



Transgender Cinema (Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture)

by Rebecca Bell-Metereau, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019, 138 pages, \$65.00 (HB), \$17.95 (PB).

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BOOK REVIEWS

Transgender Cinema (Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture), by Rebecca Bell-Metereau, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019, 138 pages, \$65.00 (HB), \$17.95 (PB).

Transgender Cinema, by Rebecca Bell-Metereau is a volume in the Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture series. A media studies professor at Texas State University, Dr. Bell-Metereau has attempted to provide a critical overview of the portraits of transgender people in (mainly American) films, ranging from the early days of silent cinema to the present. The survey is largely chronological.

For a book entitled *Transgender Cinema*, an overall flaw is the failure to define what precisely *trans* means in this context. Bell-Metereau, (a cis-woman per her own description) tries but largely fails to address this issue in the (too long) introduction. She's clearly aware of the problem. She uses the term *trans* or *transgender* for individuals "whose gender identity or identification is not the sex... assigned at birth" (p. 3). However, as one can see from the choice of films reviewed, the author includes cross dressing (drag) in this category, which is highly questionable: many male drag performers are proudly homosexual and would not refer to themselves (or consider themselves) as transgender.

In the first of three chapters, Bell-Metereau documents the history of what she calls transgender cinema, often citing obscure films whose content does not fit her definition of transgender. This definitional problem is evident even when she discusses well-known films such as *Tootsie* and *Some Like it Hot* (while ignoring the more relevant *Victor/Victoria*) as trans films when they are simply films about cross dressing and in which the cross dressing cis-male has a clear purpose: to get a job or escape from being killed. She devotes a full page of valuable space to a lunatic internet theory that Charlie Chaplin was actually a woman (we wonder what all of his exes might have thought?) and virtually ignores the films of Josef von Sternberg and his star, the bisexual Marlene Dietrich. She overlooks both the sexually explicit film, *The Blue Angel* and more notably, *Morocco*, in which the tuxedo-clad cabaret singer, Dietrich, kisses a female nightclub patron on the lips; to be fair, this film was also about cross dressing and not transgenderism.

Hitchcock's *Psycho* is indeed a great, complex, and disturbing film (though it is not clear what pathology Norman Bates suffers from, more than likely not schizophrenia, as labeled by the author). That said, the visual elements of the film, such as the iconic shower scene, are what make the film memorable, not Mr. Bates' cross dressing behavior. Including *Psycho* in a volume about transgender cinema actually dilutes the point of the book; to illustrate and analyze how cinema can influence as well as reflect societal attitudes about transgenderism.

When the author turns to more recent films, like Sally Potter's *Orlando* and Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry*, (film choices more relevant to the title of the book) her discussions are more astute. She places these later films in their relevant historical and social contexts, which many critics do not, and the reader benefits from these insights. However, Bell-Metereau once again devotes substantial space to obscure films of questionable relevance to the transgender experience.

The final chapter of the book, titled *New Platforms and New Voices*, unfortunately also deals with relatively unknown and/or inaccessible films and is therefore less interesting. The book also includes a rudimentary Filmography, as well as sections on Works Cited, and Further Readings.

Unfortunately, the brevity of the book, the confusion resulting from the inclusion of cross dressing in an analysis of transgender cinema, and the limited analysis of many of the cited films make it difficult to assign it a recommended audience.

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Transnational Psychology of Women Expanding International and Intersectional Approaches edited by Lynn H. Collins, Sayaka Machizawa, and Joy K. Rice. American Psychological Association, 2019. 322 pages. \$69.99 (HB).

“The discipline of psychology is not an innocent bystander in the dismissal of the world’s women ...” (p. *x*). So begins the series forward to this provocative book. The main premise detailed in its pages is twofold; that psychological processes are not universal, and that psychologists are thus ill-prepared to research, diagnose, treat, or intervene with an increasingly mobile, complex, and diverse population. The book grew out of the work of feminist scholars and so focuses on the psychology of women with the hope to “improve the situations of women in ways that are responsive to their and their communities’ particular needs and priorities.” (p. 5). The editors and authors of this book cogently argue that the assumption of universality has led to generalizations based on research conducted with samples from WEIRD countries (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) which have limited applicability beyond those boundaries. The editors, in their introduction, quote heavily from the work of Arnett (2008) who similarly argued that psychology must take a new approach to clients with complex identities based on experiences of different cultural frameworks, (including family structures, systems of government, educational opportunities), as well as access and experiences with health care, food availability, migration, exposure to military conflict, and income diversity, and population density. I wholeheartedly agree, and have stated as much when addressing the need for more research on the diversity of sexual experiences *before* we assume that we have effective sex therapy interventions for a global population (Hall, 2019).

This book is best used as a text for graduate and advanced undergraduate courses. Sometimes the book reads more like a manifesto than the scholarly work it is. It is abundantly clear that in this book, the authors and editors are taking a strong advocacy stance, giving a voice in the psychological literature not only to girls and women, but to girls and women who live outside the Western world. The terminology used in this book is likely new to many readers and so requires definitions and clarifications, many of which were repeated across chapters. Sometimes the repetition appears to serve a larger purpose. Importantly, the authors of the chapters did not talk of third world countries, but of the *majority* and *minority* world. The minority world is the 5% of the world’s population residing in the USA, while the majority is the non-Western world. The repeated use of this terminology with accompanying explanation, makes the book’s main premise very clear. Other times the repetition made the reading a bit tedious, as did the fact that many authors broke away from their main arguments to explain (again) transnational feminist theory.

The book is divided into 11 chapters, plus an introduction. The first chapters deal with transnational feminist psychology in historical and international contexts and subsequent chapters