**Towards Trans- gendering International Relations?**

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**Abstract:**

This article asks what insights the literature in trans- gender theorizing might contribute to IR. While it starts at and remains grounded in feminist theorizing, it explores both how trans- theorizing changes feminist outlooks in IR and how it changes IR more generally. Looking for what, if anything, theorizing of trans- gendered bodies and trans- gendering tells us about how global politics functions, this article combines a review of that literature and an application of it to some of IR’s controversies and unresolved problems. After a brief introduction of the terminology of transgender theorizing and a discussion relating theorizing about trans-ness to/with feminism, this discusses the potential purchase for) thinking about IR/global politics of a number of ideas in the trans community, including but not limited to disidentification and passing. The article then broadens its approach to ask what trans- theory insights tell us about gender hierarchy in global politics, and about global politics more generally, focusing on concepts of visibility and liminality as they apply to the lived experiences of people in global politics. The article concludes with some suggestions for further collaboration between trans- theorizing and (feminist) IR to deepen and widen IR’s theorizing both about gender specifically and about global politics generally.

**Keywords:**

Gender, feminism, trans- gender, IR theory, liminality, visibility

Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney (2004) noted that, although International Relations (IR) could be a fruitful home for research on difference and diversity (termed “heterology”), the discipline has largely been confounded by the “problems” presented by difference. Often, research that pays substantive attention to diversity is met with “awkward silences and miscommunications” (Tickner 1997) or accepted only when it is oversimple (Citation to author removed; Soreanu 2010). As a result, “instead of recognizing the possibility of the overlap of self and other, boundaries are rigidly drawn, carefully policed, and mapped onto the difference between good and evil” (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004, 11). Arguing that “identity always owes a debt to alterity,” Inayatullah and Blaney (2004, 219) argue for revisioning IR as a dialogue of, about, and for difference, rather than a field that obscures its own diversity.

One axis of diversity that IR has rarely engaged is the question of sex and/or gender diversity. Feminist theorizing in IR tries to bring the discipline into dialogue about the influence of gender in global politics (see Soreanu 2010; Zalewski 2010), but the discipline has been slow to accept it (Steans 2003), and feminist IR engagements with queer theorizing (and its potential to tell us about global politics) thus far have been somewhat limited (see, e.g., Peterson 1999). It might not be clear to some why it is problematic that IR theorizing often ignores sexual diversity and omits the concerns of queer theorizing, but this article suggests that queer theorizing provides unique perspectives on global politics that are otherwise unattainable. Following V. Spike Peterson (1999. 56), this article contends that the normalization of exclusively heterosexual desire serves the functions of maintaining the biological and social reproduction of nations, differentiating group identity, and shaping political ideologies, such that “in the context of systemic violence (within and between groups), heterosexism may be the historically constituted ‘difference’ we most need to see – and to deconstruct.”

 This article addresses that claim in more detail by engaging with trans- gender theorizing, “the academic field that claims as its purview transsexuality and cross-dressing, some aspects of intersexuality and homosexuality, cross-cultural and historical investigations of human gender diversity,” and many other similar issues (Stryker 2006, 3). Much like feminist work in IR, trans- theorizing is not constituted from a single approach or a single standpoint, but is a diverse, vibrant, and contested approach to theorizing, sharing an interest in the existence, meaning, and signification of the trans- in political and social life. This work, according to Stryker (2006, 2) “has helped foster a sea-change in the academic study of gender, sex, sexuality, identity, desire, and embodiment.” This article looks to translate those gains to the discourses of IR.

In order to do so, it asks what insights trans- theorizing might provide for the study of global politics generally, and for feminist theorizing about gender in global politics specifically. After a brief introduction of the terminology of trans- theorizing, the first substantive section of the article addresses the potential for (and potential hazards for) an alliance between trans- theorizing and feminist theorizing of global politics. The article then discusses several strands of theorizing from the trans- theory literature, including hyper- and in-visibility, liminality, crossing, and disidentification, which might be useful tools how global politics works. The article concludes with some suggestions for further collaboration between trans- theorizing and (feminist) IR to deepen and widen IR’s theorizing both about gender specifically and about global politics generally.

**Vocabularies of Trans- Theorizing**

 Generally, “sex” is perceived membership in the biological categories of “male” or “female” based on (perceived) distribution of sex organs and sexed bodies. While most feminists see more than two “sexes” (including varieties of intersex and trans- bodies), we often talk about sex as dichotomous (male/female) either out of convenience or out of an interest in focusing on gender issues presented dichotomously in global politics (e.g., Keohane 1989). While some theorists have argued that “sex” is itself a social construction (Fausto-Sterling 2005) or a performance (Butler 1993), many continue to refer to sex as a biological fact.

If “sex” is usually characterized as biological and dichotomous, “gender,” is usually characterized as social and a continuum (Hooper 2001). Gender is a set of socially and culturally constructed characteristics that are associated with persons based on their perceived sex. People understood to be “men” are expected to be “masculine” and associated with masculinity, while people understood to be “women” are expected to be “feminine” and associated with femininity (Tickner 1992; Sylvester 1994).These traits are organized hierarchically, where characteristics associated with masculinity are often symbolically and actually valued over characteristics associated with femininity (see Peterson 2010)**.** In these terms, sexism is the assumed or explicit preference for men over women; gender hierarchy is the assumed or explicit preference for masculinities over femininities; and sex/gender discrimination is the enacting of these preferences in interpersonal interaction (see Enloe 2007).

