2003 thus coincided with the flourishing of a student-led movement for trans inclusivity at women’s colleges, one that is ongoing, increasingly visible, and widespread. It feels, in retrospect, like a tipping point of sorts in the struggle for institutional recognition of gender diversity, a moment when the binary, dimorphic logic of institutional sex determination began to come under severe criticism by groups of trans and gender-nonconforming students. Many of these students were encountering women’s and gender studies classrooms deeply informed by accounts of gendered embodiment that supported the proliferation of gendered identities. One of the intended purposes of my talk was to destabilize the fiction of binary sex through an autobiographical account of coming to terms with being intersex. This mission of producing conversation focused on denaturalizing the determination of biological sex dovetailed well with the aims of the student movement for trans inclusion, as well as the general ascendancy of social constructivism within women’s and gender studies. We were united in a critical stance against the dimorphic logic of gender regulation and engaged in a struggle for institutional recognition of forms of being in excess of the gender binary.

I lack a copy of the talk, but here’s what I remember: I told a crowd of roughly fifty people about my childhood and adolescence insofar as it had been shaped by the condition of androgen insensitivity. I discussed the impact of being told I had XY chromosomes at the age of fifteen, after having been reared female. I told them about not menstruating, about lying to peers about this phenomenon in order to mask my corporeal atypicality. I told them about the feeling of being a lab

rat as I circulated between multiple medical specialists, having blood drawn, submitting to genital examinations, having ultrasounds performed to see what—if any—kinds of internal sex organs I had. I remember the audience being strikingly empathetic, sensitive, and politicized listeners generally in support of the claims I made regarding both the problematic ethics of medical intervention in intersex conditions as well as the importance of gender self-determination and not being constrained by gender assignment at birth, particularly given the biological diversity possible in processes of sex differentiation.

There's another story to be told here, however, and that's the story of how I felt: exposed, vulnerable, raw, like a case study whose experience could be ushered in as proof of the necessity to re-vision commonsense understandings of sex, gender, and the messy relations between those terms. I felt the anxiety and responsibility that comes with being spotlighted as a representative of a relatively uncommon minority. I felt my story becoming exemplary and paradigmatic as I told it. I felt a bit like a genderqueer Tiny Tim, the story of my trauma an admonition and warning of the dire consequences of acquiescence to dominant logics of sex and gender. I also felt compelled to construct a triumphalist narrative, one that traced my movement through and healing from this trauma to proudly embrace both my status as intersex as well as my queer sexuality and gender.

The lure of the pride narrative is strong, appealing, and coercive. The publicity of the guest lecture operates as a sign of willingness, openness, and lack of shame in one's identity. Those who find themselves in a position of guest lecturer are often compelled to embrace this type of narrative, out of a felt need to be positive community representatives, but also as a kind of psychic defense against the vulnerability and invasiveness of the line of questioning that often follows the guest lecture. A troubling contradiction shapes this practice: it centers attention on trans and gender-nonconforming individuals in an effort to highlight the discrimination we encounter, while simultaneously being shaped by a dynamic that risks further harming us. There is an enormous psychic cost to answering the sometimes well-intentioned but often misinformed and deeply intimate questions that crop up. These run the gamut, but often involve interrogations regarding the configuration of one's genitals, what other bodily modifications one has undergone or intends to undergo, whether one's intimates are accepting or phobic, what one's sexual experiences and desires are and/or how they have changed in the process of transition. Claiming pride is one way of shoring oneself up in order to face questioning around these very personal, often traumatic issues, but it's also, often, a not-quite-genuine assertion. The guest lecture, however, is not a place to tarry with trauma.

I now teach full time in women's, gender, and sexuality studies, and I have staunchly refused to offer an autobiographical narrative of intersexuality

