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# Rethinking Responding to Raymond: Re-replying to Reproaches of Transsexualism

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RETHINKING RESPONDING TO RAYMOND:  
RE-REPLYING TO REPROACHES OF TRANSSEXUALISM

by

Evan Spencer

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ABSTRACT  
RETHINKING RESPONDING TO RAYMOND:  
RE-REPLYING TO REPROACHES OF TRANSSEXUALISM

by

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Professor Andrea Westlund

The topic of transsexualism was most prominently brought into the feminist movement's consciousness through the critical work of cultural radical feminist Janice Raymond. In this paper I will argue that the original response given by trans theorists to Raymond's critiques has allowed for the propagation of certain mistaken notions about trans people. In order to correct these misconceptions a different tack must be taken in responding to Raymond. I will begin by overviewing how two schools of feminist thought have lent themselves to theories of transsexualism, then focusing on radical feminist critique by Janice Raymond and a post-structural feminist response by theorist Sandy Stone. I will then outline how I propose to correct the oversights presented in Stone's response. I will clarify my reason for stating that the original response to critics conflicts with other feminist aims, and will conclude by arguing how to correct the original response's problematic misunderstanding of the factors which motivate peoples' transitions.

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*I ain't in this for your revolution.*  
- Han Solo

## I. Introduction

Transsexualism first arose in the American public consciousness in the 1950's with Christine Jorgensen's highly publicized transition from male to female. While physical transitions nearly always include some combination of hormone replacement therapy and sex reassignment surgeries, it is difficult to describe the exact course that any individual's physical transition will take, and it is similarly difficult to define exactly what transsexualism is. To some, a transsexual person is "a person in need of physical alteration so that his or her body fits his or her mind" (Sullivan, 4); a felt sense of one's body delivers a certainty about their identity, resulting in a powerful conviction that one is either a man or a woman, producing a feeling of dissonance between one's brain and their body which calls for physical modification" (Salamon, 82). Some definitions of the word limit its scope to only include those who have already undergone physical changes, maintaining that the word transsexual must only be used to refer to individuals who have already used hormonal and/or surgical technologies to alter their bodies. For instance, Susan Stryker notes that the term "transsexual" has historically signified "somebody who permanently changed genitals in order to claim membership in a gender other than the one assigned at birth" (Stryker, 4). However, as Henry Rubin aptly points out, "surgery, when it does appear in trans<sup>1</sup> narratives, is a means of becoming what one already considers oneself to be, not the point of definition of oneself as transsexual" (266). Rubin believes that one is already transsexual before undergoing surgery, that the act of modification itself is not an important delineation upon which to decide whether one is or is not trans. Thus while some definitions require that one have already undergone some

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<sup>1</sup> In current literature it is common for "transsexual" and "transgender" to hold separate meanings. When distinction between these two words is not necessary, or when talking about both groups simultaneously, theorists commonly use the shortened "trans".

type of medical intervention to be considered transsexual, others only require one to have felt an internal dissonance or desire to transition. I share Rubin's intuitions on this subject, and in his vein, I find definitions requiring one to have already undergone medical interventions to be unnecessarily restrictive. I can see no important difference between situations where one has or has not actually undergone these modifications, so long as the desire to do so is still present. Thus, my own definition of the word "transsexual" will be some combination of those presented, signifying someone who has experienced feelings of dissonance or dissociation about their sexed characteristics and who seeks to change them (or is changing them) through medical means such as hormone replacement therapy or surgery.

In this paper I will argue that the original response given to feminist critiques of transsexualism has allowed for the propagation of certain mistaken notions about trans people; in order to correct these misconceptions a different tack must be taken in responding to these critiques. I will begin by overviewing how two schools of feminist thought have theorized transsexualism, first focusing on a radical feminist critique by Janice Raymond. I will then outline the post-structural feminist response by theorist Sandy Stone and show how this response addressed one of two objections raised by Raymond. However, Stone's response still perpetuated misunderstandings about trans people, and in Section III I will outline how I propose to correct the oversights presented in Stone's response. In Section IV I will outline my reason for stating that the original response to critics conflicts with other feminist aims: since the current conception of "transgender" responds to Raymond by asserting that transgender people are gender non-conforming, it tacitly necessitates and reinforces problematic statements about women

(and men) which are only true by virtue of their social standing. As such, the current conception violates a guideline defended by Sally Haslanger. In order to resolve this tension with Haslanger while still responding to Raymond, I propose that we instead maintain that trans people are neither categorically gender conforming nor gender non-conforming. I will then move in Section V to argue why we must correct the original response's failure to address the misunderstanding of motivations behind physical transitions. I believe that this is a more pressing argument to pursue since failing to address this point means a continued failure to realize that a biological component motivates physical transitions. The current misinterpretation allows for problematic normative evaluations of physical transitions, which conflicts with our intuitions about what acts can or should be viewed as bearing some ethical or political imperative. So long as transitions are believed to be born out of a social motive theorists will continue to judge physical transitions by their political effects. I will thus explain how to correct the original response's problematic misunderstanding of the factors motivating peoples' transitions.

## **II. Feminism's Responses to Trans**

Feminist theorists have long studied the roles and behaviors ascribed to the sexes and sought to describe the female condition, or what it means to live as a woman in society. Different schools of thought in feminist theory value different concepts and aims, and they have developed their own distinct approaches to addressing issues. In this paper I will be focusing on the issue of transsexualism in particular, and will use a detailed analysis of the conceptual backgrounds informing cultural radical and post-structural feminisms to explain how different approaches have been shaped by their theoretical origins. First, I will address what sources cultural radical feminists took to be

the causes of gender-based oppression and the steps they believed were necessary to overcome this oppression. I will then go on to describe how these visions of gender and women's nature informed the work of Janice Raymond and her analysis of transsexualism. I will then move on to post-structuralist feminism and detail its main ideas, specifically the concept of performativity, concluding by showing how Sandy Stone uses the notion of performativity to theorize transsexualism.

### **Cultural Radical Feminism**

One school of thought analyzing the different issues affecting women's lives was radical feminism, a strain which held that women's oppression as women was the fundamental oppression. They viewed sexism as the first, most widespread and deepest form of human subjugation, with men's oppression of women then serving to produce other systems of human domination (Tong, 51). Radical feminists believed that women's subordination under a patriarchal society is the root of women's oppression and they commonly hold as their main goal an eradication of this condition. However, an important distinction should be made between libertarian and cultural radical feminisms (Tong, 54). Libertarian radical feminists believe that in order to eliminate male control, men and women would have to eliminate gender as it has been construed under patriarchy, and androgyny, or a blending of male and female natures, presents as the best way of meeting this aim (Tong, 54). However, cultural radical feminists depart from this viewpoint. They instead believe it necessary to preserve the distinct and essential feminine nature, asserting that to do so was not only beneficial, but necessary to eradicating oppression. As distinct from their libertarian counterparts, cultural feminists generally sought to celebrate femaleness and organized women around the principle of female difference (Bell, 157). Some cultural radical feminists even went so far as to

attribute male-female differences to biology, using an essentializing tactic to reinforce their assertion that feminine traits were separate from (and better than) their masculine counterparts (Tong, 58). Thus, cultural feminists "see the primary goal of feminism as freeing women from the imposition of so-called 'male values,' and creating an alternative culture based on 'female values'" (Willis, 117). To them the preservation of the female essence was necessary to combat patriarchy and gender-based oppression; the segregation and conservation of female values from male values was essential to their project.