 Relatedly, a variety of concepts are used to discuss questions of sexual preference in social and political life. The term “heterosexual” identifies persons who are of “one” biological sex attracted to “the other.” People of a certain biological sex who have a sexual preference for people of the same biological sex are termed “gay” or “homosexual. “Bisexual” refers to persons who are interested in “both sexes” regardless of their own biological sex. Gender words are often assigned to people perceived to be or self-identifying as homosexual or bisexual, either from inside or outside of those communities, including but not limited to words like ‘metro,’ ‘butch,’ ‘femme,’ or ‘stromo’ (Munt and Smith 1998). Homophobia is the fear or discrimination against people perceived to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual; heteronormativity is the assumption of the normalcy of heterosexuality; heterosexism is the preference for heteronormative personal, social, and political organizations and discrimination against those people and lifestyles classified as homosexual or bisexual.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Trans- theorists have argued that these sexual preference and gender classifications are fundamentally limited, or only part of the story. Stryker has argued that “neither feminism nor queer studies, at whose intersection transgender studies first emerged in the academy, were quite up to the task of making sense of the lived complexity of contemporary gender (2006, 7).

In Cressida Heyes’ words,

To the extent that “sex,” “gender,” and “sexuality” have come to be thought of as core ontological facts about individuals, organized through a binary schema, discourses about transsexuality have an obvious foothold. One simply *is*, essentially, either male or female, and concomitantly heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the relation of sexual object choice to biological sex. (Heyes 2003, 1102)

Introducing trans- bodies into discussions of sex and gender complicate the ways sexes, genders, and sexualities are conceptualized, even as there is debate in the trans- theorizing community about the precise direction and goals of these complications (Stryker 2006, 8; Heyes 2007).[[2]](#footnote-2)

 The term “’transgender’ refers to people who do not appear to conform to traditional gender norms by presenting and living genders that were not assigned to them at birth or by presenting and living genders in ways that may not be readily intelligible in terms of more traditional conceptions” (Bettcher 2007, 46). The abbreviations “FTM” (female-to-male) and “MTF” (male-to-female) signify directionality in a transition from one sex to another.[[3]](#footnote-3) If misogyny refers to the hatred of women and homophobia to the hatred of people with homosexual sexual preferences, trans- phobia refers to negative attitudes (hatred, loathing, rage, or moral indignation) towards trans- people on the basis of enactments of gender (Bettcher 2007, 46). Notorious “real-” enactments of transphobia include the brutal murders of Brandon Teena[[4]](#footnote-4) (Halberstam 2003) and Gwen Araujo[[5]](#footnote-5) (Currah, Juang, and Minter 2006), but research on the experience of trans- people suggests that most trans- people have at least one serious experience with transphobic violence in their lives (Southern Poverty Law Center 2003).

 Some trans- theorists ask what the opposite of “trans-” is, given dichotomies like male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. In these terms, everyday discourses of trans- gender and trans- sexuality stand out. “Trans-” is framed as the aberration in our discourses, where people are assumed just to have “gender” and “transgender” persons are the only persons we need prefixes to describe. As a corrective, “cisgender” indicates comfort and identification with the gender one was assigned at birth, or a match between an individual’s gender identity and sex assigned at birth. “Cissexism,” then, is the belief that transgendered or transsexual gender identifications are inferior to or less authentic than those of cisgender or cissexual persons (Serrano 2007). Cissexist tendencies include characterizing trans- persons as impersonators, refusing to acknowledge their identified sexes or genders, reducing bodies to their parts or the medical procedures they have been through, or questioning their knowledge of self (Serrano 2007). The terms “cisgender,” “cissexual,” and “cissexism” are used to critically interrogate the trans-/normal dichotomy that comes up when we discuss “trans-” people as opposed to “non-trans” men and women.[[6]](#footnote-6)

These are issues on which there remains a significant amount of controversy among theorists of the trans- in lived experience. In fact, a number of trans- theorists have expressed concern about thinking about trans-ness as a sex or a gender. In Susan Stryker’s words:

Homonormativity lies in misconstruing trans as either a gender or a sexual orientation. Misconstrued as a distinct gender, trans people are simply considered another type of human than either men or women, which leads to … homonormative attempts at “transgender inclusion” …Misconstrued as a sexual orientation category, trans appears as a desire …. The “T” becomes a separate category to be appended, through a liberal politics of minority assimilation. (Stryker 2008, 148).

The goal of this discussion about vocabulary has been less to discipline a particular understanding of (trans)gendered bodies than to give a sense of the ideas and concepts on which the theoretical perspectives discussed in the rest of this article rely. Along those lines, the goal of engaging trans- theories in this article is less a liberal politics of minority assimilation than a feminist politics of theoretical critique and reformulation. Working from David Halperin’s (2004, 340) understanding of the deployment of queer theory, this article looks to make IR theory trans- (that is, to question its cissexist assumptions) and to trans- theory (to call attention to the transgressive in the project of theorizing global politics). The remainder of this article explores the ways that trans- theorizing might inform how we think about global politics.