and gender nonconformance in the classroom or as a guest speaker since, as I have become convinced that this approach is pedagogically problematic. I also strategically refuse the piecemeal incorporation of autobiographical narratives from others, and I deliberately choose materials that, while sometimes autobiographical, are much more epistemically challenging, riskier, and more confrontational than the type of narrative I offered in that Smith talk years ago. I stay away from conventional (that is, triumphal) coming-out narratives that conclude with individualized banalities about the importance of being true to one's self and finding self-fulfillment, happiness, or some other dangling existential carrot. Instead, I utilize texts in which the autobiographical elements are interwoven with meditations on phenomena like institutional exclusion, the trouble with the medicalization of gender, the experience of being marked for social death, or the technoscientific developments that have shaped the contemporary terrain of gender transition. One of my favorites is Eli Clare's *Exile and Pride*, a deeply intersectional text that links gender nonconformance with disability rights, poverty, and the violence of corporeal normativity. Another is *Testo-Junkie*, Beatriz Preciado's meditation on h/er experience of taking testosterone that doubles as an analysis of how h/er particular transmasculine transformation is a phenomenon that assumes meaning through a complex cocktail of biomolecular transformation, dimorphic fictions of gender, and the circuits of hormone extraction and production. S/he explores the embeddedness of each of those aspects within the neoliberal and neocolonial processes at work in pharmaceutical production, trials, distribution, and access. These are not paradigmatic, representative stories. They are autobiographies recounted as part of a more expansive tableau of the terrain of gender transformation, especially as it is inextricably bound to the diverse racial, ethnic, sexualized, classed, and bionormed inequities that characterize what Elizabeth Povinelli has referred to as "late liberalism."

Povinelli uses this term to indicate "the twined formations of neoliberalism and liberal cultural recognition that emerged in the late 1960s as a method of solving the crisis of liberal economic and social legitimacy in the wake of economic stagflation and colonial and social revolutions" (2013: 31). It indexes a set of institutional responses to mid-twentieth-century emancipatory movements that sought, simultaneously, to promote inclusivity in the name of bolstering the economy. Within late liberalism, cultural and social difference is recognized, but only in order to tame and manage these differences. Communities of resistance become niche markets and target demographics. The recognition of diversity, in late liberalism, is utilized as a method of governance, population management, and social control.

I understand the "special guest" approach to addressing trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming issues as part and parcel of this neoliberal management

of difference, and I find it inadequate for increasing awareness and action regarding the intense institutional and systemic discrimination trans and gender-nonconforming folk regularly encounter. I provide some recommendations that support a more deeply trans-inclusive curriculum, while remaining conscious of the fact that advocating for more substantive trans inclusion in the academy carries with it the risk that trans studies may become another site of merely symbolic inclusion, another manifestation of the kind of empty commitment to diversity championed by university administrators as a kind of progressive window dressing. This type of symbolic inclusion serves to paper over the realities of underfunding, understaffing, and the consistent threat of closure that departments and programs motivated by commitments to social justice and counterhegemonic knowledge production face in the current academic conjuncture, shaped as it is by “adjunctification,” emphasis on professionalization, the prioritization of profit, and the generalization of debt.

The Trouble with Guests

I’m not the only one to identify problems with the special guest model. Over the past few years, this approach to teaching on trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming lives has come under intense criticism by scholars of trans pedagogy. Kate Drabinski, in an essay detailing the particular difficulties of incorporating trans issues within the women’s studies classroom, writes that trans issues “tend to be taught in the ‘special guest’ model, never central in their own right and always interesting insofar as they illuminate more clearly ‘women’s’ issues,” issues that are conceptualized as somehow distinct from trans issues (2011: 10). From the start, there is an epistemological roadblock produced, wherein students are encouraged to conceptualize “woman” and “trans” as discrete categories, and the narratives of trans folk are valuable only insofar as they prove the cultural contingency and constructedness of hegemonic gendering processes. Moreover, this approach risks calcifying the alterity of trans folk in the imaginations of the predominately cis-gendered student body. Drabinski smartly summarizes this phenomenon, writing that “the great potential of teaching and learning from transgender experience is reduced to a freakish footnote in our students’ notebooks to be trotted out at the next party as a crazy example of what they are teaching over in gender studies” (2011: 10). Trans folk—not just special guests in the classroom, but also the weird kids you gossip about at the party!

