

CHAPTER 5

GENDERING THE FAT BODY: RHETORIC AND PERSONHOOD IN TRANSITION

Han Koehle

ABSTRACT

Though ciscentric discourses often claim that genitals alone define gender, public disciplining of gender deviance suggests a move toward a broader and less genital-focused concept of gender, even among people who explicitly object to the normalization of trans people in society. In this chapter, I explore genital focused and holistic concepts of embodied gender in public discourses about cisgender celebrities and then in trans writings about gender and fatness emerging around the time of the transgender tipping point of 2014. I argue that hyperfocus on genitals in ciscentric discourses about trans bodies not only misunderstands trans experiences of gender but also misrepresents the role of genitals in post-millennium discourses about cisgender bodies.

Keywords: Transgender; sex and gender; body image; social history; racism; fat studies

Public discourses about trans bodies often treat genitalia as the only location of gender in the body and the primary sign of gender. In practice, genitals are rarely assessed in social interactions, and when genitals *are* observed it is virtually always *after* an assessment of gender has been made. Gender is located throughout the body and the whole body is assessed for gendered meanings. Yet, genitals

Advances in Trans Studies: Moving Toward Gender Expansion and Trans Hope

Advances in Gender Research, Volume 32, 77–90

Copyright © 2022 by Emerald Publishing Limited

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved

ISSN: 1529-2126/doi:10.1108/S1529-212620210000032006

play an important symbolic role and feature prominently in moral assessments of gender role conformity. In this chapter, I explore moralizing evaluations of cisgender public figures' gendered embodiment, sketch a historical context for the prominence of genital hyperfocus in such discourses, and relate them to the lived experience of embodied gender in 12 trans authors' articles and blogs about fatness in gender transition.

GENITALS AS GENDER SIGN

The child's first gender role is typically assigned based on visual assessment of the genitals at or before birth, and throughout the life course, genitals are cited in gender role expectations and assessments of gender role success (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Illustrating this kind of symbolic evaluation, in 2016, Jennifer Mayers tweeted a photograph of two ham sandwiches, one arranged to resemble a vulva, and the other with all the ham tucked inside the bun. Her tweet read, "The reason I preach #Christianity. My daughters represent the right. Taylor Swift's vagina represents the left." Mayers treats genital morphology as a sign of religious and sexual propriety (Gunter, 2019). Labial morphology is associated with sexual excess via the naturalization of white supremacy via scientific racism; the enslaved Saartje Baartman's labia minora were displayed widely during and after her life as proof of the bestial sexuality of black women (Somerville, 1994; Strings, 2019). Genital morphology was used to draw explicitly moral distinctions between white and black bodies in early European science and medicine, and discourses like Mayers asserting the moral plasticity of genitals persist (Gilman, 1985; Gunter, 2019). This controversial tweet prompted a flood of responses aimed at offering an educational, biological rebuttal (e.g. Thornhill, 2016). But this claim is not strictly empirical in nature. Its presence in the medical and scientific canon is ideological, leveraging natural claims to justify rather than prove ideology.

Perhaps even more commonly cited than labia for sexual behavior is the use of penis size to represent the moral and social standing of men. Jared Del Rosso argues that starting in the 1970s and at least through the 1990s, the penis has become a "public part," becoming commercialized, medicalized, and politicized, along with a proliferation of academic and cultural interest in the penis (Del Rosso, 2012, p. 705). Del Rosso's work engages with how (cis) men who perceive their penises to be small engage with public discourses equating large penises to masculinity.

Genitals and particularly the penis are taken as a sign of gender role and success in gender role not only in the individual person but also in evaluations of whole genders (e.g. West & Zimmerman, 1987). Men are said to both have and BE dicks, expressing a general connection between being a man, having a penis, and masculine stereotypes of hypersexuality, cruelty, and domination, while women are said to BE pussies, meaning both vaginas and cowards. "Dickless" has the same meaning, both literally lacking a penis (or having a vagina) and lacking masculine courage, and affirming preference for the rhetorical penis in

gender discourse over the rhetorical vagina. In practice, genitals are frequently conceptualized as *something* between the legs, or *nothing* (Braun & Wilkinson, 2010).¹ Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000, p. 59) describes the application of this logic to the surgical “normalization” of intersex infants: “females don’t need anything built; they just need excess maleness subtracted.”