**Trans- Theorizing and Feminism (in IR)**

In an attempt to transgender IR, starting with feminist research makes sense because, when queer theorizing has been incorporated into IR, it has usually been in explicitly feminist work (e.g., Weber forthcoming; Wilcox 2009; Peterson 1999). Still, it is important to note that a number of trans- theorists have been explicitly critical of both feminism and queer theory (Stryker 2006, 2). Some, though not all, trans- theorists have often noted a discomfort with feminist theorizing, largely related to feminist theory’s reaction to the trans-. While feminist IR has not engaged in these problematic modes of theorizing, many feminist theorists outside of IR have eschewed trans- advocacy, arguing that there is tension between trans experiences and claims to legitimacy and rights and women’s claims about gender hierarchy in the social and political world.[[7]](#footnote-7) According to Shotwell and Sangray, this creates a double bind for trans- persons in (especially liberal) feminisms, where, “while trans women are framed as men stealthily infiltrating the last bastions of women’s space, ….trans men … [are framed as] lesbians with a particularly bad case of patriarchy-induced false consciousness” (2009, 70). Trans- theorists have also argued that feminisms sometimes hold an understanding of gender that is injurous to trans- people’s interests, especially to the extent that feminisms refuse to recognize some trans- people’s claim to a primordial biological sex.[[8]](#footnote-8)

 While some scholars and activists think that feminism and trans- theorizing are fundamentally at odds (where trans- people are an affront to femininity and feminism uses/abuses trans- people), others think that these tensions can be transformative for feminist theorizing, such that trans- theory insights make feminist theory stronger and better, politically and ontologically. In trans- theorist Cressida Heyes’ terms, it is a question of developing and broadening feminist theorizing:

It is now clear that feminist politics need to speak of (and be spoken by) many more subjects than women and men, heterosexual women and lesbians. How – in theory and in practice – should feminism engage bisexuality, intersexuality, transsexuality, transgender, and other emergent identities that reconfigure both conventional and conventional feminist understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality? (Heyes 2003, 1093)

As such, Krista Scott-Dixon argues that “one can speak from both a trans- and a feminist perspective at once” (2006, 45). Bettcher argues that in fact, feminists have an interest in expanding their theorizing to account for the complexities of trans bodies, trans experiences, and transgenders, because “transphobia is fundamentally a part of (hetero)sexual systems of violence and rape mythology” (2007, 57). Therefore, Heyes argues, “feminists of all stripes share the political goal of weakening the grip of oppressive sex and gender dimorphisms …with their concomitant devaluing of the lesser terms *female* and *feminine*” (2003, 1094). Trans- theorizing brings to an alliance with feminist theorizing, then, work “disrupts, denaturalizes … and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated body [and] the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy” (Stryker 2006, 3). Interested in what such an approach has to offer, this section explores what an alliance of trans- theory and feminist theory might contribute to the study of global politics. It argues that, at the very least, taking trans- theory seriously would complicate and grow feminist IR.

***Potential Contributions of a Trans- Feminist IR***

In considering the ways in which thinking through trans- theorizing could complicate and benefit feminist IR analysis, at least three potential directions are clear. The first is that a relationship between trans- theory and feminist theories in IR is that it would encourage feminist IR theories to think about what difference a truly plural (rather than dichotomous) understanding of “sex” would have in our thinking about how gender hierarchy works in global politics. For example, while many feminists have a more complicated understanding of ‘gender’ than biological sex, sometimes even feminist participation in things like gender mainstreaming is reducible to representation of people and interests associated with people understood to be biologically ‘women.’ Often, feminist theorists have trouble understanding what (if any) ‘other’ to the masculine and the feminine exists. Trans- theorists tend to talk about gender not in terms of masculinities and femininities (which feminisms almost always pluralize but still often set in opposition to each other) and more in terms of “gender diversity,” which might enhance feminisms’ (and IR’s) understandings of diversity in global politics (Lane 2009; Moreno 2008).

