

Transgender Lives, Transgender Cultures

Transgender Lives: Complex Stories, Complex Voices, by K. Cronn-Mills
Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2015. 88 pp. ISBN: 978-0761390220. \$34.60.

I Am Jazz, by J. Herthel & J. Jennings
New York: Dial/Penguin, 2014. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0803741072. \$17.99.

Reviewed by Diane Gavin, PhD

Here is a bold prediction to begin this book review: Within a generation or two, current organizational questions and concerns raised about trans* culture will evolve into commonplace practices and the existing workplace issues and responses surrounding trans* individuals will seem parochial and provincial. Twenty or 30 years from now, future researchers will wonder what all the fuss was about cisgender and trans* issues in schools and in the workplace, similar to the puzzlement many present-day anthropologists and sociologists who study gender-fluid societies may have about First World institutions with trans* students and workers. Gender fluidity has always existed in cultures, even within American culture; however, in contemporary American corporate or educational organizations, such identities have been tightly constrained and contained.

Two slim texts, however, begin to open glimpses into the personal stories found in modern American cisgender and trans* culture. As scholars have learned from other liberatory movements, such as the “second-wave” feminist movement of the 1960s–1980s and the gay and lesbian movements of the 1970s–1990s, personal stories are both awakening and political. Throughout Cronn-Mills’s book and Herthel and Jennings’s book are examples of people’s lives that raise both consciousness and questions that should pique the interest of researchers who engage in organizational cultural studies.

Herthel and Jennings's book, *I Am Jazz*, offers readers a look into 13-year-old Jazz Jennings's journey of being female trapped in a male body through the eyes of a child. Once Jennings is diagnosed with gender dysphoria, and her parents, school, and friends allow Jazz to emerge, the child blossoms. Told in picture-book style, *I Am Jazz* is written to guide other youngsters—and perhaps adults who parent or educate cisgender children—in becoming comfortable with gender dysphoria and how to live in a third space outside of traditional gender roles.

Kristin Cronn-Mills, a transgender woman, compiled personal stories and historical fact to weave an intricate look at several adults whose gender fluidity spans the trans* spectrum, from transvestite to transsexual. Perhaps the most salient point Cronn-Mills makes in her text is the following about cisgender and the generational divide: Social media and the Internet have accomplished more in changing and broadening people's views of trans* culture than any other cultural avenue; according to Cronn-Mills, in 2005–2006, more than two-thirds of 18- to 22-year-olds who came out as trans* knew someone who was trans* before deciding to come out; comparably, only one-third of trans* individuals in their 40s and one-fourth of trans* individuals who were 50 or older knew someone who was trans* prior to coming out in society (p. 71). Acceptance of trans* culture appears to be led by youth culture, which also drives the narrative structure of Herthel and Jennings's book. Cronn-Mills, also an author of young adult narratives for cisgender teenagers, appears to understand that youngsters will be the ones to lead social change.

However, while a cisgender youth movement is central for establishing an awareness of intersexuality in homes and schools, it is also important to note that the communication third space gener-

ated by the Internet appears to have given rise to opening multiple public spaces in gender identification as well. Cronn-Mills acknowledges that online communities are offering ways for individuals to explore their gender identities, as are television programs that feature trans* actors and publishing houses that print intersexual narratives. Perhaps it is time for corporations and other institutions to consider including trans* actors in training videos or career development tools.

As I read both Cronn-Mills's and Herthel and Jennings's work, a number of questions regarding the shift toward encouraging gender-fluid workplaces and organizational culture planning and policies began to take hold. What changes in organizational culture ideas, policies, and planning must occur to accommodate a future generation of gender-fluid workers? How will privileged views and spaces that are now celebrated or segregated be altered as more openly trans* employees, managers, and organizational leaders enter industrialized society? How will organizations and institutions address the attitudinal baggage that some employees may have as trans* workers blend into organizational culture? Perhaps more importantly, what might that attitudinal baggage be as organizational culture becomes trans*, as overt bigotry or institutional intolerance looks and is enacted quite differently from coworker ambivalence, indifference, or social desirability biases? While Cronn-Mills's and Herthel and Jennings's books explore critical but mundane issues in organizational or institutional cultures, such as which bathrooms to use or barriers to health care, greater and significant research related to trans* workers and organizational culture needs to occur. The challenge of creating a societal third space in any organization or culture is to understand the impact such a third space may have. And while not the focus of such conscious-raising books like Herthel and

Jennings's or Cronn-Mills's, after a certain point in cultural time and space, consciousness-raising will no longer be sufficient. As I read these two books, a voice kept whispering, "Ah, but what then?" While we cannot determine when that tipping point in cultural time and space will be for organizations to lack the need for consciousness-raising related to diversity, in the present, books like Cronn-Mills's and Herthel and Jennings's offer locations within current cultural time and space to begin providing corporate and diversity training linked to trans* culture.

Readers familiar with Lev Vygotsky's understanding of the "third space" in cognitive development could read Cronn-Mills' and Herthel and Jennings' books with a sense that as the trans* communities accumulate shared artifacts with more established heterosexual and LGBTQ communities, society will change. The present realm of social and workplace exclusion that many members of the trans* community face will

blend over time with a range of emerging linguistic and social tools, personal narratives, cultural signs, and interpersonal relations that become shared acceptance. Such may be the most hopeful way to read these two slim texts; one a personal narrative of a young child's emergence as trans* and the other a primer for those who yearn to learn more about friends, family, or colleagues who live in a third space: In a generation or two, book reviews like this one will simply seem quaint and naïve to organizational cultures that have no need to define individuals by gender identification. ♦

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