Another concept of particular importance to the cultural radical feminist project was the act of consciousness raising. Consciousness raising was introduced as a way for women to cultivate and nurture their alternative female consciousness, allowing them to come together and talk about their personal experiences *as women* (Tong, 51). Through this practice they sought to meet their goals of defeating patriarchy and eradicating gender-based oppression (Bell, 157). Cultural radical feminists believed that there was "a lot of sense in listening to each other and in being willing to understand the meaning of other women's experience", and that consciousness raising would allow a woman to "arrange the patterns of [their] lives into political shapes"; it allowed women to discover similarities they could bond over and collectively unite in the name of, and enabled them to find unifying elements amongst their individual lives (Bell, 483). For cultural radical feminists consciousness raising presented a way to illustrate how the personal is political, and this tactic was ultimately fundamental to realizing their political goals (Bell, 152).

### **Janice Raymond**

The topic of transsexualism was most prominently brought into the feminist movement's consciousness through the work of cultural radical feminist Janice Raymond, with her book *The Transsexual Empire*, showing clear theoretical roots in this particular

feminist tradition. Evidence of her background can be seen by the fact that she grounds her views as necessary to eliminate the patriarchy and gender-based oppression. Her framework also maintains the notion of separate male/female consciousnesses, and stresses the importance of consciousness raising as a means to combating sexism.

Raymond interprets transsexualism as another iteration of the patriarchy and oppressive gender system. It is merely another way in which men flaunt their control over women. To her, transsexualism demonstrates how men wield so much control in society that they can even claim to *become* women and exploit those claims to exert authority within all-women spaces (Raymond 1979, xviii).<sup>2</sup> Raymond considers transsexualism to be caused primarily by the sex-role stereotyping of society; she believes that it results directly from patriarchy and only serves to perpetuate its harmful effects. She states that, as opposed to reaching true liberation in their transitions, “the transsexual only exchanges one stereotype for the other, thus reinforcing the fabric by which a sexist society is held together” (Raymond, xviii). By letting the transsexual undergo their transition we are indulging our patriarchal society, allowing its effects to run rampant and unchecked.

In addition to these discussions of patriarchy and gender-based oppression, the concept of consciousness raising also figures importantly into Raymond’s arguments. In this respect Raymond's stance echoes the voices of theorists before her. Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna similarly credit the urge to transition to a "false consciousness" caused by the internalization of our patriarchal society and its strict gender roles. They view transsexualism as "a category constructed to alleviate ambiguity - to avoid the kinds of combinations (e.g. male genitals-female gender identity) that make people

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<sup>2</sup> The majority of Raymond's critique focuses on transsexual women devoting very little time to discussing transsexual men. However, she still believes that transsexual men transition as a result of patriarchal society; their desire to transition is motivated by a desire to possess male privilege.

uncomfortable because they violate the basic rules about gender....In a society that could tolerate lack of correspondence, there would be no transsexuals" (Kessler and McKenna, 1978, 120). In such passages we see a stance echoed by Raymond, the belief that transsexualism only occurs because people are uncomfortable living outside of society's gender norms. If society were only more comfortable with people acting outside of strict predetermined and prescribed roles, these theorists collectively believe, then transsexualism would cease to exist.

True to cultural radical form, Raymond believed that consciousness-raising would allow transsexuals to resolve their conflicts with themselves without needing to resort to medical intervention. Raymond thought that if they would forego surgery and hormones and instead opt for peer support and encouragement to deal with this "particular manifestation of gender deviancy," joining environments which allowed them to "transcend cultural definitions of both masculinity and femininity, without changing [their] bod[ies]" they would see that their planned actions were unnecessary and misguided (Raymond, 183). Ultimately Raymond believes that more accepting attitudes towards gender roles would allow transsexuals to see that they are not women, but rather deviant males; if transsexuals simply talked to and found solidarity with others similarly frustrated by the patriarchy and its effects, they would realize their feelings were commonplace occurrences and would no longer feel the need to impersonate women through surgery and other medical interventions (Raymond, 183).

Given these statements, we can summarize Raymond's critique as making two main assertions. She states both

- (1) That transsexuals problematically cling to strict gender roles, and

(2) That transsexuals transition as a result of patriarchal pressure (1979, 16).

### **Post-Structural Feminism**

However, cultural radical feminism has not been the only strain of feminist thought to address transsexualism. Other authors have found post-structural feminism to be integral to their theories. Post-structural feminism<sup>3</sup> arose out of works by French feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and found its establishing ideology in the self/Other distinction, a concept used to highlight how women have been denied the “default” status afforded to man and forced into the status of merely “other”. However, while Beauvoir believed woman’s role as Other was ultimately a negative condition to have to endure, an imposition women should work to rid themselves of, postmodern feminism strips this status of its negative connotations and instead views it as a condition to be celebrated. Postmodern theories disregarded this status as something worth avoiding and instead focused on the positives it could afford, believing that “otherness ... is more than an oppressed condition. It is also a way of being, thinking, and speaking allowing for openness, plurality, diversity, and differences” (Tong, 192).

In a marked departure from cultural radical feminism, postmodern feminists refuse to search for the "base" or "root" of women's oppression, not caring to develop an overarching explanation and solution for women's subjugation, even rejecting any mode of thought which aims to provide a single explanation for why women are oppressed or the steps necessary to achieve liberation (Tong 192). They instead undertake other projects, such as the rejection of phallogentric thought, or the rejection of the idea that

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<sup>3</sup> There is certainly a distinction to be made between post-structuralist and postmodern feminisms. In fact, Butler speaks out against the conflation between these two movements (See: Tong, 192). However, I will be using these terms - "post-structuralist" and "postmodern" - synonymously.

there is one objective reality. Post-structuralist theorists argue that objective and universal truths do not exist, that particular forms of knowledge have merely become naturalized in culturally specific ways (Sullivan, 39). They also call for the destabilization of norms and are typically critical of grand narratives, or the idea that everyone in a particular social group must have gone through a single shared experience (Sullivan, 40).