Thinking of sexes and genders as multiple provides several insights that might complicate feminist thinking about gender in IR. First, it urges us to critically interrogate the ease with which we adopt social constructionist approaches as an alternative to biological essentialism without either looking for the downsides or for a third approach. As Lane warns, “social-constructionist methodology tends to invite *ontological* belief that gender is produced by socialization” (2009, 144). Lane’s concern is that feminist IR’s constructivist and poststructuralist epistemological choices reflect (and produce) an understanding of gender *as social construct* or *as performed* that does not resonate with trans- people’s experiences. Instead, taking trans- theory seriously might encourage rethinking the role of the biological in a way that acknowledges the strong role that it plays in some gender narratives (particularly those of many trans- people) without falling into the traps of essentialism. Perhaps work like that of Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000; 2005), Lauren Wilcox (2010), and Iver Neumann (2008) which thinks seriously about questions of embodiment alongside questions of performance and social construction provides a way forward that could expand feminisms’ understandings of gender to be broader, more complex, and more inclusive.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Thinking of sexes and genders as multiple allows us to talk about them in terms of diversity instead of in terms of dichotomy. While power dynamics between things understood as masculine and things understood as feminine are strongly operative in global politics, trans- theory hints that there might also be power dynamics between things understood as queer and things understood as straight, as well as between things understood as trans- and things naturalized as cis-. Seeing many sexes as opposed to two complicates our understandings; but seeing those sexes as diverse instead of linear adds another dimension. Sex and gender “diversity” can be used in the negative (global political leadership is not sex or gender “diverse” enough), but it can also be read in the positive (sex or gender diversity in global leadership would introduce new perspectives and add potential policy solutions previously omitted from dominant discourses). This diversity is both representational (including not “both” but “all” sexes and genders) and substantive (thinking about how to take account of peoples’ differences in social and political decisions, and analyses of those decisions.

This suggests a different way of looking at biological sex(es) and social gender(s) as not only constraint and boundary but capacity. In other words, we often think of physical sex as assigned and therefore fixed: people *are* “male” or “female,” where the combined existence of ambiguity and the potential to change our sex means that our bodies not only limit us but give us potential to interpret and even alter them. Further, we often think of gender norms and stereotypes as caging: the expectations placed on one because of one’s perceived biological sex. While this is true, gender expectations are not only limiting, but also things we can manipulate, use instrumentally, take advantage of, and navigate among. Seeing sex *and* gender as capacities does not erase sex and gender subordination, oppression, or discrimination, but it does open up space for a creative, transgressive politics of the body. People *change* their bodies, not only through “sex reassignment,” but through a wide variety of cosmetic surgical procedures, diet, exercise, body-building, and the like. To the extent that we can come to understand embodiment as flexible and changeable (as it clearly is to practitioners of sex and gender around the world), we can understand the role of sexings and genderings in politics in a clearer and deeper way.

The second thing that taking trans theory seriously might influence is feminist interpretations of “what” gender “is,” not only substantively (as discussed above) but also conceptually. Feminist work assumes gender’s ontological existence is only as social construction – that is, gender is fundamentally epistemological – it is as we know it, and it does not exist outside of our knowledge of it. Trans- theorizing suggests that there is an ontological component to gender that cannot be reduced to social construction, but also cannot be reduced to essentialist notions of male and female bodies producing masculine and feminine persons. In other words, how do we read sex and gender dichotomies when we take account of trans people? Does the very existence of trans- people reveal the false nature of sex and gender dichotomies? Can feminism understand (some part of) gender as ontologically prior to epistemology and still maintain its commitment to deconstructing gender dichotomies in global politics? Or does the suggestion that there might be substance to not just sex but gender pose a fundamental threat to feminist theorizing?

Along these lines, I suggest that it is possible to see sex/gender as sociobiological (e.g., Fausto-Sterling 2005); a combination of what people know, what they experience, and how they use that to read their bodies and others’. Such a conception has the potential to radically change the ways feminist theorizing thinks of gender, and thereby broaden and add complexity to how feminists characterized gender as impacting global politics. For example, in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry (2007) note that sometimes violent women’s behavior is characterized as an alienation from womanhood (e.g., Strickland and Duvvury 2003), but others are interested in violent women’s performances of femininity (Landesman 2002). They argue (with other feminists) that biological femaleness and femininity do not map one-to-one, but, using a sociobiological notion of gender (diversity) from trans- theorizing, could complicate this analysis even further to show femaleness and femininity in violent women as a feedback loop.

Third and finally, trans- theorists bring up the question of whether gender expression is what we call in political science a zero-sum game. Heyes (2003, 1095) argues that gender diversity and plurality cannot be the end of the story for a trans-aware feminism, because the implication that feminist politics should tolerate any gender expression forgets one of the first lessons of feminist theorizing: that gender is relational, rather than absolute. Heyes explains that “a failure to understand gender as relational (and hierarchical) leads …to elide certain normative implication of hir account” (2003, 1095). The normative implications that Heyes is talking about revolve around more powerful gender expressions silencing weaker, more marginal, or less mainstream gender expressions. As feminists have observed when looking at male-female relations, “expression of one gender may limit the possible meanings or opportunities available to others” (Heyes 2003, 1095). Therefore, while it is important to be inclusive of sex and gender diversity, it is equally important not to lose sight of the power relations between and among sexes and genders in social and political life.

Trans- theorizing about gender has the potential to be a transformative force for feminist IR theorizing about global politics because it could open up new research directions examining the complexity of gender, the ways that configurations of gender diversity impact and are impacted by other political configurations, and the ways that multiplicities (of gender and otherwise) are influential in shaping political interactions in global politics. In addition to adding complexity to theoretical understandings of gender and layers to empirical examination, a trans- feminist IR could add depth to (feminisms’ and IR’s) understandings of global politics.