Diana Courvant has written eloquently on her extensive experience as a guest lecturer on trans issues, in the form of classroom visitor as well as the author of an anthologized and widely taught autobiographical essay documenting her experience at a 1997 Riot Grrrl gathering in Olympia, Washington, where she asked her friends to support her “in adding a last-minute lunch workshop” where

she would “strip and hold a dialogue about trans bodies, dis/ability, and the bathroom conundrum” (2011: 29). The essay was included in Ophira Edut’s 1998 anthology *Adios, Barbie! Young Women Write about Body Image and Identity*. During the extensive revision process, Courvant was asked three times to expand her initial blurb about coming out as trans; by the time the piece received publication, the coming-out tale took up a large chunk of the essay. The logic behind this expansion was that, according to the editor (and recounted by Courvant), the “book’s audience would not know how to react to a transsexual protagonist without a narrative explaining how [they] arrived at adulthood . . . so different from the other women attending” (2011: 29). Another pronounced change had to do with the ending; rather than the initial conclusion, which discussed the impact of stripping as a means of transforming “intolerable terror” at lack of inclusion and misrecognition to a “manageable insecurity,” Courvant was asked to simplify the ending, “focusing it more on the positive to better fit the anthology’s flavor.” In the end, then, an essay about coping with transphobia, the difficult and ongoing struggle to accept and embrace bodies that aren’t cis-normative, and the affective ambivalence of navigating everyday life as an out trans woman became reduced to a coming-out story documenting movement through insecurity toward a public declaration of pride and self-love—a narrative, much like the one I had offered at Smith, that “is commonly read as triumphant” (2011: 29).

Within many women’s and gender studies classrooms, the assignment of this type of story—whether in written form or in the form of a visitor—is taken as evidence of inclusivity. It is often considered pedagogically effective to have discussed one, ostensibly paradigmatic trans life narrative and then move on with the curriculum. This is sometimes coupled with a tendency to ignore key epistemological issues raised by grappling with these narratives as the students move through the rest of the course—for instance, the tendency to utilize cis-bodies as the unmarked referent when discussing sexual health and reproduction; the necessity of distinguishing gender orientation from sexual orientation in order to resist the conflation of queer sexuality with gender nonconformance; or the importance of introducing diversity within student’s understandings of trans narratives of embodiment, rather than recursively referencing one particular narrative as the “trans take” on certain ideas.

What makes this approach to trans inclusivity so popular? One reason is the ease with which students are able to digest this narrative. If the stress falls on coming out as a movement toward self-acceptance and self-love, it is possible to encounter the text as profoundly unthreatening. There is nothing in that narrative that necessarily unsettles the self-perception of the reader; it is, rather, a pleasing, perhaps even heartwarming, affirmation of the importance of “being true to yourself.” The reader (or listener) is encouraged to take on an attitude of

benevolent empathy and can emerge from the encounter feeling more accepting without having to engage in any kind of critical self-reflexive process.

Another reason this type of narrative is endemic is because it dovetails with the pedagogy of liberal, multicultural pluralism. Nancy Fraser (2000) has written convincingly on the transformation of an emancipatory, radical politics of identity into the politics of liberal, multicultural pluralism. This latter iteration of identity politics is fully compatible with the economic imperatives of neoliberal globalization, as it advocates symbolic inclusion and cultural sensitivity but not real, material redistribution of resources that would make the lives of marginalized folk more livable. This method of cognizing difference mainly at the level of the cultural isn't adequately attentive to structural and institutional stratifications that, as Dean Spade explicates, maldistribute life chances for trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming folk (particularly T/I/GNC folks of color) (2011: 12).

We can see the form of identity politics problematized by Fraser at work in pedagogies that encourage us to take a tour of multiple gendered, racialized, classed, and sexualized cultural and political identities, exploring intersubjective difference through a series of staged encounters with alterity. In this model, the classroom becomes a sort of phantasm of a liberal democracy where identitarian difference is ultimately benign, where the struggle for "acceptance" and "equality" is fundamentally about an education in diversity that results in "tolerance" and "respect" for minoritized others. Instructors may attempt to actively guard against this buffet-style approach to encountering difference. However, we often have a hard time shifting this style of perception because it has become the hegemonic model for the pedagogy of difference at the elementary and secondary levels. What this means is that, even as we try to push through mythologies of achieved social equity for women, queers, and folks of color, difference is perceived most often through the lens of benign diversity: difference that doesn't, ultimately, make much of a difference.