However, while all of these notions are characteristic of post-structuralist feminism, the concept which is perhaps most important to their approach is that of performativity. A performative speech act can be defined as one which, itself, is the actual doing of the action. For instance, saying "I do" is the performative speech act through which one is married, and saying "today I am a man" is the act through which one is bar mitzvahed. For a greater explanation of performativity and how it relates to transsexualism, we can turn to post-structuralist Judith Butler.

Butler has written extensively on the topics of gender and sexuality, and in her seminal text *Gender Trouble*, she challenges what had henceforth been seen as a necessary connection between sex, gender, and sexuality. Butler claimed that there is no necessary connection between a person's sex and a person's gender, rejecting the idea that a biological female (one who possesses XX chromosomes) will inevitably display feminine traits and desire men as her sexual partners (Tong, 201). She believes that "to choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organizes them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms. This is not a prescriptive task we must endeavor to do, but one in which we have been endeavoring all along" (Tong, 201). It is important to note that Butler does not view gender as a choice, something that can be freely chosen or disregarded.

However, she does believe that identity is performatively constituted in and through relations with others and with a world, and gender is "a tenuous identity constituted in and through 'the stylized repetition of acts'", maintaining that one's gender is neither as concrete nor as inevitable as previously thought (Sullivan, 85).

True to form, Judith Butler saw trans people as embodying these postmodern concepts, most notably the notion of performativity. She analyzes the occurrence of drag most famously, citing drag queens as one example where gender norms and identity are played with and manipulated. She asserts that drag subverts the notion of a true gender identity, because "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency" (Sullivan, 86). She also extends her analysis to transgender people (by which she means, those who are gender non-conforming) as well. According to Butler, the fact that transgender people exist serves to show how all gender is a performance. Relating it back to her core concepts, she asserts that the transgendered subject "brings into relief" the performativity of gender (Stryker, 262). However, in a marked departure from her views on drag and transgender people, she states that transsexuals can only offer "an uncritical miming of the hegemonic [sex/gender system]" (Butler, 131). Where drag and transgenderism seemingly serve to break the connection between sex, gender, and sexuality, transsexuals rely on a congruence between those characteristics in order to be read properly. Thus, while drag, transgenderism, and transsexualism may do so in separate ways, all serve to show how all gender is an act.

Butler argues that through these three groups of people, we can see that all gender is constructed and performed.<sup>4</sup>

### **Sandy Stone**

Post-structural feminism was the dominant theoretical starting point informing a group of authors who, in response to Raymond, focused their studies on trans people. In what is popularly taken to be the start of queer/trans theory, *The Empire Strikes Back*, author Sandy Stone calls for a rebuttal to Raymond's arguments in *The Transsexual Empire* via a post-structural reading of transsexualism.

Stone's theoretical origins are clear from the very start; the subtitle to her article, "A Posttranssexual Manifesto", along with her recurring use of the phrase "posttranssexual" throughout the paper makes it clear that the notion of departure (and departing from previous dominant modes of thought) will figure heavily in her theory (Stone, 154). Just as post-structuralism was a response to structuralist thought, so Stone hopes her paper will allow us to move past the old modes of interpreting and theorizing about transsexual people. Stone hoped to usher in a new era of writing about transsexualism, departing from the age where the only texts about trans people were written by doctors and never by trans people themselves. Thus, she endeavored to refute the popular conceptions of trans people present in the (up until then radical) feminist theory through a shift away from medical studies, where non-trans doctors controlled the nature of the dialogue, and towards texts penned by transsexuals themselves (Stone, 155). She uses the opportunity presented by autobiographies to show how transsexuals specifically perform gender. Stone recounts how one woman's autobiography details her

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<sup>4</sup> While I have presented my analysis of Butler before my analysis of Stone, Butler's comments on transsexualism in particular were penned years after Stone had written her response to Raymond. Butler's original statements in *Gender Trouble* focused solely on drag and transgender people.

desires: "I wanted the sensual feel of lingerie against my skin, I wanted to brighten my face with cosmetics. I wanted a strong man to protect me" (Stone, 156). Similar to Butler, Stone takes this opportunity to point out how transsexuals can uncritically mime the hegemonic sex/gender system. Stone describes how this woman's story displays "complicity...in a Western white male definition of performative gender", where the author "reinforce[s] a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification" (Stone, 156).

Stone is also interested in analyzing autobiographies to discover what sort of subject has been constituted in these texts and how this construction has occurred (Stone, 155). After detailing a passage from one woman's autobiography, Stone asks us to consider, "*for* whom was Lili Elbe constructed? Under whose gaze did her text fall?" (Stone, 156). Stone uses this opportunity to segue into a discussion of identities and the fact that doctors who treated trans people placed strict requirements on how a transsexual identity could be acceptably constructed. She highlights how doctors required that transsexuals not tell others about their trans status in order to continue receiving treatment. To follow these orders transsexuals would create alternate histories for themselves, deftly avoiding any mixture of narratives, evading discussing their past and current lives in opposite terms. Stone saw these acts, too, as serving to further reinforce gender binaries (Stone, 158). These contemporary medical standards also precluded the opportunity for openness, plurality, and diversity in the identities expressed by transsexuals. In addition to these requirements, transsexuals were also historically required to unquestioningly recreate narratives where they reinforced gender norms in order to appease doctors and obtain treatment. Stone recounts these additional standards that had to be met in order to receive treatment, one of which was appropriately

responding to the question "Suppose that you could be a man [or woman] in every way except for your genitals; would you be content?" Stone explains how "there are several possible answers, but only one is clinically correct" (Stone, 166). Transsexuals were all expected to express the same dissatisfactions with their bodies, and failure to do so would result in the withholding of treatment. Stone hoped to destabilize this norm of only a single shared experience being deemed acceptable and appropriate for transsexuals.

With her response to Janice Raymond's critique of transsexualism, Sandy Stone introduced a new approach to trans study, one which hoped to expand the options available to trans people past just being written about by doctors or voicing a single mandated narrative. She used the popular post-structural concept of performativity and its rejection of singular narratives to achieve this aim. Because of her article's theoretical stance, the entirety of the academic movement which would follow would also be committed to post-structuralist concepts. However, I believe that Stone's response (and its underlying theoretical standpoint) faces inherent difficulties in the adequate rebuttal of Raymond's claims. Embracing an unlimited number of trans experiences as equally valid leads to the broadening of definition of "transgender" to the point that it includes anybody displaying gender non-conformity, thus reinforcing the notion that women are necessarily gender conforming. Additionally, I will argue that this theoretical framework produced the argument that sex is socially constructed, leading to the rejection of the idea that sex is based on objective realities of the world and necessarily leading to evaluations of transsexuals which judge them by their political acumen.