Losing sight of the representative and *ideological* nature of the link between gender role and genitalia leads to discourses that justify gender-based oppression by naturalizing white supremacist logics of the natural body. Previous work on the role of scientific racism in shaping racialized genital stereotypes and racialized narratives about queerness, transness, and fatness hint that these narratives have a dual role of first othering and justifying the abuse of the stigmatized group and then disciplining members of the dominant group by activating the risk of being too closely associated with the other, often without any explicit mention of that other (Ferguson, 2003; Gilman, 1985; Strings, 2019). Mayers (2016) tweeting about the sexual propriety of cisgender women and girls based on their labial morphology does not appear to reference race, but this leveraging of antiblack stereotypes linking labial morphology to sexual impropriety is nonetheless identical to the explicitly white supremacist rhetorics in which it originates.

White feminist critiques of genitalia as signs of gender role come to similar conclusions about the role of these metaphors in naturalizing power relations, though they miss the role of white supremacy in shaping those power relations. Betty Friedan’s (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* argues that Freud’s concept of penis envy locates in the actual penis what is properly attributable to maleness as a construct. By locating male privilege and authority in the penis, Freud suggests that any libertory ambitions a woman might express is merely *penis envy*. Like Strings and Ferguson, Friedan shows that by locating a social relation in the body, the necessary effect is treating the social relation as beyond reproach or alteration.

Sandy Stone (1991) finds a similar fault in Janice Raymond’s equation of penis to man and transsexual to rapist. Janice Raymond’s (1979) *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* expands on the rhetorical link between penis, manhood, and sexual violence by arguing that trans women embody male intrusion into womanhood/vaginas and thus are literally, by virtue of being trans rather than through any act of physical violation against a particular woman, rapists. Notably, Raymond anticipates rebuttal by appeal to the fact that not all trans women in fact *have* a penis, and specifies clearly that a literal, physical penis is not relevant to the rape she describes. The author’s flexibility reveals the underlying commitment; as in every other case I have described, it is not the genitalia that she objects to, but the person.²

Strikingly, Freud’s concept of penis envy enjoyed its heyday contemporaneous to the publication of *The Transsexual Empire* and a number of the other works on the gendered genital cited here. To briefly illustrate this, Google indexes approximately 590 references to “penis envy” in books and scholarly articles between 1940 and 1959 (its next most popular period), versus 5,770 between 1970 and 1999. Both periods of elevated interest in the term correspond to periods of antifeminist backlash and marked valorization of white cisheteromascularity in

the United States. These periods also correspond with Nazi repression of pro-trans literature in the first case and the proliferation of feminist texts equating penises to rape and other patriarchal violence in the second (Stryker, 2008).

It is also worth noticing that while transmisogynist narratives of the 1970s–1990s virtually started and stopped at the penis, contemporary narratives are less focused. Throughout these examples it is clear that the social function of genitalia is not in *judging* or *defining* gender, but in *surveilling* and *regulating* gender and thereby reproducing a social order in which white supremacy and patriarchy can continue. As public focus on the penis wanes generally and as awareness of genital mutability increases and explicit challenges undermine the normative relationship between the penis and social gender, self-styled gender “critics” and gender “realists” are increasingly reaching for other justifications, evaluating sites where boundaries can be reerected and renaturalized.

In contemporary trans athletics debates, the penis is gradually being supplanted by arguments about men (and thus trans women) being too large, too full of testosterone, too muscular, too lean, and with too-dense bones (e.g. Rigby, 2019). Though bone density, muscle mass, fat accumulation, and of course testosterone level itself are highly responsive to hormone therapy, increasingly granular body features are cited as the *true* scientific location of gender in the body. If muscle mass is mutable, well, myonuclei are for life (Bruusgaard, Johansen, Egner, Rana, & Gundersen, 2010; Rigby, 2019). Myonuclei are organelles inside muscle cells that increase in number with extreme use of the muscle (as by concerted athletic training) and are retained during periods of atrophy; this function is why initial training is slower than reconditioning after a period of inactivity. This structure is not a serious contender as the new *real* site of gender in the body, both because of its weak association with sex and its public obscurity, but its citation in recent debates about the fairness of trans women competing in sport illustrates the current instability of logics regarding the location of gender role in the body. Others have tried to locate biological truth values in pronouns, a surprisingly postmodernist position for proponents like Ben Shapiro (2018), and unstable gender rhetorics will likely find new sites on which to focus in coming years. It is within this context of unsable gender rhetorics and within the broader context of gender naturalization as a justification for gendered subjugation that the body narratives of fat trans authors emerge.