**Translating Trans- Theorists’ Concepts to IR**

It is, however, not only trans- theorizing about gender impacting feminist IR that makes trans- theory worth paying attention to in theorizing global politics. Instead, as this section will discuss, some of the central concepts in trans- theorizing are translatable to IR’s understandings of global politics. Particularly, this section goes over four concepts from trans- theorizing that have implications for how the discipline of IR thinks about the workings of global politics: hyper- and in-visibility, transition and liminality, crossing, and disidentification.

***Hyper- and In-Visibility in Global Politics***

Questions of visibility and voice have come up in, and been circumvented by, IR theorizing for decades. Sometimes, mainstream IR talks about this as the “levels of analysis” (Waltz 1959; Singer 1961) debate or the “agent-structure” (Wight 2006). Fundamentally, the problem is recognizing who is “International Relations” and how scholars in the field might study that *who.* Feminist work in IR began by carefully looking to listen to the “voices” of people, particularly women, at the margins of global politics (e.g., Tickner 1988). Gayatri Spivak, however, made the controversial argument that the subaltern in global politics cannot speak or be heard in the halls of power (1988). A similar conversation took place between Copenhagen school securitization theorists who argue that the utterance of security produces it (e.g., Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998) and Lene Hansen (2001), who expresses concern that such an approach to security excludes those in the international arena whose silence (in security utterances) is not voluntary.

Feminist theorists in IR have looked to make the invisible visible, asking, after Cynthia Enloe, “where are the women?” in global politics, a question that implies finding people who were previously unseen and revealing them to change our ideas of the world “out there.” Spike Peterson and Anne Runyan have conceptualized seeing and visibility in IR as a case of “lenses,” where all scholarship makes choices about what it sees (first) and what it focuses on (originally) that shapes the process of research and the products of projects. Critical theorists have argued that mainstream IR sometimes “sees” with “blinders” (George 1994). On one hand, some of these references to visibility are meant as metaphors. On the other hand, the discussions bring up very real issues that are important in formulating both ontological and epistemological approaches to global politics.

Much trans- literature expresses concern about the politics of visibility, particularly dealing with the dimensions of “outness” particular to trans- people. Being “out” in terms of gay/queer communities often signifies a process of personally accepting homosexuality and disclosing it to family, co-workers, and friends. In these terms, Being “in” or “out” in queer terms has various pros and cons; “in”-ness is hiding; out-ness is dangerous.

Visibility is all the more complicated in trans- communities, where some argue that there is no such thing as being “out” as trans- (that is, that being “out” would require some unreal perception being given by not admitting one is “trans-,” where some people see transitioning as a solution to an unreality, rather than as an unreality itself) and others see “outness” as an important part of transitioning. Still others see trans- bodies as invisible, where “outness” is meaningless because one would have to be acknowledged to be “out,” but “it is common, that is, for non-trans people to neither know nor care about the existence of trans-people” (Shotwell and Sangray 2009, 59). Trans- theorists are also interested in the times when trans- bodies become *hyper*visible – that is, the object of gaze, fascination, and attention. I contend that visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility in trans- theoretic terms are useful tools in understanding global politics.

*Outness and (in)visibility*

The first question that “outness” might bring up for the study of global politics is the question of who is “out” or visible in the international arena, and the genuineness of their public presences. Judith Butler (in reference to queer performances of outness) once framed visibility as a question of privilege, asking “for whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the term, and who is excluded?” (Butler 1993, 227). Outness presumes visibility and the ability to be heard when speaking, which are both privileges of limited availability in global politics (e.g., Spivak 1988; Hansen 2000). “Outness” in any sense is a site of privilege, and there is often a barrier of (in)visibility to even making it into the discussion to be considered in IR as an “agent” in global politics. This is because there are those for whom visibility of their “true” self is an option – that is, they have a voice and a public presence and options about outness (be it about gender, sexuality, or some other political element). Alternatively, there are others who do not have the privilege of visibility; that is “outness” is empty, because to be “out” would be the same as being “in,” invisible and without voice. There are thus both class and power dimensions to outness that have implications for trans- people and in global politics more generally.

There are also others for whom the question of what “true” self would be visible is not an easy question. This is because “outness” presumes some essential content of self that is “truer” than appearances and requires explicit acknowledgment to be known or seen. In this way, “outness” presumes some opposite, “in-ness” that is in some way secretive, dishonest, or misrepresenting. We usually do not talk about leaders or states in global politics in terms of their “in-ness” or “outness,” and rarely talk about them in terms of genuineness at all, even when visibility is a theoretical question. But the discourse of visibility in trans- theory is not just about seeing people period, it is about seeing people (controversially) for what they “really” are. In global politics, then, “outness” might have two important elements: visibility at all (as an “entry fee”) and then some analysis of the “true self” of an actor.

*Visibility Tradeoffs: People and Groups*

 Questions of visibility/invisibility are further complicated by individual and group representation. In global politics, there are some groups who are visible when their individual members are not (for example, “comfort women” in the Second World War, or Afghan civilians in the “war on terror”). Trans- theorizing has struggled with the paradox that sometimes *trans- people* generally are visible, where the voices of *trans- persons* individually can be silenced. A dominant image of what “trans-” is can become hypervisible, and persons who don’t meet it correspondingly invisible. As Moreno explains,

In order to understand the consequences of visibility/invisibility, it is useful to highlight the different dimensions of (in)visibility as an analytical category. First, it is possible to distinguish an individual dimension from a collective dimension in this phenomenon. Second (in)visibility can be addressed according to the lived experience of people involved or through cultural representations and the standards of dominant communication, which universalize the opinions of some while excluding those of others (Moreno 2008, 140-141).