### III. My Proposal

As I showed in my detailing of Janice Raymond, feminist theory has faced a tumultuous history addressing people who change their sex and live opposite what they were assigned at birth. As noted in Section II above, Raymond's critique has two main components, stating both:

- (1) That transsexuals problematically cling to strict gender roles, and
- (2) That transsexuals transition as a result of patriarchal pressure (1979, 16).

Since Raymond's first analysis of the subject, and in the wake of Stone's intervention, the term "transsexual" has been eschewed in favor of the broader term "transgender", a word meant to describe the gender non-conformity of the members involved.<sup>5</sup> One characteristic definition of "transgender" asserts it to be:

[an] umbrella term for an imagined community encompassing transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anybody else willing to be interpolated by the term, who felt compelled to answer the call to mobilization (Stryker 2006, 4).

However, I believe an approach which responds to critics by merely switching to this definition faces two problems.

First, I will assert that this response's attempt to avoid the original charge of strict gender conformity by instead asserting that transgender people categorically *break* gender roles causes friction with commonly held feminist aims. While such an assertion

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<sup>5</sup> The term transsexual was originally coined by medical professionals to describe specifically those who underwent sex reassignment surgery (and delineate them from individuals who did not wish to undergo this specific procedure). Over time, this term was rejected by activists who deemed this particular distinction unnecessary and wished to use a vocabulary outside of that created by the medical community. The main distinction currently deemed important is whether or not one adheres to gender roles; those who do not are referred to as "transgender". While it is not often used today, I will use the word "transsexual" in this paper, both to mirror the language used by critics and to be specific when only talking about those who modify their sex.

may evade the original critique, it now finds us on the wrong side of a persuasive argument made by Sally Haslanger. This new definition - one which I will show defines trans people as being necessarily gender non--conforming, and positions non-trans<sup>6</sup> men and women as necessarily gender conforming - tacitly necessitates and reinforces problematic statements about women which are only true by virtue of their social standing.

Second, I will assert that this response fails to address the more pressing concern: Raymond's claim that physical transitions are motivated by social pressures and gender norms. I believe this mistaken claim must be addressed and corrected to show how motivations to transition have a basis in biology. Failure to correct this misunderstanding will mean continuing to produce theories like one presented by Cressida Heyes, which, I will argue, mistakenly evaluates physical transitions based on their politically effectiveness.

#### **IV. Addressing (1): Sally Haslanger**

##### **Haslanger On Generics**

While our theory must do an adequate job of responding to Raymond's assertions about trans people, an acceptable response must also meet a second criterion, arising from Sally Haslanger's piece "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground". In this piece Haslanger analyzes generic statements like "sagging pants are cool", "blacks are more criminal than whites", "cows are food", and "women are more submissive than men", and ultimately concludes that we must deny such claims. She first explains that generic statements are generalizations which omit quantifiers such as "some," "all," or "many"

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<sup>6</sup> I recognize that the term "cisgender" is typically used to designate someone who is not transgender. However, to try and avoid inundating the reader with potentially unfamiliar terminology, I will refrain from using it here.

(Haslanger 2011, 5). Additionally, generic statements do not make claims about singular, specific instances of the category mentioned, but rather make claims about the category in general and say something about the group as an open-ended class (2011, 5). She believes that analyzing generic statements can be useful, because as humans, "we have a very basic capacity to sort the world into kinds of things that seem to behave in similar ways and generics highlight striking or important features that members of these kinds typically exhibit" (Haslanger 2011, 5). When dealing with generic statements, the important and pertinent feature is how "they draw heavily on background knowledge and patterns of inference to highlight a significant property (either characteristic, striking, or common) of a kind" (Haslanger 2011, 9).

Haslanger is especially interested in the cases where generics are particularly misleading and initiate negative social consequences (Haslanger, 2011, 6). For instance, in evaluating the statement "women are more submissive than men", it may be true that women defer to men in both work and family life. However, such a statement conveys more than it might seem to at first glance. Allowing such statements to go unchecked would promote unintended explanations; they would allow for the implication that the truth of these statements lies in women's nature, how women *are* (Haslanger 2011, 26). For example, in stating that women are more submissive than men, such a statement obscures the background social conditions which makes it ostensibly true, and thus it is systematically misleading. Because such a statement would imply that women are *by nature* submissive, Haslanger maintains we must reject them (2011, 29). When

statements have such implications, we can deny the statement as a way to block what the statement conveys (Haslanger 2011, 13).<sup>7</sup>

### **Tension**

The term "transgender", as it is currently defined, violates the guideline that Haslanger has constructed. This tension becomes more evident when analyze at different ways the word has been used. For instance, Leslie Feinberg self-describes as “a female who is more masculine than those prominently portrayed in mass culture...Speaking for myself, my life only comes into focus when the word transgender is added to the equation” (1998, 7). Feinberg later elaborates, stating that “what makes me transgendered is that my birth sex – which is female – appears to be in social contradiction to my gender expression – which is read as masculine” (1998, 69). Through such statements, Feinberg asserts that ze<sup>8</sup> is transgender because hir gender expression differs from what is normally expected of hir sex.

However, while Feinberg is merely describing hir own experiences, we can also find instances where this definition of the word is elevated to a categorical truth about what being transgender is. For instance, Feinberg later states that a transgendered person is “someone who transcended traditional stereotypes of ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (1998, 63). Transgender people are defined as those who display an incongruence between “sex and gender expression”, including masculine females and feminine males (Feinberg 1998, 5).

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<sup>7</sup> Haslanger allows that in some cases, similar statements can be unproblematic; for instance, she does not have a problem with saying that “women are oppressed”, or that “blacks in the United States suffer racism” (2011, 5). She believes that those statements can be unproblematic because either the context cancels the implicature, or because there is some non-accidental connection between the subject and the description (ie., women and being oppressed or being black and suffering racism in the US). In these cases, the point of making such a claim would be to criticize the practice, not to justify oppression or racism. Because these statements expressly take the overarching social structure into account in their utterances, they do not fall into the same problematic trap as those generic statements previously evaluated.

<sup>8</sup> Feinberg uses pronouns other than "he" or "she".

Author Kate Bornstein calls for a similar definition of the term transgender, using it to describe "transgressively gendered" individuals, or "a group of people who break the rules, codes, and shackles of gender" (1994, 134). Thus, the theorists asserting this broad definition share the view that a person is transgender if they are not conventionally masculine or feminine, and that being transgender means breaking from the stereotypical gender role assigned to one's sex.

This conception of the term conflicts with Haslanger's principle when we realize that it, in turn, must mean that non-transgender men and women are stereotypical in their gender expressions. The stances presented above never make outright claims about what women are like; these statements never directly make assertions about women like those analyzed in Haslanger's piece. However, such statements tacitly rely on a definition of (non-trans) women which necessitates they be stereotypically gendered.