GENDERING THE FAT BODY

People impacted by gendered fatphobia before, during, and after gender transition offer analyses of the social processes and constructs of gender, gendering, and being gendered by others while traversing social locations that remain highly stigmatizing and highly visible at every stage. These narratives illustrate the violence of gendered fatphobia while highlighting how essentially *absent* genitals are in many people’s experience of gender on a social level. In reading fat trans authors, I begin to map overlooked relations between discrete gendered body parts, gendered features of the body, and gendered meanings and implications of

Table 1. Articles Considered.

Ballou, Nicholas. (2016, July 14). Op-ed: Learning to love my trans male body after years of violence. <i>The Advocate</i>
Bryan, Faith. (2015). Learning to care for ALL of me—Living in a transgender higher weight body. <i>Binge Eating Disorder Association</i>
Burns, Katelyn. (2016, January 17). My intersection with being trans and fatphobia. <i>Medium</i>
Dynarski, Wiktor. (2014, March 7). Transitions of fatness. <i>Transitive Insights</i>
Rude, Mey. (2016, June 18). Fat, trans, and (working on being) fine with it. <i>Everyday Feminism</i>
Sallans, Ryan. (2012). Finding me: Looking past the surface to discover my transgender identity. <i>NationalEatingDisorders.org</i>
Samson, Jude. (2016, April 21). Trans fat: Obesity and trans men. <i>Transgender Universe</i>
Shackelford, Hunter Ashleigh. (2016, July 7). Why I'm nonbinary but don't use "they/them." <i>Wear Your Voice</i>
Existentialhomo. (2016). A shoutout. <i>Tumblr</i>
[Anonymous]. (2016a). This post is for FAT trans people. <i>Tumblr</i>
[Anonymous]. (2016b). My relationship with my body. <i>Tumblr</i>
[Anonymous]. (2016c). 10522. <i>Tumblr</i> , c. 2016

the body. I find that these are entangled but that the *implications* take precedence over the *parts*, not just in the trans anarcho-utopian future but also in the social worlds of people committed to resisting trans liberation.

This chapter examines public discourses by trans people about gendering fat, trans bodies written around the “transgender tipping point” of the mid-2010s. I engage with articles and blogs by Nicholas Ballou, Faith Bryan, Katelyn Burns, Wiktor Dynarski, Mey Rude, Ryan Sallans, Jude Samson, Hunter Shackelford, and anonymous and semi-anonymous blogs published to Tumblr during the same period (see Table 1).³ In considering the way these authors gender their bodies and experience their bodies being gendered by others, I argue that the primary function of gendered antifatness is to create opportunities for increased gender policing according to masculine or feminine gender norms in a manner derivative and supportive of white supremacy.

Corrections

This section is based on my 2016 thesis on fatphobia as a barrier to gender transition care, and I would be remiss not to acknowledge some significant errors and problems in the original study. Approaching this work with an interest in barriers to transition care, I struggled to find sources that explicitly described clinical encounters, but I kept my a priori framework of healthcare access and read a care-seeking story into every narrative of fatness in transition. Though I would not have expressed such a belief even at the time, this epistemic choice meant implicitly endorsing an assumption that all trans people who could access medical transition care would want to transition medically, and wrote medicalizing discourses onto the experiences of trans people who in fact have specifically and vocally *not* transitioned medically. In hindsight, I think this error was largely the result of my own narrow perspective as a medically transitioning person in my first year of transition and in a context where medical injustice was highly visible in my neighborhood and among my immediate peers. I offer sincere apologies to

the authors whose experiences I mischaracterized in this biased framework and to any readers of the work who may have adopted the same bias based on my analysis.

Another error in my approach was the degree to which I treated these writings as data rather than community-grounded analysis. Aware of trans research fatigue (e.g. Ashley, 2020) and worried about the short and rigid deadlines a thesis implies, I concluded that prioritizing unobtrusiveness by using public materials and anonymizing them seemed like an ideal way to reduce my own footprint and keep my project timeline as streamlined as possible. I was hesitant to replicate the objectification of outsider research and worried that my project was not significant enough to justify contributing to research fatigue, potentially distracting participants from some more important project. After consulting with the review board at my university I decided that the lowest-risk approach was to strip all identifying information from the texts so my analysis would not run the risk of reflecting poorly on the authors.

