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## Introduction: The Emergence of 'Trans'

*Exclusive: According to a new survey of people aged 13-34, members of "Generation Z" find the gender binary much less on fleek than millennials.*

(Zing Tsjeng, Vice: Broadly, Thursday March 10<sup>th</sup> 2016).

Genealogy is concerned with something more than the origin of things. To describe a genealogy is to look beyond linear narratives of causation. As Foucault (1977: 147) argues, 'it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself'.

The articles of this special issue are concerned with the fragmented paths to trans *becoming*: that is, the myriad means by which the terminologies of 'trans' have come to be, and by which a range of trans identities and experiences have become possible and recognisable. These are not simple histories. Rather, they are narratives of contestation and negotiation over meaning in a range of social contexts.

The emergence of 'trans' as a stand-alone terminology, an increasingly popular mode of self-identification and a locus of popular cultural preoccupation heralds a new era of what might be termed 'post-identity' or 'post-Kinsey' sexual politics. De-sutured from its qualifiers of gender and sexuality, the notion of 'trans' has cast a challenge to earlier understandings of the relationship between gender and sexuality, identity and feeling and the question of embodied subjectivity. It has challenged not only dominant, but also counter-discursive understandings of gender and sexuality. As Bhanji (2013: 521) notes, 'the prefix, *trans-* does not just signify movement across or beyond a schism [...] it is also evocative of the *transgressions*, *transmogrifications*, and *transmutations* of established norms'.

Trans discourses and languages have both catalysed and been part of a wider social liberalisation of discourse around sexuality and gender. They represent a shift towards a new paradigm of sexual fluidity, in which bodies and experiences are understood more in terms of individual feeling than social or 'biological' category. This can be seen for instance in the *Broadly* article quoted at the beginning of this editorial, 'Teens These Days Are Queer AF,<sup>1</sup> New Study Says'. In the article, Tsjeng (2016) describes the findings of a report by a US trend forecasting agency. It suggests that only 48% of 'Generation Z' (people presented aged 13-20) define themselves as 'exclusively heterosexual', with a majority knowing 'someone who [goes] by gender neutral pronouns such as "they," "them," or "ze,"' and supporting the idea of 'public [...] access to gender neutral bathrooms'. A considerable number of mainstream media outlets picked up on the story in the weeks that followed, including *CNN*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Dazed*, *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*. There is a limit to what we can learn from the actual figures discussed in the report and accompanying media articles; this was not a peer-reviewed publication, nor did the researchers employ a particularly robust sampling frame. However, the amount of attention that the report *received* represents an unprecedented level of interest in matters of sexual and gender diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Queer As Fuck'.

The Kinsey revolution of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century suggested that sexual identities were complex and on a continuum of possible identities. The emergence of 'trans' heralds a shift beyond this, with gender and sexuality representing intersecting spectra, not only of possibilities but of actual lived experience. Fluidity replaces linearity; gendered and sexual feelings do not necessarily resolve into clear identities (Nestle et al., 2002; Bornstein and Bergman, 2010). Subjective alignments of body and feeling play out on a field of expectation defined by what might be termed a *productive uncertainty*. This is an oppositional trend, insofar as it stands opposed to the social limitations of a binary gendered social system, but it also holds an important egalitarian potential (Shah et al., 2015).

'Trans' has perhaps most notably emerged from and also transformed the medical context. The languages of 'transvestism' and 'transsexualism' have their origins in the literature of sexology, as medical researchers sought to define (and control) the conditions by which a person might refuse to conform with traditional norms of gendered and sexual becoming. 'Transgender' is most commonly associated with the language of solidarity and social movement that gained a particular momentum from the 1990s onward, but this term, too, was employed by medical writers in the 1960s and 1970s (Williams, 2014). Trans people were most typically written *about* within clinical accounts, and could be subject to powerful disciplinary measures through them. They nevertheless played an important role in shaping the context in which such accounts emerged. Pioneers such as Magnus Hirschfeld – who authored important early text *The Transvestites* and helped to pioneer sex reassignment procedures – worked closely with gender nonconforming individuals who sought a medical solution for their cross-gendered feelings and desires (Stryker, 2008). As Meyerowitz (2002) describes, patient demands for treatment would also play a key role in the emergence of the *transsexual* medical model in the decades that followed.