Put another way, the argument proceeds as follows. The proposed umbrella definition asserts that transgender people (including drag queens, transsexuals, masculine women and feminine men) all share the characteristic of being gender non-conforming, or having a gender expression which is different from what is expected of one's sex, and that *anyone* who has this characteristic may be considered transgender. Thus, for these authors, being transgender means both being gender non-conforming and acting in ways not typical of men and women, not showing the sex-gender congruence expected of either sex. Thus, a person is either not-trans or is gender non-conforming and expressing a sex-gender incongruence. For Feinberg and Bornstein, then, displaying sex-gender incongruence, not partaking in the gender role stereotypically associated with their sex, is not characteristic of non-trans men and women.

One may object that Feinberg and Bornstein's statements above never directly state that women or men are some certain way ("women are  $x$ "), thus a modified definition is never justified. In fact, one may point to the appeals to societal expectations in these statements as proof that these definitions themselves are socially created. Because of this, it may be said that these theorists' statements already refer to society's expectations of men and women in their definitions of transgender, thus not implying that men or women are naturally gender-conforming. However, while Feinberg for instance uses society to ground his status as transgender, this appeal does not do the work necessary to diffuse the worries raised by Haslanger. Feinberg's statement still does not avow that women only are a certain way because of society, it merely grounds these identities (trans or not-trans) in relation to what society expects. In other words, Feinberg's account does not say that women possess this congruence *because of* society, just that society *expects it*. Thus, while such statements might not take the form of the statements that Haslanger is worried about ("women wear lipstick"), they still reinforce the idea that women possess a congruence between sex and gender and allow for the impression that women possess this congruence naturally.

By asserting that they are not women in virtue of the fact that they do not partake in the gender role stereotypically associated with their sex (ie., by the fact that they do not wear makeup), these authors maintain that partaking in these roles (ie. wearing makeup) is relegated to non-trans men and women. So while they may have gone unstated, we can see that the arguments presented by these authors rely on the types of statements that Haslanger takes issue with, statements that are only true due to social mandates and trends. After such a definition of "transgender", the only people left in the non-trans

categories of “man” and “woman” are those who stereotypically adhere to gender roles. This broad usage of “transgender”, then, necessitates that theorists have situated men and women as being necessarily stereotypical in their gender expression. By this view, one is only a man or woman if they conventionally, stereotypically adhere to their prescribed gender role. Though it may not explicitly endorse them, this broad definition of the term transgender relies upon (and thus perpetuates) notions about men and women which are only true by virtue of our current social structure and its strict gender roles.<sup>9</sup>

To avoid this problem, I believe we must abandon this broad definition. I contend that a response to Raymond which implements the umbrella definition of this word must be rejected in order to avoid the criticisms raised by Haslanger.

### **Additional Considerations**

For the reason presented above I believe it is harmful to define trans people as being categorically gender non-conforming. However, there are further considerations that can also motivate a refusal to make categorical statements about trans people as being either gender conforming or gender non-conforming. I believe that it is inaccurate to state that transsexuals tend to either conform or resist gender roles, since they do not appear to categorically sway either way. As a group, they neither uphold nor break-down gender roles; one can find transsexuals who do either. In fact, debating this point and

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<sup>9</sup> One might argue that you could avoid this problem by making transgender into a socially-defined word, asserting that it's possible to use "transgender" in such a way that it highlights the social conditions surrounding being trans. This move would mean that the definition would no longer be objectionable under Haslanger's framework, since she believes such statements to be unproblematic. However, since this was Raymond's original critique in the first place, such a move would do nothing to refute her claims, and would not reach my overall goal.

holding either of these polar stances has come to be seen as trite by authors within queer theory.<sup>10</sup>

Author Julia Serano addresses the commonly held idea that transsexuals are strictly gender-conforming and points out that the theorists espousing either of these claims have generally only experienced limited interaction with the population they are writing about. Serano notes that authors who have interacted with transsexuals for longer periods of time typically come to reject both of these stances, offering Anne Bolin as an example. Bolin found that of the transsexual women she got to know:

Contrary to the stereotype of transsexuals as hyperfeminine, reveling in traditional notions of womanhood to a greater extent than genetic women, the transsexuals in this population were not admirers of stereotypical womanhood. They were keenly aware of the feminist movement ... and represented styles of dressing as diverse as the female population emulated (Serano, 153).

Author Henry Rubin comes to a similar conclusion after interviewing twenty-two transsexual men for his book *Self Made Men*. He observes that "transsexual men may confirm or undercut the hegemonic version of normative maleness and masculinity in this culture. Transsexuals per se are neither *essentially* gender normative nor *essentially* gender subversive", ultimately concluding based on his findings that there is "a wide

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<sup>10</sup> Author Henry Rubin is blunt in his critique of this debate. He believes that "up until now, it seems as if the most pertinent question about transsexuals is whether they subvert the heteronormative gender order. We view transsexuals only as either revolutionaries or traitors. ...They are either in service to a greater cause or they betray that cause" (with that cause being "the overturning of the present configuration of gender, sex, and sexuality that configures and constrains institutions and individuals"). He continues, saying "this sort of scholarship has fetishized transsexuals, either as 'gender revolutionaries' or as 'gender traitors.' It refuses to acknowledge that transsexuals are a heterogeneous group. Some subvert gender or sexuality; some do not. Most combine subversion of and conformity to dominant cultural beliefs about gender, sex, and sexuality. The fetishistic appropriation of transsexuals or the critique of false consciousness makes it impossible to grasp the meaning of their social psychological experience" (163). Rubin thus questions the motives of those theorists who have been so intent on maintaining that transsexuals are gender non-conforming. He believes that, as opposed to what some theorists may be aiming towards with their appraisals, we should not be "judging transsexuals as a group by their commitment to the gender revolution" (164).

range of ways to be transsexual; some subvert hegemonic masculinity and some do not" (Rubin, 173). He thus proposes "a ban on the question of whether transsexualism and transsexuals are unequivocally subversive or hegemonic" (Rubin, 164).

I believe, just as these authors have argued, that to highlight the gender non-conformity of transsexuals would mean to focus on accidental qualities held by only a portion of its members, traits which are only coincidentally occurring among a segment of the population and not shared by all of its constituents. The act of modifying one's sex concerns a characteristic separate from one's gender, so the gender conformity or non-conformity of those who alter their bodies presents itself as an unimportant and unrelated matter.<sup>11</sup>

As I have shown here, there are multiple reasons to reject the current response to Raymond's criticism. Attempting to block her critique by shifting the definition of "transgender" to include gender non-conforming people (and therein making gender non-conformity the defining characteristic of the group) is a problematic avenue, and fails to address the more significant misunderstanding of transsexualism presented in Raymond's paper.