While my intent in separating authors from their autobiographical texts was to reduce the ethical footprint of my work, this practice instead reinforced the dehumanization of trans authors and particularly the deacademicization of trans scholars. Their public work is not separable from their academic expertise, and treating their use of their own story as if it were separate from their analysis because it is not peer-reviewed inappropriately treats public scholarship as top-down, as merely publicizing the activities of the knowledge-producing elite rather than as a truly collaborative enterprise that increasingly occurs *in public*.

Real and Valid

To my surprise, the features that emerged most often as fat trans authors located gender in their own bodies were not specific body parts but abstract concepts, intangible features, and statuses implicated in their embodied experiences of gender. The most common of these were fatness itself and the status of having a gender that is valid or real. Ten of the twelve pieces included these themes as immediately relevant to locating gender in the body; the same number as implicated fatness. This is remarkable because fatness was an explicit focus of the study and a criteria for inclusion in the 2016 study, but validity or realness were not. The briefest pieces, confessional and peer support blogs on Tumblr, present this theme concisely. “You deserve to know that the definition of gender has nothing to do with body size,” writes an anonymous Tumblr blogger, “just because you aren’t a skinny white trans person doesn’t mean you aren’t real” (Anon., 2016a). This brief segment posits a straightforward relationship between gender validation for trans people and body normativity according to thinness and whiteness. Hunter Shackelford (2016) posits a similar relationship, writing that “femininity is significantly scripted through whiteness and thinness” (para. 3). Most of the authors did not explicitly implicate whiteness but similarly described fatness as invalidating gender wherever it turns up in the body.

Katelyn Burns (2016) describes the social erasure of fat women as a barrier to recognizing herself as a woman. She recalls wondering, “who’s ever heard of

a 6'2" 320 pound woman" (para. 4). Burns could not imagine existing as such a woman because she could not imagine such a woman existing at all. Part of the structural invisibility of fat women and fat femininity that several authors described was the inaccessibility of feminine clothing in their sizes. As previous authors have argued, the relegation of "plus" or "outsize" fashions to dark corners of stores contributes to stigmatizing fatness and negatively impacts fat identity formation (Downing Peters, 2015). As retailers increasingly move plus sizes to ecommerce-only, fat shoppers are increasingly pushed out of the public eye (Adams, 2013).

Several authors in the 2016 sample described the impact of struggling to find gender-affirming clothing or being forced to shop in a separate section. Mey Rude (2013) described shopping for clothes as one of the scariest parts of early transition, not just because of the fear of being challenged in an act of gender defiance or spotted by an acquaintance but also knowing that,

in the town I live in, there are only two stores that carry a wide selection of women's clothes that fit me. Building up the courage to get dressed, put on makeup, do my hair, and then go out in public to do some shopping only to be told '*we don't have anything in your size*' feels like an affirmation of all the times I was told I was a man. (para. 18, author emphasis)

Rude experiences the structural invalidation of retailers almost universally excluding her body from the category of women's clothing as reinforcing personal, direct invalidations about her status as a woman.

Hunter Shackelford's essay explicates her defiant nonbinary femininity as responsive to experiences of gendered antiblack violence. Shackelford (2016) names experiences of racialized fat stigma as foreclosing on gender opportunities. She describes being forced to shop in the boys' or mens' departments to clothe herself and how this functions as a form of gender discipline, excluding from femininity those bodies that fail to be stereotypically petite and controllable. "My body was none of those things," she writes:

And my only opportunity to find ways to present my gender ... as "more feminine" were denied to me because clothes that would affirm my girlhood/womanhood were not available in my size. (para. 6)

Shackelford's childhood masculine presentation was not a voluntary exploration of gender nonconformity but a forced exile from femininity based on fatness. Gender 1-0-1 approaches to explaining sex, gender identity, and gender expression often seem to sort these as body/mind/behavior, and these stories, particularly Shackelford's, show that these distinctions are less clear than that. Gender expression cannot be conceptualized as the essentially voluntary, expressive aspect of gender or as divorced from the body when the social conditions around the body dramatically dictate what expressions are possible. Burns' struggle to see and imagine fat women in society (and thus, to recognize herself as a woman) was likewise neither strictly voluntary nor strictly of the body.