Against Addition: Trans-Inclusive Innovations at the Introductory Level

This perceptual habit is often reified by the logic of course planning, especially at the introductory level, particularly if the course is organized according to the additive logic of identitarian difference (a week on African-American feminisms, a week on Latina feminisms, a week on trans/intersex issues, etc.). Toby Beauchamp and Benjamin D'Harlingue, in an article that critiques the organizational logic of several oft-utilized women's and gender studies textbooks, argue that "introductory texts that are less organized around identities or issues might be more conducive to centralizing transgender subjects" (2012: 32). This is because of the way in which course organization around identity discourages students from thinking about subjectivity in terms of intersectionality, mutability, mutual

constitution, and imbrication with shifting flows of institutional and geopolitical power. Students are taught to expect to engage trans issues only in a unit specifically on trans and gender-nonconforming folk, but not in class discussions of reproductive justice, decolonial feminisms, or gendered economic inequities. In light of the insufficiencies of identitarian course organization, I propose two alternative approaches for creating trans- and gender-nonconforming-inclusive classrooms—what I have termed, following Eve Sedgwick and Michel Foucault, *universalizing* and *genealogical* approaches and will discuss shortly. These approaches resonate with the long history of struggles for inclusion under the sign of “women” enacted by women of color, who have consistently pointed out the exclusions operative within women’s studies and assimilationist, white-dominant forms of feminist practice. They have done so while simultaneously developing accounts of identity that are mutable, contingent, and flexible in a way that lends itself to coalitional intellectual labor and activist praxis. Of note, here, are Kimberle Crenshaw’s coining of *intersectionality* (1989), Chela Sandoval’s notion of differential consciousness (2000: 15), and Jasbir Puar’s redeployment of the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of assemblage (2007).

When identities are posited as discrete entities prior to the beginning of a course, it is quite difficult to encourage the important epistemic habit of assuming that “the ontological integrity of identities prior to the social cannot be taken for granted” (Beauchamp and D’Harlingue 2012: 32). When identities are thought of as stable, discrete, preexisting entities, it is impossible to effectively focus course material on the construction, emergence, and mutations of differing forms of identity. In the absence of an ontologically tenuous approach, a fractionalized account of feminist theory and movement is offered: second wavers versus third wavers, sex positivity versus antipornography, women of color feminists versus white liberal feminists, essentialists versus constructivists, and so on. This renders the feminist movement a matter of warring camps and internecine battles, in which each group is locking horns with the others, informed by deep resentment and bad faith, with dialogic connection and coalitional possibilities downplayed.

Within this type of course organization, trans and intersex bodies are typically trotted out, on their particular assigned day or week, in order to demonstrate the fallacious logic of biological essentialism. We are posited as exemplarily disruptive bodies, the exceptional beings that expose the rigidity and coercion implicit in gendering processes. But, as Beauchamp and D’Harlingue argue, “this approach can easily displace gendering processes onto only transgender bodies, effacing the ways that all bodies are continually gendered” (2012: 38). Moreover, this approach can “foreclose further complexities by implying that the burden of gendering processes rests only on transgender people, and that transgender and nontransgender populations understand their gendered bodies

in fundamentally different ways” (2012: 38). We are made to bear the burden of demonstrating the contingency and constructedness of gender through being positioned as privileged objects of inquiry, rarefied beings with a unique perspective on the gendering process; cis-gendered folk are let off the hook.

This practice is extraordinarily common within programs and departments that are transitioning, or have transitioned, from “women’s studies” to some version of what I’ll call “women-plus”—that is, “women’s and gender studies,” “women’s, gender, and sexuality studies,” and so on. These nominal transformations, at least on the face of it, seem to be a progressive response to the insistence of critical race, ethnic, queer, and trans studies scholars that the nominal declaration of “women” as the object of study immediately forecloses intersectional approaches to gender and sexuality. Those of us at work on the ground know that there is a history of intense disagreement that is covered over by these nominal transformations. As Clark Pomerlou attests, in a roundtable on trans pedagogies that appeared in *WSQ* in 2008, “women’s studies is still a contested space” (see Muñoz and Garrison 2008: 290). So are many of the “women-plus” programs and departments, despite their movement toward epistemic expansion and inclusivity. When a classroom is structured by a cis-normative understanding of what gives form and content to maleness and femaleness, “the very condition of the women’s studies classroom’s possibility enacts a violence of nomination—a coercive gendering or sexing through naming that can be tangibly felt by classroom participants interpellated through such equations” (2008: 29). In my current academic post, I teach several sections of Introduction to Women’s Studies each year. Without fail, each term, several of my evaluations from these courses demonstrate surprise that we discussed gender and sexual diversity so much, given that it was a “women’s studies” course. In particular, students are surprised to have spent such a large chunk of time reading and discussing trans issues. For many of them, “women” and “trans” are incommensurate categories; trans issues have no place in a women’s studies course. This phenomenon is similar to student responses to thinking critically about racialization in the women’s studies classroom. In white-majority classrooms, there is the habitual surprise at discussing race and ethnicity in depth (“I thought this was a class on women, not race!”).