## **V. Addressing (2): Cressida Heyes**

In this section I will show how the original response to Raymond took a wrong turn in failing to address her claim that people transition as a result of societal pressures. Allowing for this understanding of physical transitions means that feminist theories will retain normative judgments of actions which are in fact not problematic and which should

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, shifting to a new definition would also mean that the term would fail to capture a segment of the population which had previously fallen under the term, specifically those transsexuals who have physically transitioned but are gender conforming. Making gender non-conformity the defining characteristic for who is "trans" would mean that these transsexuals are no longer trans, which would seem to go against our intuitions.

not be evaluated by their reaching ethical aims. I argue that, rather than comparing these procedures to ones like breast augmentation, as Cressida Heyes does, a more accurate comparison would relate them to procedures like reconstructive surgery. I will end by explaining that Heyes's article will serve as an example for feminist theories in general; I argue that all theories must incorporate this understanding into their approaches because the consequences facing Heyes's argument will face any theory that relies on the same mistaken causal belief. Before undertaking this endeavor, I will first show where Heyes's theory gets its theoretical underpinnings from arguments asserted by queer theorists.

### **Queer Theory's Understanding of Motivation**

The current trend within trans theory maintains that sex is just as socially constructed as gender. Linda Martin Alcoff summarizes this line of thought in her book *Visible Identities*, explaining how it is often argued that sex is not in fact a given entity, but rather is just as socially constructed as gender. Indeed, the existence of transsexuals is often thought to prove how a socially-based understanding of sex is necessary.

Transsexuals are often introduced to discussions about sexual dimorphism and the definitions of "man" and "woman" because they seemingly prove that the line between male and female is blurry; the fact that people sometimes need to transition is often invoked to further an argument which paints men and women as strictly social categories. Theorists Monique Wittig, Collette Guillamin, and Judith Butler, who voiced opposition against the idea that "a human group may be physically (or as common sense would put it, 'objectively') specific *in itself*, independently of its relationships or practice", instead argued that sex and gender are "not objective or independent of human belief systems and thus not natural" (Alcoff 2006, 157). They collectively argue that transsexuals' "absence of correlation between actual sexed characteristics and sexed identities" supports the idea

that sexual categories are not determined by objective features in the world, and thus concluded that sex is no less a product of culture than gender is. Transgender activists then used these theoretical advances to enact a "major cultural transformation" to sexed identity, building upon these theorists' arguments to support the notion that sexual categories are merely social categories (Alcoff 2006, 158).

However, while the premise to the arguments presented by Butler et al. may be correct, it is not true that the conclusion necessarily follows. In other words: trans people certainly do present a case where a person's sexed characteristics do not correlate to their sexed identity. However, even with this information, it is still possible for these categories to be independent of human belief systems; it is not necessarily the case that "sex is no less a product of culture than gender is" simply based on the existence of transsexualism (Alcoff 2006, 159).

It is still possible that some alternate understanding of the physical world could offer an explanation for the experience of having a sexed identity which is contradicted by one's body. In other words, while transsexuals claim they know their appropriate sex, these claims do not necessarily mean that one's sexed identity cannot be caused by some material (rather than social) reality. In actuality, trans people could be seen as proving this fact. In her book *Whipping Girl*, Julia Serano argues that this need to physically transition could be biologically based and pre-determined from birth. In her view, trans people have brains which are "hardwired to expect our bodies to be female or male, independent of our socialization or the appearance of our bodies" (Serano 2007, 81). While such a claim might appear metaphorical, Serano maintains that a literally alternate

hardwiring is in fact present in transsexuals.<sup>12</sup> Under this conception, trans people illustrate that one is born with a sex that one can subconsciously feel oneself to be.<sup>13</sup>

Serano bases this assertion on studies where male infants born with intersex conditions were surgically reassigned and raised as female. In the majority of such cases these children eventually came to identify as male, despite their upbringing. Most of the children felt a marked amount of distress at being raised female, insisting that this categorization was inaccurate, and this distress dissipated when they were allowed to both live as men in society and physically transition away from the female sex. While such cases do not deal directly with transgender children, they do demonstrate that the hardwiring of one's brain may override both socialization and genital sex (Serano 2007, 80). Thus, it seems plausible to use these findings to assert that this phenomenon also occurs in transsexuals and is the driving factor behind their desires to transition. Similar to what Serano has presented, Dick Swaab offers that "in the human brain, structural differences have been described that seem to be related to gender identity<sup>14</sup>", and more confidently states how "observations in human subjects with genetic and other disorders show that direct effects of testosterone on the developing fetal brain are of major importance for the development of male gender identity" (Swaab, 301). Studies into these claims will surely need to be investigated further to ensure they can be substantiated. However, if observations such as these are accurate, then trans people would not

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<sup>12</sup> Serano states in her book that some studies have examined "a small, sexually dimorphic region of the brain known as the BSTc. Researchers found that the structure of the BSTc region in trans women more closely resembles that of most women, while in trans men it resembles that of most men" (2007, 81).

<sup>13</sup> Julia Serano develops this concept of a "subconscious sex" in her book *Whipping Girl*. She uses the term to capture "the gender we subconsciously feel ourselves to be" (Serano 2007, 78). Similar to what I am suggesting here, she explains that "perhaps the best way to describe how my subconscious sex feels to me is to say that it seems as if, on some level, my brain expects my body to be female" (Serano 2007, 80).

<sup>14</sup> While scientists often use the term "gender identity", it is not generally meant to capture what feminists are talking about when they discuss "gender". For medical professionals, this term typically holds a meaning more similar to Serano's term "subconscious sex".

necessarily go so far as to show that one's sex is not pre-determined; they would merely demonstrate that in some instances one's sex is not immediately obvious.

Thus, while activists have argued that sex is socially constructed in order to bring about a cultural transformation, arguments for such a claim are not conclusive, nor is it apparent that theories of sexed identity which posit a biological influence necessarily do a disservice to trans people. From the presented evidence we cannot concretely conclude that *no* objective feature in the world founds sexual categories, just that the previously decided upon foundation - the notion that one's sexed identity is always accurately reflected by their sexed characteristics - was inadequate. Sexual categories could instead just be based on some other objective feature in the world, such as a combination of one's sexed characteristics and the brain wiring resulting from hormonal influence in fetal development. Thus, there still exists theoretical and scientific support for the idea that sex is an objective reality (albeit different from how we currently conceive of it).

### **Heyes on Motivations**

With that understanding in mind, I will now turn to address Cressida Heyes's article. Heyes sets out to construct a theory which she thinks will mend the relationship between trans theorists and feminists, two groups who she has noticed have historically had tensions. The aim of her paper is to strike a compromise between these groups by retaining some of the ethical imperatives present in feminist theory while also arguing that trans people are not as ethically suspect as some feminists have asserted in the past.