Additionally, while popular simplifications of gender socialization often assume that children are socialized in essentially *opposite* ways based on role assignment, the universality of access to narratives (or more accurately narrative absences) about fat women as socially nonexistent and the throughline of

childhood and pretransition socialization about fatness and gender illustrate that children are taught *similar* messages about the meanings and roles of men and women, and ultimately people are forced to contend with the values that have been forcibly applied to their bodies, regardless of when in life that occurs and whether it aligns with their felt sense of self. As Bell Hooks (2004) argues, the introduction of patriarchal norms in cisgender men requires self-directed violence and the threat of violence by other men as a precondition to violence against women. If all cisgender people are subject to patriarchal violence in order to discipline and devalue femininity, there can be no doubt that all trans people are subject to patriarchal violence on the basis of femininity or that most trans people experience patriarchal violence both intended to discipline women and intended to discipline men at different points in our lives. This likely explains the notable similarity between binary and nonbinary authors' grapplings with gendered antifatness and the lack of a distinctly nonbinary experience of antifatness in these writings, as nonbinary people, like all people, experience gender policing according to the gender assigned by the person policing them at a particular moment and not according to their inner gender concept or role assigned at birth.

Shamefulness

The pervasive engagement with validity points to the looming threat of invalidation and what it means for the gendered self. Two thirds of the authors in the 2016 corpus described shame and dehumanization as characterizing their experience of gender and fatness, and this dehumanization was further inflected based on the individual author's social status and context. Rude (2013) and Shackelford (2016) both described gendered racism as expressed through explicit fat policing and sexual objectification. Bryan (2015), Dynarski (2014), Rude, and Shackelford explicitly describe peers and/or adults mocking and otherwise abusing them about their weight as children, but only Burns (2016) describes an instance of weight mocking in an encounter where she was being viewed by her interlocutor as an adult man, and remarkably, that was an interaction in which she was being teased about how ugly a woman she would make. It is her (hypothetical!) approach toward femininity that opens Burns up to the kind of gender discipline that others report only as children or when openly identifying as women. Notably as well, Burns' friend does not object to her genitals; the definition of womanhood he cites in disciplining her perceived gender deviance is feminine beauty.

After the trauma of dehumanization and stigma, authors described experiences of being treated as having normative, acceptable bodies as upsetting; Wiktor Dynarski encountered physical destigmatization in high school after a period of intense weight loss. They found that the sudden respect and approval with which adults treated them was infuriating: "I was a person and a human being before, [but] at that time, thanks to the diet, I gained that status for others" (Dynarski, 2014, "Coming out as fat," para. 2). Recognizing themselves as the same person as when they were fat, Dynarski perceived the increase in status in terms of having been unfairly mistreated. Dynarski is not the only one to describe this relationship between thinness and being treated as fully human. Hunter Shackelford

(2016) describes being mistreated “because I wasn’t feminine or girl-enough to be seen as attractive, worthy of being treated like a human” (para. 2). Again, she relates this directly to antiblackness. “The way whiteness and white supremacist ideology is set up, we’re not seen as feminine or woman or human” (para. 18).

Sabrina Strings (2019) traces this connection to the foundations of scientific racism and the development of white nationalism; the slenderness of the white American was taken as proof of his willpower, his godliness, and his civility, while the corpulence of the African was proclaimed a sign of her animalistic excesses. Close attention to the diet, exercise, and physique of the white race remained a priority for the eugenic movement; though the claim was initially one of an innate natural difference between racialized bodies marking moral rank, it was transformed into a mark of *individual* moral status that the white race was obligated to maintain in order to remain superior. Just as the apparently literal function of genitals in assessing gender role belies its essentially ideological referents, fatness was merely the pretense by which social meanings about race were attributed to natural causes.

Bigness Versus Fatness

One of the features of fatness illustrated here is that, in parallel to studies on cisgender people, antifatness tends to be more powerful and straightforward as it is applied to women versus men. While fatness is problematized in men, *bigness* is stereotyped as masculine, which in practice means that men have a larger acceptable range of bigness, whereas women, expected to be both thin and small, have a smaller range. One of the implications was that being read as a woman in a given interaction was associated with more overt stigma at the same size in men. Mey Rude (2013) describes the baffling experience of not experiencing size-based harassment since high school and then suddenly finding her body open to public comment. She cited a particular example in which someone had told her that she and her fatness were why America has “fallen into ruin” (para. 14).