Since the 1990s, 'trans' identifications have increasingly taken the place of earlier notions of transvestite, transsexual, and transgender bodies. These earlier identifications sat, often uncomfortably, between a more-or-less fixed understanding of gender as essential and binary (one was born either male or female), and the arguably more expansive Kinsey-influenced understanding of sexuality and gender as a continuum. One could be born 'in the wrong body', for example, with the 'transsexual' clinical intervention intended to right a mis-fit between (male/female) body and (female/male) identity. Alternatively, one might live as a 'dual role' transvestite, 'oscillating' between the gendered poles of female and male (Ekins and King, 2006). Queer writers initially struggled to shift the discussion beyond the concept of a female/male continuum, writing for instance of 'female masculinity' (Halberstam, 1998) or of 'genderqueer' identities that combined elements of the feminine and masculine (Nestle et al., 2002). However, the emergence of the stand-alone term 'trans' – alongside the gradual evolution of 'transgender' as an umbrella term for all manner of gender nonconforming identities and experiences – has laid the groundwork for more fluid, complex, and *non-binary* understandings of gendered and sexual possibility (Monro, 2005; Bornstein and Bergman, 2010). Such understandings frequently elude clear or consistent approaches to definition; in this context, 'trans' can be understood as signalling a shift from identity-led to *feeling*-led approaches to gendered subjectivity, as described by Igi Moon in their contribution to this special issue.

This is not to say that older trans languages have been entirely supplemented. Instead, the stand-alone 'trans' has multiple meanings in multiple contexts. Often, it can be used to denote 'movements and crossings' in a broad sense, with reference not simply to queer and non-binary

gender possibilities, but also to their intersections with 'multiple intersecting oppressions that structure unequal distributions of power and access along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class (Green, 2017: 320-321). On other occasions, 'trans' is employed in a far more limited sense, referring specifically to 'binary' (female- or male-identified) trans people who are undergoing or have undergone a process of medical transition: i.e. individuals who have historically been regarded as 'transsexual'. This more limited use of 'trans' is also raced, classed and sexualised, but in ways that are less frequently made visible: for instance, white, heterosexual, middle- and upper-class trans people often have better **access** to specialised medical services due to their increased **access** to social and economic capital (Koyama, 2006; Davy, 2010). Differences such as this frequently inform fierce debates around authenticity, definition, essence and belonging (Elliot, 2009). Nevertheless, many trans communities and organisations employ 'trans' strategically in a manner that creates space for a pluralistic approach to gendered ontologies, epistemologies and politics (Monro, 2005).

Within a medical context – and particularly within the specialist setting of the Gender Identity Clinic – these more fluid and open 'trans' approaches poses a challenge for attempts to define and delineate 'trans people' for the purposes of providing treatment (Ellis et al., 2015). Moreover, as JR Latham explores in this special issue, the disciplinary action of diagnosis can work to limit the scope of trans/gendered possibility. This may stoke tensions between clinician and patient (Davy, 2010). The emergence of 'trans' has signalled a similar paradigmatic challenge within the context of psychotherapy and counselling, a primary site for personal negotiations of gender, sexuality and feeling (Sanger, 2008; Singh, 2016). Emergent research has been tracking a growing mis-alignment between dominant paradigms of gender and sexuality in counselling and the increasingly queer life experiences and understandings of many clients (Moon, 2010). Significantly, this dis-alignment applies *beyond* those specifically self-identifying as 'trans', arising also in more general practice (Moon, 2011). This has left practitioners without adequate conceptual models for their work, and has left patients who do not 'fit' on the expected spectra feeling underserved and misunderstood. However, in recent years a number of medical and therapeutic practitioners have argued that significant changes in language and practice are necessary in order to provide affirmative care for trans patients and clients (e.g. Winter et al, 2016; Bouman et al., 2017). In this way, trans discourse continues to open up space for debate and new ways of thinking.

On the terrain of popular representation, trans lives are increasingly visible and trans discourse increasingly influential. In 2014, American magazine *Time* declared that a 'transgender tipping point' was at hand, entailing social and political change as well as surge in media interest. This was a claim that failed to attend either to the complexities of trans history, or the possibility of reactionary backlash. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by popular interest in Zing Tsjeng's *Broadly* article, trans media has become a major constituent of the Western cultural imaginary. This increasingly includes works produced *by* as well as *about* trans people. There is a long history of trans people being present in the public eye, with figures such as Christine Jorgensen and Thomas Beatie attracting headlines across the world, and films such as *Silence of the Lambs* and *Boys Don't Cry* utilising 'trans' figures to provoke visceral reactions from fictional protagonists and cinema audiences alike. What has changed more recently is that a greater number of trans and/or non-binary artists are telling their own stories in their own language than ever before, making possible what Stryker (1994: 248) has described as 'new modes' of subjectivity and 'different codes of intelligibility'. This can be seen most prominently in the work of musicians such as Angel Haze and Miley Cyrus, film and television

directors such as the Wachowski sisters, and actors such as Laverne Cox and Rebecca Root. However, these mainstream successes also reflect a growing proliferation of trans cultural production within the micro-media ecologies of 'underground' and alternative art and music scenes (Halberstam, 1998; Carrera et al. 2012; Kumpf, 2016). In this sense 'trans' might be increasingly understood as a 'post-closet' epistemology.