In other words, group “outness” might actually present a condition of impossibility for individual “outness” or individual counternarratives to the dominant group narrative. Feminist concerns with life “at the margins” of global politics and with the international arena’s “socially subjugated,” then, need to pay attention to both individual and group visibility, and the politics of genuineness around that visibility. Moreno is also concerned that the general, collective invisibility of trans people and the individual invisibility of trans people reinforce each other - that is, that the lack of recognition of trans as a sex or an experience causes individual trans people to remain “in,” while individual trans people’s remaining “in” contributes to the lack of recognition of trans- as a sex or an experience and transphobic/cissexist behavior (2008, 141). Two questions that are important for the study of global are presented: what are the power relations between individual voices and group voices? And when and how is marginality self-reinforcing?

*Hypervisibility*

 There are those who argue, contrary to claims of “outness,” that the whole debate about “in-ness” and “outness” does not make sense for trans- people, since “trans-” is not something you *are* (and therefore not something you need to come to terms with or tell people that you *are*). Instead, “trans-” is the process of becoming the sex that you *are*; once you become that, you are that, and there is no need to be “out” as trans-. This is where trans- theorizing puts most of its work into thinking about visibility, problematizing the idea of a “true self” to be “out” as. After all, being “out” as trans- may feel awkward to someone who sees “trans- ness” as a process rather than a result. Still, a trans- person who is not “out” might be considered dishonest by persons they are “passing” to. Bettcher notes that the construction of “really an x” “reinscribes the position that genitalia are the essential determinants of sex,” while most trans people relate their experiences as exactly the opposite: that their genitalia are not representative of their “actual” sex (2007, 50). At the same time, “fundamental to transphobic representations of transpeople as deceivers is an appearance-reality contrast between gender presentation and the sexed body” (Bettcher 2007, 48).

In other words, trans- people are often labeled as dishonest if they are not “out” as “trans,” because they are “really a x” but presenting as the “other” sex. This, in Bettcher’s understanding, presents a double bind for trans- people: “disclose ‘who one is’ and come out as a pretender or masquerader, or refuse to disclose (be a deceiver) and run the risk of forced disclosure, the effect of which is exposure as a liar” (Bettcher 2007, 50). In this construction, both being “in” and being “out” render the trans- person dishonest – the “out” trans person is pretending while the “in” trans person is lying.

This creates a politics of hypervisibility of trans- identities. In these terms, “visibility yields a position in which what one is doing is represented as make-believe, pretending, or playing dress up,” while “to opt for invisibility is to remove one’s life from the domain of masquerade into actual reality… [which] generates he effect of revelation, exposure, or hidden truth” (Bettcher 2007, 50). Each begets violence, but is often unrecognized as such.[[10]](#footnote-10) Judith Butler sees it as important to think about:

Why violence against transgender subjects is not recognized as violence, and why this violence is not recognized as violence, and why this violence is sometimes inflicted by the very states that should be offering such subjects protection from violence. (Butler 2004, 207)

Trans- theorists have explained this in terms of the violent enforcement of a settled gender; the “punishment” for the “deceptions” of “in-ness” and “outness” are actually punishments for non-conformity with settled ideas of what ought to be, phrased and understood in terms of dishonesty to hide that it is not honesty, but reality, being policed. That policing takes place by silencing, but also by drawing attention to difference through hypervisibility (Lamble 2009).

 Many of the insights about visibility in the trans- theory could inspire potentially important research directions for the study of global politics. For example, it might be useful to ask what norms we *do not see* being enforced violently, what realities are policed, and whose identities are labeled less valid or genuine by definition. It might be fruitful to theorize the ways in which the public gaze silences or distorts certain people’s voices, and to look at the ways that attention traps certain people as public/publicized representational forces. How does being trapped *in* the public gaze affect certain people at the margins of global politics? How does that relate to being trapped *outside* of the public gaze? Do some people and/or groups experience both simultaneously?