This specific message vividly recalls the link between American exceptionalism, eugenics, and antifatness as explicated by Strings (2019). While none of the authors assessed here explicitly endorsed the immorality of fatness, this message did arise implicitly in some places. Jude Samson (2013) writes that:

the transgender community faces a unique set of challenges when it comes to maintaining a healthy weight. While there are those who refuse to conform to a cis-normative appearance, there are still just as many that do strive for that level of presentation. (para. 3)

Here, fatness is associated with transness, but particularly the non-striving trans person, the person who refuses to look normative, who does not attempt a higher level of presentation. He goes on to characterize increased appetite on testosterone as a “complicated battle” in which men can lose control:

Initially seeing some mass gain may be encouraging since men have broader [builds,] so putting on a little extra “stock” will help some trans guys develop a more “masculinized” appearance. Some guys, however, may start to notice that the stockier you get the easier it is to conceal your chest One “solution” for some is to allow the weight gain to take over so that the belly overcomes the chest. (paras. 5–6)

Given that this piece is explicitly situated as being for trans men who wish to appear cisgender, this warning appears to be counterproductive. If the goal of the reader is to appear cisgender and a larger belly achieves this end, why put “solution” in skeptical quotes? Samson follows up with gestures about health, but he seems most bothered by the unmanliness of passivity; he warns against *allowing* the appetite to take over and *allowing* the weight to take over. Marking this as inappropriate even if it technically achieves the goal of a cis-normative appearance shows that this is a gender violation of another kind. While Samson does not explicitly posit that fatness indicates moral laxity, it implicitly recalls the moralization of weight grounded in scientific racism (Strings, 2019).

When women explained the gender problems related to their fatness, they cited not only unfeminine weight but also unfeminine *height*. Katelyn Burns implicitly suggests that she faces more gendered fatphobia because she is 6'2" than if she were in *some* dimension small. Mey Rude (2013) also cites her roughly six foot tall frame in explaining how fatness makes it more difficult to go out in “girl mode” for the first time (para. 2). Faith Bryan (2015) offers a clue into the relationship: “Today, I am still fat, but overall, I am lighter physically and emotionally than I was when I had my heart attack ... I always will be [6'5"] tall,” she writes; “That I cannot change. But, through hard work... I can change how that [6'5"] frame looks in a little black dress” (“Learning to love myself” para. 3). Height is gender linked, but it is viewed as static, whereas weight is both strongly gender linked and viewed as essentially subject to voluntary control. This voluntary control is moreover linked to moral discipline and individual hard work, creating a tantalizing and ultimately fictional opportunity to earn back social status and redeem the non-normative body.

Gendered Parts

While none of the authors located gender *exclusively* in general or intangible features of the body, the specific body parts they named as significant to gender were myriad and idiosyncratic. Seven body parts were mentioned in only one piece each; another seven were mentioned only twice (see Table 2). The body parts cited as relevant to gender in at least a quarter of the assessed articles were fat tissue, hair, the midsection (i.e. waist or belly), and the chest. While this deviates dramatically from cis discourses of trans bodies, it is consistent with research about trans people’s engagement with transition-related surgical interventions. The 2015 US Transgender Survey found that transgender men and nonbinary people with female on their original birth certificate were vastly more likely to have had or desire chest surgery versus any other surgical procedure, while transgender women and nonbinary people with male on their original birth certificate were vastly more likely to have had or desire hair removal versus any other procedure (James et al., 2016). While *attainment* differentials could be explained by differences in cost or other practical considerations, the attendant differences in reported desire suggest a real and counter-stereotypical priority.

This is also consistent with body dissatisfaction in cis people. Although cisgender men are stereotypically fixated on the penis, penis size is a low or middling

Table 2. Features of Embodied Gender by Number of Authors Citing This Feature.

Number of Authors (<i>n</i> = 12)	Features (Bold indicates a discrete body part; <i>italics</i> indicate a status or intangible quality)
10	<i>Realness</i> or <i>validity</i> ; <i>fatness</i>
8	<i>Shamefulness</i> ; general size (e.g. height, scale of body); general shape or build
7	<i>Beauty</i>
6	Chest (includes chest reconstruction); hormones (includes hormone therapy)
5	General presentation; waist or belly
4	Fat (tissue); clothing; hair (including wigs)
3	<i>Race</i> ; <i>passing</i> (as cisgender); <i>personality</i> or <i>values</i> ; <i>sex role</i> or <i>sexuality</i> ; <i>desirability</i> or <i>lovability</i>
2	Butt ; body hair ; shoulders ; thighs ; hips ; genitals (includes genital reconstruction); face (includes facial feminization surgery)
1	Cheeks ; musculature; posture; <i>pronouns</i> ; makeup; scars; feet ; chromosomes; skeleton ; voice; fingers ; fingernails ; menstruation; arms ; facial hair

concern in overall body dissatisfaction; more pressing are fatness, muscularity, and height; in other words, the same priorities that trans men have (Griffiths, Murray, Mitchison, Castle, & Mond, 2019). While I could not find a direct corollary study of cis women, a 2017 study in cis mothers found significant negative correlations between general body satisfaction and genital self-image (Jawed-Wessel, Herbenick, & Schick, 2017). In other words, genital dissatisfaction may present as a higher priority in people with a more positive view of their body overall, and a lower priority in people with a more negative view of their body overall, and the very low emphasis on genitals in this group of authors may reflect felt high social urgency of antifatness.