I try to teach past this presumed conflict through the use of two methodological approaches. The first is, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a universalizing approach to teaching gender construction; the second, following Foucault, is a genealogical method of framing the historical emergence of identity categories. These approaches can be combined in innovative ways in order to create more trans-inclusive women’s and gender studies classrooms, particularly at the introductory level.

I'd like to briefly recap Sedgwick's distinction between universalizing and minoritizing perspectives. This distinction leads the now-canonical *Epistemology of the Closet*, and it has become enormously influential as a method of framing the projects of critical sexuality studies; I think an analogous development has occurred over the past decade or so in trans studies. Sedgwick argues that there are two ways of considering the importance of the modern, Western hetero-homo binary: "The first is the contradiction between seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority (what I refer to as a minoritizing view), and seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities (what I refer to as a universalizing view)" (1990: 1). There has been a consistent tendency, at least since the mid-1990s, to denaturalize cis identities through emphasizing styles of being, performances, and behaviors that overlap and sometimes blur the boundaries of the cis/trans distinction. The invention of the transgender umbrella, well-documented in David Valentine's ethnographic volume *Imagining Transgender* (2007), is an important historical move toward identifying a range of gender expressions that stray beyond medicalized conceptions of transsexual realness. This expansive move produced a spectrum-based understanding of gender expression that framed transgender practices as part of many disparate methods of assuming and performing gender(s). We can also look at Kate Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* (1997), another queer/trans classic that aimed to denaturalize all assumptions of gender while highlighting the agency involved in gendered de- and reconstruction. This is the same historical moment that witnessed the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2006), which framed all gender as performative and posited gendered naturalness as a phantasmatic construction. It was also the moment when we first encountered Susan Stryker's call, in one of the first issues of *GLQ*, for cis folk "to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine" (1994: 242).

Recognizing this genealogy, it's important to consider how trans issues are being taught in ways that destabilize the cis/trans binary, through a universalizing perspective that emphasizes, to rephrase Sedgwick, how this binary has continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the gender spectrum. One tactic is to emphasize the shared and resonant nature of what Courvant calls "gendered grief" (2011: 31). I understand this phrase, which Courvant mentions in relationship to nontrans experiences of grappling with testicular or breast cancer, to index the anxiety, pain, and tribulation we all experience in relation to gendered corporeal norms. Through emphasizing the commonality of gendered grief, we can link seemingly disparate experiential phenomena in ways that are not dictated by a focus on the supposed alterity of

trans experience. We can discuss, in intro courses, the ways in which beauty ideals work as disciplinary mechanisms and motivate conspicuous consumption and how this plays out across various intersectional iterations of gender; we could map this phenomenon across a cross-section that could include queer black masculinities, cis high-femme folk, and gender-nonconforming trans women, utilizing video, memoir, and theory in conjunction to discuss the effects produced by this highly gendered mode of disciplinary power. With a universalizing focus, we can render strange the experience of feeling a lifelong consonance with one's assigned gender at birth; we can relativize cis experience and think about all the corporeal modifications that occur while staying safely within the parameters of cis identification. We can move away from the special guest model and instead focus on our shared performativity. What is desirable, ultimately, is that students begin to see that "for all of us, there is a gap between gender ideals and the realities of our lived experiences" (Drabinski 2011: 16).

It is not enough to simply get students to realize this basic insight about gender performativity; it is also imperative that there is some education on the interacting social and institutional forces that constrain gender autonomy, in order to prompt a collective realization that, while we all may be doing gender, we can't just suddenly decide to start doing it in a radically different way without facing severe harassment, censure, and punishment. In order to bear out the implications of the disciplining of gender, a genealogical focus on the constraining and enabling conditions of emergence of contemporary gendering practices is essential. Genealogy—what Foucault describes as a focus on "systems of subjection" and the "hazardous play of dominations" (1984: 83)—is an examination of historicized relationships of forces at work in the emergence of "morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts" (1984: 86). An examination of the construction of gender norms and ideals that regulate the enactment of legible and livable types of subjectivity is necessarily genealogical because to study the construction of gender is to study the historical emergence of dominant concepts of gendered realness, and the ways in which these concepts produce systems of subjection and domination that are experienced unevenly, more intensely for some than others.