These developments clearly interface with material lives on the terrain of law and social policies. Across the world, trans and gender variant communities are increasingly outspoken and have successfully campaigned for legal recognition, anti-discrimination legislation and changes to health and social care frameworks (Winter et al., 2016). 'Trans' discourse has provided important modes of connection, networking and community-building. However, such successes have taken place against a backdrop of stigma, harassment, violence and (sometimes also) criminalisation (Jauk, 2013; Winter et al., 2016). Visibility, too, has its dangers (Green, 2017): this can be observed for instance in the recent swathe of anti-trans legislation introduced by American lawmakers.

A further limitation of 'trans' is its origins as a specifically white, Western concept, and its contemporary associations with the English language (Ocha and Earth, 2013). As Gramling and Dutta (2016: 344) note in their introduction to the recent *Transgender Studies Quarterly* special issue 'Translating Transgender', the growing international hegemony of 'trans'/'transgender' reflects a wider 'compounded effect of colonialism, postcolonial nationhood, and globalization' upon hierarchies of vernacular and linguistic possibility. In our description of 'mainstream' trans media figures above, our list consists almost entirely of American individuals, reflecting the continued role of the West in general and the USA in particular as a cultural 'centre' to the Majority World's supposed 'periphery', a phenomenon that very much incorporates the counterdiscursive interventions of marginalised groups. In retrospect, we could have done more to draw upon the resources of the Western academy to try and address these imbalances in preparing this special issue. Gramling and Dutta (2016) offer some excellent advice on how to undertake this work, even as they acknowledge the problematics of doing so from within the 'hub' language of English and the cultural context of the West. Examples of this from 'Translating Transgender' include fostering international collaboration and providing translation services, both for the issue's call for papers and for a number of its submissions. These are work-intensive and potentially costly solutions, but ones which perhaps only mirror the extent to which even white trans discourse continues to both draw upon and marginalise knowledges from non-white peoples in both the West and the Majority World (Bhanji, 2013).

This special issue also has a complex genealogy. It was primarily inspired by a 2012-2014 seminar series at the University of Warwick, UK: *Rethorising Gender and Sexuality: The Emergence of Trans*. Four of the articles in this issue – contributed respectively by Kat Gupta, Ruth Pearce and Kirsty Lohman, Iggi Moon and Zowie Davy – build directly upon papers presented during these seminars. The series itself represented a convergence of the three special issue editors' respective interests. Ruth approached 'trans' primarily through the lens of health discourse; Deborah built upon her wider interests in media spectacle and sexuality politics; and Iggi was interested in a therapeutic angle, informed by research with bisexual clients that revealed the growing importance and influence of 'trans' ideas and understandings. These are just three of many means by which trans genealogies can be uncovered, with each revealing a myriad of associated histories and contestations.

An additional three articles in this special issue – written respectively by JR Latham, Joseph Goh and Thaatchaayini Kananatu, and Katrina Roen – were submitted in response to a call for papers issued in September 2015. This enabled us to expand the scope of issue beyond our own networks and the broadly British focus of the seminar series, to explore a wider context of ‘trans’ emergence. We were pleasantly surprised by the range and quality of contributions we received in response to this call, more than for any previous special issue of *Sexualities*. This enabled us to assemble an interdisciplinary issue that captures something of the ongoing emergence of ‘trans’, in a manner attentive to the ‘numerous beginnings whose faint traces and hints of color are rarely seen by a historical eye’ (Foucault, 1977: 145).

We open with JR Latham’s ‘Axiomatic: Constituting Trans Sexualities in Trans Medicine’. Latham provides a genealogy of medical becoming, drawing the reader’s attention to the manner by which trans identities may be constituted in and through a pathologising discourse that retains the influence of pioneering mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century clinician Harry Benjamin. Through his elucidation of four axioms of transsexualism, Latham also unpacks the role of sexuality in the becoming/emergence of trans in medical settings, and explores the manner by which we might arrive into entirely contingent spaces of gender subjectivity and enactment that we nevertheless take for granted.

A second example of the disciplinary impact of categorical thinking is explored in Kat Gupta’s article, ‘Response and responsibility: mainstream media and Lucy Meadows in a post-Leveson context’. Like Latham, Gupta describes how trans might ‘emerge’ and ‘become’ through the interventions of *non-trans* actors: in this context, journalists writing about a trans teacher Lucy Meadows after she came out in the workplace. Meadows’ dreadfully sad fate was only compounded by the continued construction of an unwanted male identity for her in British newspaper reporting. However, as Gupta carefully demonstrates, this was not entirely the outcome of intentional prejudice: rather, the misgendering of Meadows emerges through the subtle contingencies of repetitious reproduction and metacommentary.