Rather than experiencing gender validity and policing in terms of a specific troublesome body part, fat trans authors experience their bodies being *generally* problematized. Transness could not be separated from fatness, from gender, from race; these could not be separated from their signs, and these could not be clearly separated from their social outcomes. Returning to Hunter Shackelford's (2016) description of femininity as "scripted through whiteness and thinness," she argues that by mediating attractiveness, worth, perceived innocence, and humanness; antifatness *denies gender* to its target (para. 4). Likewise, Katelyn Burns (2016) describes her inner monologue as she struggled to avoid transitioning: "you're too fat, you're too tall, you're too bald to be a woman. To be pretty." (para. 3). Burns (2016) illustrates how transitioning required her to grapple with internalized fatphobia and misogyny that left her unable to imagine a fat woman as a person worth being; while she was socialized to believe that beauty is what makes a woman fit to be in society, she realized that most women "had some masculine features and they all had unique body shapes and sizes" and that social exclusion of fat women was misogynist (para. 7).

Burns (2016) and Shackelford's (2016) similar descriptions of femininity as thin and pretty *by definition* echo some of the priorities indicated by the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory; notably, research using this scale finds that high

feminine norm conformity predicts body dissatisfaction, weight-control behaviors, and disordered eating (Mahalik et al., 2005). Eleven of the twelve authors considered here described body dissatisfaction, six described intentional weight control, five named having eating disorders, and three described disordered eating that became life-threatening. Disordered eating is associated with more mortality risk than any other category of psychiatric illness, and in trans people it is both more prevalent than in the general population and more strongly associated with suicidality and self-injury (Duffy, Henkel, & Joiner, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The current period of rhetorical instability and activation of antiracist organizing offers an opportunity to actively and intentionally resist the renaturalization of gender and race ideology through the (re)location of gender in the body. The current analysis shows that while fat trans people do not experience gender as being located in the body as predicted by genital-focused narratives, neither do cisgender people. Connecting our lived navigation with the gendering of fat trans bodies to public narratives about cisgender bodies of different sizes illustrates the persistently representative and social nature of gendering the body. In addition to tracing the ways in which transphobic and fatphobic body policing are unique, it is crucial to consider the ways that transphobia and fatphobia function as two of many sites of active struggle against hegemonic white patriarchal domination that enacts and requires violent disciplining of non-normative bodies on many bases. In acknowledging the white supremacist roots of transphobia and fatphobia as it impacts trans people of all races and genders, let us view the struggle for dignity as fat trans people as inexorable from the struggle against white supremacy.

NOTES

1. I have been surprised to see this logic even in trans health contexts, where it is sometimes claimed that transmasculine people do not typically experience genital dysphoria because there is “nothing” for their genital dysphoria to respond to. The vulvovaginal area appears here not merely as a nonpenis, but a nonentity, a conceptual black hole into which even emotional reactions disappear without a trace.

2. Raymond’s (1993) *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women’s Freedom* expressly argues that reducing women to reproductive function is inherently oppressive, but she does not appear to acknowledge the relationship between defining sexes as immutable and reducible to genitalia and reducing women specifically to biosexual equipment.

3. One article was included in a 2016 analysis of (otherwise) the same corpus but excluded from the current chapter; the work was unpublished by the author and given its intimate nature, I am interpreting the virtual deletion as a sign that the author does not wish for it to be read. A number of entries from now-deactivated blogs remain in the corpus. These narratives were already anonymous or semi-anonymous; the host was often different from the author (via anonymous submissions), so the author was not involved with the deletion; and deactivation is more likely related to general turnover on Tumblr versus a specific management of this content.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincerest gratitude to Zakiya Luna, my advisor during the thesis stage of this research, and a valued mentor in the years since. I am also deeply grateful to Elena Skapoulli-Raymond, Tracy Royce, Blu Buchanan, Hannah Kagan-Moore, Nik Valdez, Mercedes Forster, Jessica Rosewillow, Christina Hollowell, and Max Rorty for their generous help over the course of the research, and to the editors and authors who made this work possible.