There are a series of important developments that are worth addressing as part of a genealogy of gendered realness. A class collaborative could examine the development of modern concepts of sexual deviance and normativity (often complexly yoked to gender deviance) or look at readings in twentieth-century Western sexology concerned with developing taxonomies of deviance. They could explore the historical redefinition of "woman" as a category divorced from reproductive capacity and familial obligation, especially in relation to the emergence of twentieth-century feminist, queer, and trans movements. They could perform historical research on the series of contestations levied against feminist

universalisms, particularly those issued by women and queers of color, or read about the emergence of hormonal and surgical tactics that have enabled corporeal reconstruction of highly gendered morphological aspects. They could investigate the assimilatory trajectory of the Western LGBTQ movement and the concomitant sidelining of trans issues, or examine the nineteenth-century reconstruction of sex on a model of incommensurable biological difference and consider how that has played out in the search for dimorphic criteria for the determination of biological sex. There's a lot to cover that's of interest when considering the emergence of contemporary trans subjectivities.

So how can we parse it, particularly in the context of an introductory course? One way I've done it is through highlighting moments of rupture and transformation in the genealogy of gendered subjectivity, and by "tracing connectivities between varied social phenomena" in order to "make clear that identity is neither given nor hermetically sealed, but changing and contingent, part of social and cultural trends both sweeping and minute" (Benjamin and D'Harlingue 2012: 32). To study genealogical emergence is to study moments of contestation and reappraisal, moments of transformation, in their complex contingency. To teach a truly trans-inclusive introductory course, we must organize the course around gender-as-practice (the universalizing component), as well as ruptures in the "common sense" made of those practices (the genealogical component).

This strategy has the cumulative effect of making trans experiences resonate with other types of struggles and complicities with gender normativity. By centering gendering practices, rather than charting a tour of disparate identities, we can encourage students in introductory-level courses to approach all iterations of gender as a complex mix of regulation, discipline, determination, desire, and pleasure, as well as a concatenation of subconscious impulse and autonomous decision making. Considering how to reframe the introductory course with these two coimbricated approaches in mind is essential if we are interested in preparing students to encounter material in an upper-division course specifically in trans studies.

A Pedagogy of Our Own? The Case for Trans Studies Courses

An upper-division course specifically in trans studies? They're not too common, at least not yet, and certainly not as core curricula in major and minor degree-granting WGSS programs. A handful of universities are slowly integrating them; during my postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Gender Studies at Indiana University, I was able to teach one, entitled "Gender in Transition." Many of my concerns and strategies stem from this experience, one that was both challenging and gratifying in hard-to-predict ways. The class enrolled quickly; capped at twenty-five students, it was wait-listed only a few days into enrollment. I

attribute this partially to the recent pop cultural interest in trans issues, as well as the political groundswell of trans activism that has motivated an increased attentiveness to manifestations of trans and gender-nonconforming discrimination, harassment, and violence. It also has to do with the fact that the course was the only one of its kind available. Trans issues were discussed in other courses, but often only in the “special guest” style criticized earlier. Students would regularly discuss their frustrations with the treatment trans issues received in other courses, particularly those outside the department; they reported that these course sections were often perfunctory and rife with inaccurate information. The discussions were laced with phobic responses that the instructors failed to manage well. These issues have to do with the way in which the imperative to be pedagogically attentive to gender diversity is filtered through a liberal pluralist sensibility by folks with no training or intense interest in trans-specific theory, politics, or pedagogy. This creates a situation in which it seems to not matter how you talk about trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming folk, nor why—it’s merely important to acknowledge our existence, often as a caveat to otherwise highly biologically dimorphic and binary understandings that operate a priori in course material and discussion.