This project necessitates that Heyes highlight how physically transitioning can be politically progressive while disapproving or downplaying the transitions which might be found to be politically suspect by feminists. She does this by pointing out that the trans community is composed of more than just those transsexuals whom feminist theorists

have critiqued; in fact, Heyes asserts that most trans peoples' journeys do not include having full sex reassignment surgery and then living quietly as their intended sex for the rest of their lives, the practice that Raymond had taken issue with. Heyes then spends some time highlighting how these trans people who had been overlooked in prior theories do not succumb to those ethical quandaries which ensnared the transsexuals undergoing more normative transitions. However, I will argue that this response to Raymond presents a problem; it still involves normatively evaluating acts which are unsuitable for evaluation. As part of this argument I will first show that her argument paints physical transitions as being motivated by social norms.

### **Evidence of This "Socially Constructed" Understanding**

Heyes's theory implies a tacit portrayal of physical transitions which paints them as wholly socially motivated and not influenced by one's biological make-up. She first displays this belief when she states that she can understand what might motivate one to to physically transition, believing it is necessary for everyone to seek out a home as a gendered or sexual being since "community, recognition, and stability are essential to human flourishing" (Heyes, 1097). She elucidates this idea further when she tries to better understand trans modifications by relating them to things that non-trans people experience and comparing physical transitions to certain socially motivated actions. Heyes believes that transsexual people are feeling discomforts similar to "genetic women who ponder the wisdom of breast implants, crash diets, or body building", asserting that people who entertain these considerations are "hardly different" from someone who feels that they needs to change their sex (Heyes, 1116).

However, while statements like this final comparison may assert the transsexual to be no worse than somebody contemplating undergoing plastic surgery, it simultaneously places them to be as similarly culpable as somebody considering these acts. Bundled in with this attempt to gain sympathy for those who physically transition comes the assessment that they would be acting in ways that support some ethically or politically problematic end. I will now turn to investigate more fully how her theory implies judgments of certain physical transitions.

### **Judgments of Physical Transition**

Certain physical transitions are still deemed problematic in Heyes's theory since, similar to procedures like breast augmentation, they are acts undertaken by agents who may not fully understand their own motives.<sup>15</sup> Similar to those cases, those who undertake these actions would do well to interrogate their motives and should be more conscious of the power structures that caused their desires. We see that this is her goal through her failure to hold as equally problematic those whose transitions involve weakening the norms that the medical community (along with the greater western society) imposes. Thus Heyes distinguishes between those normative transitions which had been the sole object of Raymond's critique and more non-normative interventions, which she believes are paths taken by most of the trans community. Heyes introduces this distinction in her explanation of how Raymond did not have a nuanced enough understanding of trans people in her original critique; not everybody transitions in the manner she had thought. Particularly, Heyes states that Raymond's assessment of

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<sup>15</sup> Heyes begins by comparing physical transitions to plastic surgery in an attempt to humanize those who undergo them and lessen the ethical evaluations made of them by feminists. Her comparisons are no doubt well-intentioned; she makes them in an attempt to normalize physical transitions which will hopefully convince some feminists to stop people from judging them so harshly.

transsexuals has placed an "emphasis on the surgically (re)constructed transsexual", which "obscures the multiplicity of transgendered lives" (Heyes, 1106). Heyes believes the group's composition has changed, and Raymond's understanding of transsexual people presents itself to be no longer accurate. Currently, Heyes believes that, in general "increased access to critical information about medical procedures, a growing political consciousness, and expanded community has caused those trans people who do seek medical services to be increasingly concerned with the limits of SRS as a route to an authentic identity" (Heyes, 1116). In doing so, Heyes focuses on those trans people previously overlooked by Raymond and uses them to show that some do not physically transition in problematic ways.

Thus, Heyes is intent on informing the reader that not all transsexuals want to undergo full sex reassignment surgery and live quietly as the intended sex. Highlighting this fact could primarily act as a way for Heyes to disprove certain statements and assumptions made by Raymond; however, she also utilizes this distinction in order to show how some who physically transition show promise and move in the right direction towards ideal political actions.

Later aspects of Heyes's argument rely on acknowledging the political shortcomings of those people who do fully and normatively transition, and asserting that the people who undertake more politically savvy interventions are acting in more praiseworthy ways. She states that:

I have been impressed by the political commitment and sophistication of many trans activists. The politically resistant choices that trans people are making often do challenge the terms of medical practice, as well as the depoliticized queer aestheticism that some feminists find objectionable (Bolin 1994; Califia 1997, 221–44; Feinberg 1998). Many FTMs in particular refuse surgeries, especially lower-body surgeries. The cosmetic

and functional inadequacy of phalloplastic techniques is undoubtedly a major element of this resistance (and a valid one: who wants a lousy outcome to their surgery?), but resistance is also motivated by the feminist recognition that the penis does not make the man (Devor 1998, 405–13; Cromwell 1999, 112–17, 138–40).<sup>16</sup>

Combining Heyes's focus on the previously overlooked trans identities with her statements that non-normative physical transitions are politically committed and sophisticated, one is left with the understanding that a trans person exemplifying the historical conception of transsexualism is less than ideal. While such individuals are perhaps not blameworthy, they are neither politically committed nor sophisticated. Heyes subtly utilizes her introduction of that "multiplicity of transgendered lives" to draw focus away from those transsexuals whom would be viewed less favorably by feminists. Thus, she asserts a theory whereby the typically acting transsexuals are still seen as unaware of their complicity in systems of oppression, but some other politically minded trans people are moving in the right direction. Those trans people who undergo non-normative transitions are spared such severe analysis, since they are seen as at least taking a step in the right direction, taking some measures to fight back against the structure which necessitated their desires or actions in the first place.

Thus, in her attempt to be sympathetic to trans people, Heyes's theory allows that some are still succumbing to politically or ethically problematic norms. To undergo a normative physical transition is to act in a way as unreflective and apolitical as undergoing cosmetic plastic surgery; complicit with overarching systems of repression

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<sup>16</sup> In addition to the objections raised in this section, I believe Heyes makes a few inaccurate statements in this quote. First, I believe her statement that "many" FTMs refuse lower-body surgeries misrepresents the fact that, according to the sources Heyes cites, most FTMs only do not pursue these avenues because of lack of access. Additionally, her statement that phalloplasties are "cosmetically and functionally inadequate" is no longer accurate; with current medical technology this procedure often produce results that attain much of the appearance, sensation, and functionality of non-trans male's genitals with low complication rates.

and inattentive to the relations that hold stigmatized concepts of 'woman' in place (Heyes, 1113). Undergoing non-normative procedures, on the other hand, can at least mitigate some of these consequences.

