

Transphobia and Transactivism

INTRODUCTION

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With this publication, *Atlantis* is pleased to present three articles that focus on transsexual and transgender issues. This "Trans" cluster is our first engagement with the exciting developments in this field and we anticipate further initiatives in the future. Several themes emerge from these articles. While the topic is newly developing as an area of research and teaching interest in the academy, there is a much older history of trans individuals and communities, living, working and organising politically to create spaces for themselves. At present still largely hidden from history, trans history promises to raise important questions and invites extensive future research. As Viviane Namaste's article notes, to date, much of the work on trans issues has focused on identity, culture and the confusions between gender and sexuality. Namaste also urges us to pay attention to labour, including the sectors of the labour market where "out" trans people have been able to work, their working conditions, and the importance of labour to trans survival and organising activities.

The lives and activism of trans people pose major challenges to prevailing concepts of women and men, of femininity and masculinity. The feminist and lesbian movements, with their deep commitment to improving women's situations, have had to rethink some of their most fundamental premises. Despite their commitment to diversity, parts of the women's and lesbian movements have found their efforts to welcome trans individuals, and to build solidarity and alliances with trans activists to be challenging. Patricia Elliot uses the on-going struggle involving Kimberly Nixon and her effort to train as a counsellor at the Vancouver Rape Relief Centre to show how struggles over who gets to be a woman can easily fracture the feminist community and alienate much of the trans community. However, many trans people have had long histories of activism within both movements. Most have a wealth of knowledge and experience based on their own personal struggles that could strengthen feminist and lesbian initiatives. Jean Bobby Noble argues that the relationship between female-to-male (FTM) transsexual masculinity, female masculinity and feminism is an underexplored site of politics and argues that FTM masculinity can be an alternative and pro-feminist embodiment of non-phallic masculinity.

As with any movement of subordinated and oppressed peoples, the emergence of a public debate on

trans issues reveals the lack of consensus about language and terminologies. Patricia Elliot notes how easily naming can unintentionally offend. Linguistic debates also reflect the complexity of the politics of gender and sexuality. The trans issue offers academia new insights into the ways in which bodies, identities, cultures and politics are understood, challenged and organised.

The papers published here were presented at a workshop organised by Professor Linda Briskin and the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies at York University on 29 November 2002 called "Trans Gender/Trans Sexual Theory, Organising and Cultural Production." We thank the authors for submitting their work to *Atlantis*. We hope that this special cluster provokes further research, deeper political debate and more effective political organising.