The four articles that follow critique binary thinking from a range of perspectives, and question both cis-normative and trans-normative approaches to categorisation. These articles ask how we might think about bodies and psyches in more open and ethical manner, informed by ‘trans’ discourse but with wider consequences for understandings of gender and sexuality. They look at how we might move beyond the axioms described by Latham and the cultural forces analysed by Gupta, inviting us to consider how we might re-think our approach to bodies and identities, avoiding binaries in inhabiting these ideas while building new solidarities and allowing new possibilities to emerge.

In ‘Rethinking Queer Failure: Trans Youth Embodiment and Distress’, Katrina Roen explores how we could seek to *break from* normative thinking, including the transnormativities that have emerged with ‘trans’. Noting that trans youth are frequently associated with narratives of distress and self-harm, Roen draws upon Jack Halberstam’s concept of queer failure and Sara Ahmed’s feminist critique of happiness in order to ‘unsettle’ these narratives and imagine new trans possibilities ‘that do not involve straightening or alignment’. Iggi Moon also looks predominantly at the experiences and narratives of trans youth in “‘Boying” the boy and “‘girling” the girl: From Affective Interpellation to Trans-emotionality’. In their article, Moon argues that emergent trans discourses offer an important alternative to binary notions of emotionality. They describe ‘trans-emotionality’ as

pluralistic approach to understanding gendered feeling that has been made possible through non-binary and genderqueer peoples' responses to experiences of sexual liminality and dis-orientation.

In 'Genderqueer(ing): "on this side of the world against which it protests"', Zowie Davy questions that categorical lines that are frequently drawn between 'transsexual' and 'genderqueer' trans identities, desires and bodies. Revisiting a series of interviews from the early 2000s, Davy employs the Deleuzian notion of 'assemblage' to question frequently taken-for-granted assumptions around trans difference. She asks us to be reflexive in our understanding of the terminologies of trans, transsexualism, transgenderism, genderqueer and non-binary; terminologies that can be used to help us understand specificity but which also be used to close down analyses of connection and similarity. In this way we are effectively encouraged to be attentive to the limitations of a 'non-binary'/'binary' binary in our accounts of trans possibility. An optimistic account of such possibilities is provided by Ruth Pearce and Kirsty Lohman. In 'De/constructing DIY identities in a trans music scene', the authors draw upon a case study of an 'underground' scene in the UK to explore how trans discourses and everyday political approaches can feed into processes of cultural production. This offers an insight into what possibilities might emerge and flow from 'trans' as a pluralistic approach to gender and identification.

The issue closes with an account of Malaysian legal and media advocacy, '*Mak nyahs* and the dismantling of dehumanisation: Framing empowerment strategies of Malaysian male-to-female transsexuals in the 2000s'. In this article, Joseph Goh and Thaatchayini Kananatu effectively revisit a range of themes from across the special issue: processes of becoming and definition (including *self-definition* as well as *being defined* by others) and the manner in which activism intersects with the media and law as well as the medical and political establishments. Like the UK case studies, this account is one of both specific importance and broader relevance. It is vital to acknowledge the particular context of the struggles for gender liberation by *mak nyahs* in Malaysia: a context shaped both by local law and religion, and the complex post-colonial impact of Western discourses and political interventions. The emergent language of *mak nyah* identity effectively stands in opposition not only to the cis and binary gender norms of conservative politics and religious fundamentalism, but also to a homogenised white, Western, Anglophone discourse of 'trans'. At the same time, Goh and Kananatu highlight how high the stakes are and how difficult battles of liberation can be for gender diverse peoples around the world, in an important account of the dangers and possibilities that come with 'trans' visibility.

The emergence of 'trans' thus signals a need to revisit and rework wider paradigmatic understandings of gender and sexuality. The necessity of this work can be seen in the often dramatic polarities between clinical and psychotherapeutic paradigms and those emergent in contemporary gender diverse communities, many of which have arisen in pointed contradistinction to prevalent clinical and social norms. This widening breach has significant implications not only for medical and therapeutic practice, practitioners and patients, but for wider social and cultural questions that accrue to a changing field of gender and sexuality politics. These are questions of rights, discrimination and citizenship; welfare and education; social inclusion and wider cultural commonsense, spectacle and representation: questions that are at present perhaps more pressing than ever.

## Authors

Dr Ruth Pearce, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds: [r.pearce1@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:r.pearce1@leeds.ac.uk)

Professor Deborah Lynn Steinberg, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick

Dr Igi Moon, Department of Psychology, University of Roehampton

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