In the grand scheme of feminist theories that evaluate physical transitions, Heyes's article shifts from a stance which paints all physical transitions as bad to one where some are better than others, asserting that people who transition in certain ways have raised their political acumen and worked towards political imperatives. Just as Heyes believes the politically reflective plastic-surgery-hopeful would ideally reconsider and forego surgery, the politically reflective trans person would ideally forego physical transitions wholesale. But if they feel they must, they would do well to reconsider transitioning fully and normatively, and instead undertake alternate procedures which at least take some steps to dismantle the power structures which produced them.

### **Better Comparisons**

I believe that these ethical evaluations arise from a misunderstanding of the underlying cause of the desire to physically transition. If we cease to view this desire as socially motivated and rightfully view it as having a biological component, we can see that no transition should be evaluated by its meeting certain political goals; even normative transitions should be seen as posing no ethical problem. I will illustrate this point by asserting that transitions would be more appropriately understood when compared to acts which face no ethical scrutiny in feminist theory.

As I showed in the introduction to this section, there is support for the argument positing a biological basis for one's sexed identity, as illustrated by individuals who were forcibly reassigned and raised as the opposite sex from infancy. I believe that most

people, in hearing about such individuals, would feel no hesitancy in declaring that they have acted in ways unmotivated by society, simply endeavoring to maintain congruence between their internal sense of sex and their sexed characteristics. I believe that transsexuals undergoing physical transitions are acting similarly; they are also undertaking actions to maintain congruence between their internal sense of sex and their sex characteristics. Thus, just like those intersexed youth who had been spared judgment, people who transition should be seen as acting unproblematically. Just as it would be wrong to judge the medical interventions undertaken by intersex adolescents for their political effects, so the physical transitions undertaken by transsexuals should not be seen as apt targets of criticism.

However, I recognize that some may be wary of this comparison; since research into this area is still ongoing one may be hesitant to endorse such an analogy. If one is tentative to accept the similarity of these situations then another comparison might be found more suitable. For another example, consider an act like breast reconstruction after a mastectomy. This procedure is not viewed as comparable to plastic surgeries like breast augmentation; such an operation is simply seen as recreating body parts which were lost due to illness. Thinking of this act as somehow ethically suspect or politically uncouth would seem uncalled for, and this is reflected in the literature; texts which critically evaluate plastic surgery generally withhold judgment of reconstructive surgery. In contrast to their attitudes towards breast augmentation, theorists would not consider it appropriate to pass judgment on those who faced a need to change their body as a result of some unfortunate medical condition. In these cases the motives are clear and unproblematic, thus the acts themselves are not seen as necessitating evaluation.

Connecting this back to trans people - it would seem that if one is unwilling to accept that physical transitions are motivated by biological factors, it is still not evident these acts must be viewed and judged as politically regressive and unsophisticated. Instead, one could forego judging the political efficacy of physical transitions by bypassing the subject of motivation entirely. Transitions do not need to be seen as either suspect for their origins in society or acceptable because their origins in biology; they can simply be seen as acceptable due to their ability to maintain the physical and mental health of those who undertake this course of action.

For another example, consider a medical intervention such as hormone replacement therapy. Non-trans men with hypogonadism do not produce enough testosterone on their own and thus must undergo testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) to restore their hormone levels to a normal range (Pinsky, 2010). Such a treatment is instinctively seen as medical in nature and unproblematic, and is not critiqued as having any political or ethical ill-effects. A transsexual man will also typically undergo this treatment, and for much the same reason: his body, similarly, does not produce enough testosterone on its own and so TRT must be undergone to maintain healthy male hormone levels. Extending Heyes's analysis of breast augmentation to include endocrinological management, an understanding of these actions which places them as socially motivated would necessitate holding ethical and political standards for transsexuals which are not imposed upon non-trans individuals.<sup>17</sup> However, remaining silent on the topic of motivation and instead viewing these acts as necessary to maintain the physical and

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<sup>17</sup> Heyes does not expound upon the political effects of hormone replacement therapy for transsexuals as much as procedures like breast augmentation, but I believe she would in fact evaluate these procedures similarly. She views them similarly enough to group them together, when she states that "in making decisions about hormones, surgery, passing, and gender conformity, trans people—especially if they are feminists—face ethical and political dilemmas" (1116).

mental health of transsexual people would highlight the fact that these actions are not in and of themselves problematic.

Acts such as I have just detailed, when pursued by non-trans individuals, are the very same procedures as those undergone by transsexuals who physically transition. Yet when undergone by non-trans individuals, they are not considered socially motivated and are not evaluated by their ability to break down oppressive structures. They are commonly just as necessary to maintaining the well-being of the individual in question, either restoring the natural appearance of one's body or maintaining healthy biological functions. These acts are not judged for their inability to break down oppressive structures because they are never seen as being caused by those structures in the first place. In order to avoid placing inappropriate political goals onto those who physically transition, we should shift away from viewing transsexuals' procedures as motivated by oppressive social structures.

### **Generalizing**

It is not only Heyes's account which will have to face these problematic consequences. I believe that they will necessarily accompany any account which continues to frame physical transitions as a response to patriarchal society. Attempts to reconcile a socially motivated understanding of these acts with ethical theories prizing the dismantling of oppressive structures will continually result in normative judgments of those physical transitions which are seen as inadequately resistant.

### **VI. Conclusion**

As I showed in Section II, Raymond's critique had two main assertions. She believed both

- (1) That transsexuals problematically cling to strict gender roles, and
- (2) That transsexuals transition as a result of patriarchal pressure.

The original response propagated by trans activists addressed this first objection. In section IV I showed why the current response has problematic conflicts feminist theory. Because the current conception of "transgender" responds by instead asserting that transgender people are gender non-conforming, it tacitly necessitates and reinforces problematic statements about women which are only true by virtue of their social standing. This conflicts, I have argued, with an important guideline defended by Sally Haslanger. In order to resolve this tension with Haslanger while still responding to Raymond, I propose that we respond to (1) by maintaining that trans people are neither categorically gender conforming nor gender non-conforming.

I believe that the more necessary assertion which should be made is in response to Raymond's objection (2). Failing to address this point means a continued failure to realize that a biological component motivates physical transitions. In Section V I demonstrated how this misunderstanding allows for problematic normative evaluations of physical transitions, which conflicts with our intuitions about what acts can or should be viewed as bearing some social, ethical, or political imperative. While I have only focused on Heyes's article here, I believe this would be an implicit facet of any such theory which fails to refute this notion of a biological influence. If one believes that resisting patriarchal gender norms is an important aim in feminist theory - as Heyes certainly does - then one should not be sympathetic to any account which proclaims that people physically transitioning is wholly unproblematic. Thus, so long as the actions undertaken are believed to be born out of a social motive, theorists will continue to judge physical

transitions by their political effects and hope trans people will act in a way consistent with feminist political aims.

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