REFERENCES

- Adams, R. (2013, June 21). Kenyatta Jones, Bella Rene CEO: Fashion forgot about “fat” people. *HuffPost*. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/kenyatta-jones-belle-rene-fat_n_3474592?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAANBHMNVu17mh3SwjRdn_CFUxanC_J0rdTMLOiG3pp50gbhnvPfrx0_fMpdezmxMqb8a0hWDHt22hnpubq3d7BmHy7SxmQ81v2BHog95aqm1XM4eB-cjBVpG4VWg5ztZZJGshxWxuqkAFFK17v7XnHSI8IrH5JBJaPsOe9RnAVAsxy
- Ashley, F. (2020). Accounting for research fatigue in research ethics. *Bioethics*, 35(3), 270–276.
- Braun, V., & Wilkinson, S. (2010). Socio-cultural representations of the vagina. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 19(1), 17–32.
- Bruusgaard, J. C., Johansen, I. B., Egner, I. M., Rana, Z. A., Gundersen, K. (2010). Myonuclei acquired by overload exercise precede hypertrophy and are not lost on detraining. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA*, 107(34), 15111–15116.
- Del Rosso, J. (2012). The penis as public part: Embodiment and the performance of masculinity in public settings. *Sexualities*, 14(6), 704–724.
- Duffy, M. E., Henkel, K. E., Joiner, J. E. (2019). Prevalence of self-injurious thoughts and behaviors in transgender individuals with eating disorders: A national study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 64(4), 461–466.
- Downing Peters, L. (2015). You are what you wear: How plus-size fashion figures in fat identity formation. *Fashion Theory*, 18(1), 45–71.
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ferguson, R. A. (2003). *Aberrations in black: Toward a queer of color critique*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Gilman, S. L. (1985). Black bodies, white bodies: Toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine, and literature. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), 204–243.
- Griffiths, S., Murray, S. B., Mitchison, D., Castle, D., & Mond, J. M. (2019). Relative strength of the associations of body fat, muscularity, height, and penis size dissatisfaction with psychological quality of life impairment among sexual minority men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 20(1), 55–60.
- Gunter, J. (2019). *The vagina bible: The vulva and the vagina: Separating the myth from the medicine*. New York, NY: Citadel Press.
- hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: Men, masculinity, and love*. New York, NY: Atria.
- James, S.E., Herman, J.L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., Anafi, M. (2016). *The report of the 2015 U.S. transgender survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.
- Jawed-Wessel, S., Herbenick, D., & Schick, V. (2017). The relationship between body image, female genital self-image, and sexual function among first-time mothers. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 43(7), 618–632.
- Mahalik, J. R., Morray, E. B., Coonerty-Femiano, A., Ludlow, L. H., Slattery, S. M., & Smiler, A. (2005). Development of the conformity of feminine norms inventory. *Sex Roles*, 52, 417–435.
- Mayers, J. [@southern_mayers]. (2016, June 16). The reason I preach #Christianity. My daughters represent the right. Taylor Swift’s vagina represents the left. [Tweet] Twitter. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/southern_mayers/status/743257961351385088

- Raymond, J. (1979). *The transsexual empire: The making of the she-male*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Rigby, S. (2019, March 29). Can transgender athletes be fairly integrated into women's sports? *BBC Science Focus*. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/can-transgender-athletes-be-fairly-integrated-into-womens-sports/>
- Shapiro, B. [@benshapiro]. (2018). It is not “transphobic” to say that the government cannot and should not compel people to use biologically inaccurate pronouns. [Tweet] Twitter. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/benshapiro/status/1071140420497768448>
- Strings, S. (2019). *Fearing the black body: The racial origins of fat phobia*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Stone, S. (1991). The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto. In K. Straub & J. Epstein (Eds.), *Body guards: The cultural politics of gender ambiguity* (pp. 280–304). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stryker, S. (2008). *Transgender history*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Somerville, S. (1994). Scientific racism and the emergence of the homosexual body. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 5(2), 243–266.
- Thornhill, N. (2016, July 15). Taylor Swift ‘ham sandwich’ vagina nonsense! [Video] YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OofWQlOVcXc>
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 1(2), 125–151.