*More In-visibility*

It also might be useful to ask for whom neither “in-ness” nor “outness” are an option; who, in Christine Sylvester’s (2002) terms, is “homeless” in IR, and how that plays out in global politics. As Heyes explains, these conundrums with visibility apply both inside and outside of trans- experiences:

It is both necessary and troubling to seek out a home as a gendered or sexual being: necessary because community, recognition, and stability are essential to human flourishing and political resistance, and troubling because those very practices too often congeal into political identities and group formations that are exclusive or hegemonic (Heyes 2003, 1097)

This realization is important because often, theorists who have talked about homelessness in IR have talked about the opposite (being “homed” or having a “home”) as a positive development, where belonging produces a sense of community. Trans- people often experience the dark side of belonging, however, which is being among the people still excluded. If, in McCloskey’s terms, women and men both have “tribes” to which they belong, some trans- people find themselves belonging to neither, and victimized by the tribal violence of one or the other (or both) because they have remain “homeless.” In other words, the very existence of “homes” is what makes “homelessness” dangerous for trans- people. While (feminist) IR is well-versed in the problems of being homeless while others are “homed,” disciplinarily and in the daily practice of global politics, it is less well-versed in the dangerous of being assigned a “home” that one does not feel like one belongs in, or of being adopted by a particular “home” that brings one not only benefits but also burdens and consequences. Trans- theorizing could be used to illuminate these problematiques, and to set up a serious and complicated dialogue on the question of visibility and placement in global politics as dimensions of traditional “levels of analysis” and “agent-structure” debates

***Transition and Liminality***

Even assuming a clear ability to both recognize and treat fairly potential actors in global politics as objects of study, scholars of IR still struggle with the potential for change in those actors, both in terms of their identities and their relationships. IR as a field that studies global politics has struggled with how (if at all) to account for change. Particularly, critical theorists have accused realist and liberals (particularly those theoretically oriented towards the systemic level) of not being able to account for and/or not being interested in accounting for change (e.g., Checkel 1998). On the other hand, Kenneth Waltz (2000) suggests that we as scholars are witnessing changes *in* the system but not changes *of* the system, so constancy remains more important to study than change.

Still, some theorists have argued that IR needs to account for change in a causal way – how does the international arena change over time? What cycles does it go through (Goldstein 1988)? What are the unique causes of individual wars and conflicts (or lack thereof) (Suganami 2002)? Is the system *still* an anarchy (Waltz 2000)? If it is, how has that anarchy changed? If it is not, what is it now? If IR as a discipline has been uncertain about how to best account for change in global politics, it has also been uncomfortable dealing with questions of liminality and unrest. Liminal states are transitional, uncertain, and unidentifiable, potentially structurally as well as functionally. While some scholars have addressed questions of liminality (e.g., Rumelili 2003; Higgot and Nossal 1997), the discipline has, for the most part, understood change as moving from one state to another, rather than the process of uncertainty in between. When the discipline have thought about process (like democratization), it has often been in terms of approximating the end result, rather than in the period of in-betweenness.

 This is a place where borrowing from trans- theorizing is a helpful intervention. Much of trans- theorizing is about change, and much of the gaze focused on trans- people is related to the process of “transition” from one sex to another. As Krista Scott-Dixon explains, “non-trans observers and clinical practitioners fixate on ‘the transition’ demanding with oblivious gender privilege to *look*, to *know*, and to *judge* the most intimate details and private representations of trans people’s physical selves (2009, 43-44). In other words, not only is the “change” seen as the relevant part of theorizing the trans- experience, the change *is* the trans- experience, and therefore needs to be understood, deconstructed, and examined in intimate detail. As Bettcher laments, “why do only some people have to describe themselves in detail while others do not?” (2007, 53). The answer to Bettcher’s question can be found in the combination of the uncertainty of the observer (what *is* that person?), the assumption that clarity can come from understanding what parts a person has (oh, that person has a penis, therefore, that person is a *man*), and an intolerance for confusion and liminality in our understandings of trans- bodies.

 Therefore, trans- theorizing has prioritized thinking about the meanings and significations of liminality, work which can enhance IR’s thinking about liminality and change in global politics. Christine Sylvester sees that “liminality suggests borderlands that defy fixed homeplaces in feminist epistemology, places of mobility around policed boundaries, places where one’s bag disappears and reappears before moving on” (2002, 255). We can the n think of human interactions in terms of “different subjectivities, different travelling experiences, which we can think of as mobile, rather than fixed, criss-crossing borderlands rather than staying at home” (Sylvester 2002, 255).

What trans- theorists add to this conception of liminality is a reminder that “home” might be as dangerous as the “liminal,” and that there might (like bell hooks (1990) suggests about marginality) be empowerment in embracing liminality.The murky waters of “passing,” “crossing,” and “disidentifying,” (all liminal states) might be safer for some persons and groups in global politics than the certainty of membership, identity, and home that so many IR theorists are interested in locating for global politics’ marginal/liminal participants.

***Crossing through IR***

If IR theory has been accused of being unable to deal with change, it has also been accused of having a flat or static concept of identity, and struggles with the question of whether identities in the international arena are primordial or changing, and how to conceptualize them. In IR theorizing from a number of perspectives, we often have a sense that ‘self’ remains ‘self’ and ‘other’ remains ‘other.’ Often, this is discussed in terms of primordial culture (Huntington 1996) or intransigent conflicts (Jackson 2007). Seeing trans- genders, however, brings this apparently simple relationship between self and other into question and leads to the possibility to question the naturalness of stagnant identification.