That’s one set of reasons why a trans studies course, preferably housed within an academic program or department centrally concerned with gendered complexity, is valuable—as an ameliorative in relation to the piecemeal, inadequate flirtations with trans pedagogy happening in other institutional quarters. Another strong argument has to do with moving beyond the supposed impasse between trans studies, feminism, and sexuality studies; often, when trans issues appear within WGSS curricula, they manifest in a mode in which they are pitted against other areas of political and scholarly inquiry, presented through the question of compatibility. While these debates are certainly important, as clarifying historical footnotes or articulations of intellectual field formation and political vision, they also reify the epistemic and political divisiveness that shunts the development of coalitional endeavors, and they do not adequately engage the rich and extensive corpus of work that forms what we can perhaps refer to as the trans studies archive. It is more imperative, I think, to collaborate with students in ways that encourage them to think about the compatibilities of trans studies and feminism than it is to consistently worry the question of whether trans issues are relevant to feminist pedagogy and activism. Placing pedagogical emphasis on the emergence of intersectional transfeminisms, for instance, rather than emphasizing battles between trans exclusionary radical feminists and trans activists, is one way to steer coursework toward the coalitional.

There is a vast interdisciplinary backlog of historical artifacts, theoretical articulations, and political engagements to think with, and intellectual space to

encounter this archive is imperative, particularly for those students seeking a comprehensive WGSS education to aid them in activist, nonprofit, academic, and other endeavors. If we don't offer trans studies courses at the undergraduate level, taught by scholars with firm specializations in this area of research, we can expect to see trans issues given short shrift in the coming years because we'll have not adequately prepared this generation of students to advocate and educate on behalf of trans and gender-nonconforming folk—particularly those that lack the kind of cultural capital to effect institutional transformations or are systematically denied those proverbial seats at the tables of power. There is an important caveat that comes along with this argument for an upper-level trans studies course, however: we can't stop there. If we do, we risk the course becoming a site of containment for trans studies, for the epistemological and ontological trouble trans studies has and will continue to produce across a range of intellectual and activist domains. It can't become just another check in the administrative accounting of diversity, another manifestation of symbolic inclusion, another instance of the pedagogy of liberal pluralism. An upper-level trans studies course is a space to work out trans pedagogy and engage trans archives; but the work of trans pedagogy must always exceed this (and any) classroom.

Through grappling with trans and gender-nonconforming experiences, knowledges, and political movements, students are encountering a radically new way of thinking about gendered subjectivity, a different way of thinking about what it is to have a body, what it is to be in the world. Trans pedagogy, in its disruption of hegemonic certitudes about corporeal stability, sex determination, gender dimorphism, and naturalized linkages between gender enactment and sexuality, is infused by a concern with the mediation between disciplinary and biopolitical power, on the one hand, and, on the other, enactments of self-determination and autonomy. It teaches us about the commonality of gendered grief, the way in which all beings are constrained and determined by hegemonic conceptions of gendered realness; yet it also familiarizes students with disparate and overlapping struggles to reconfigure that terrain of determination, with embattled legacies to self-identify beyond the staid boundaries of naturalized dimorphic gender. In its best deployments, it effectively provincializes those conceptions of gender identity with genealogies grounded in the modern West, opening conceptual space for iterations of being and embodiment not solely orchestrated by Euro-/West-centric articulations of gender identity, transition, and mutability. In developing a critical take on histories of medical pathologization of gender deviance, it breeds a healthy skepticism of medico-scientific conceptions of normality and irregularity, ability and debility, as well as the fundamentally heterosexist institutional logic that has historically undergirded transsexual authenticity. It teaches gender according to a logic of composition or

craft, rather than one of naturalized determination, wherein gendered being is not about what one is but about what one does in the milieu(x) they inhabit. It teaches that gender identity, for each of us, is about negotiating forces, orchestrating elements, rearranging corporealities; it is an always simultaneously constrained and enabling performance. It shifts the register from a stable ontology of gendered being to an active, collaborative, and ever-shifting ontology of becoming, placing questions of genealogy on the table to inquire after what styles of gender liberation we can invent next. It is committed to thinking a profound transformation in the logic of gendered being. Trans studies is, for all these reasons, integral to the curriculum.

Hilary Malatino is the assistant director of the Women's Studies Program at East Tennessee State University. Her recent publications include "The Waiting Room: Ontological Homelessness, Sexual Synecdoche, and Queer Becoming" (*Journal of Medical Humanities*, June 2013), "Utopian Pragmatics: Bash Back! and the Temporality of Radical Queer Action," in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (2013), and "Queer Monsters: Foucault, 'Hermaphroditism,' and Disability Studies" in *The Imperfect Historian* (2013).

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