 ‘Crossing’ in trans- theorizing is generally used to refer to the process of changing one’s appearance and gender representations. Deidre McCloskey (2000) describes ‘crossing’ as changing tribes – she was once an accepted member of the tribe “men” and behaved in the manner expected of members of that tribe. She then joined the tribe “women” and behaved in the manner expected of members of that tribe. In other places, McCloskey describes crossing in cultural terms (“crossing cultures from male to female is big; it highlights some of the differences between men and women, and some of the similarities too” (2000, xii)) and in psychological terms (as “change, migration, growing up, self-discovery” (2000, xiii)). Roen (2002) describes the act of crossing as a political one, moving from one defined and exclusive group to another.

As one crosses, in trans- theorizing, many trans- people express concern about “passing.”[[11]](#footnote-11) A trans- person is said to have “passed” when the people around them in a given social or professional situation believe that they are of the biological sex which they see themselves as/understand themselves to be/have changed their physical appearance to resemble.[[12]](#footnote-12) A trans- person that may “pass” to some may not “pass” to others, or someone may be able to “pass” in a distant or sterile work environment where they would not be able to “pass” in an intimate setting.[[13]](#footnote-13)

 The idea of changing defined groups is not new in IR; people change religions and state citizenships frequently, even as we think that those matter pretty fundamentally in defining international conflicts. People ‘cross’ sides of wars and conflicts (like those people seeking peace in Israel/Palestine despite their governments’ behaviors, or, more explicitly, Prussia’s changing sides in the Napoleonic Wars). Though IR speaks of it less, people also cross ethnic groups and castes (Dirks 2001). For example, some of the leading ‘Hutu’ perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide had been born to Tutsi parents, but become accepted into the ‘tribe’ of Hutus, even when acceptance or rejection was a question of life or death (e.g., Landesman 2002). At the same time, IR often cannot account for the process, logic, or consequences of these crossings between seemingly un-crossable divides.

While we assume that ethnic group or national group membership is an ontological fact that one simply *is*, rather than something flexible, the world out there does not reflect such a simple construction. Understanding that people ‘cross’ even the deepest and most clearly understood of boundaries in social and political life (and often ‘pass’ as crossers) makes it important to rethink what those boundaries mean, both to ‘crossers’ and more generally. While boundaries, borders, and expected social mores are clearly salient, and often key to the world’s most brutal conflicts, they are also porous, and understanding the lives and actions of those who cross them might help us understand their pores.

 A simple example is women crossing the gender divide in conflicts. Stories of women “passing” as men are common throughout history for women interested in being a part of military forces or state leadership. Historic and mythic figures (like Joan of Arc Pope Joan, and Mulan) posed as men to get around prohibitions against women fighters and women leaders along with many other women who remain nameless and faceless in history, including in the United States Civil War (Blanton and Cook 2002), in the Napoleanic Wars (Wilson 2007), in the Crusades (Vining and Hacker 2001), the Trojan War (Spear 1993) and other conflicts. Very often, this “passing” is described as heroic historically but met with substantial disapproval in immediate reactions.

 Thinking about “crossing” might help us understand how states and other actors in the global political arena experience ontological change from one thing to another, and what can be gained and lost in the process. Thinking about “passing” while crossing or once crossed might help us understand how to identify and deal with the unseen in global politics. For example, spies rely on “crossing” national and/or ethnic groups and then “passing” as a member of the group that they are charged with getting to know. Many military maneuvers are built on “crossing” into enemy social and political life and “passing” either as local or as part of the surrounding landscape. These and other instances of “passing” suggest that we think about what passing means for how we understand global politics. Particularly, useful questions to ask include what trans people “passing” means for the meaning of sex and gender, what the ability to “pass” means for the stability of the categories we take for granted in our analysis of global politics, and if (and if so where) more subtle “passing” takes place in the relationships between states, nations, and ethnic groups.

***Disidentification and IR***

As mentioned above, IR has struggled with what Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney call “the problem of difference” (2004). The question of the role difference plays in global political interactions has garnered a fair amount of attention in the discipline in recent decades. For example, Peter Katzenstein (1996) collected the ideas of a number of scholars who argued that culture plays a definitive role in national security identity and strategizing. Mark Salter (2002) has argued that perceived civilization and perceived barbarity impact the likelihood of conflicts and the nature of them. In much more rudimentary forms which garnered more attention, Samuel Huntington (1996) and Francis Fukuyama (1992) argued that culture and identity were major faultllines in international interactions. Postcolonial scholars (Bhabha 1994; Muppidi 2006) have argued that the continued power of colonial dynamics in global politics is not only defining but ultimately destabilizing. Scholars interested in religion and politics (Fox 2001; Dark 2000) have argued that religious difference is a crucial determinant of conflictual relations in global politics. Scholars have also pointed out that differences in regime type (Russett 1994), governance values (Russett and Maoz 1993), economic system (Mousseau 2010), and values related to women’s rights (Hudson et al 2009; Caprioli 2000). Even post-colonial feminists have argued that the differences among feminists can translate into conflict and oppression (e.g., Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Mohanty 1988; 2003).

 These IR theorists who think about difference deal with it in different ways. IR theorists have dealt with difference by trying to understand it (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004), emphasizing it (Huntington 1996), downplaying it (Booth 2005), or trying to overcome it (Ruane and Todd 2005). Some scholars have noted that difference can be leveraged counterproductively in global politics. As Inayatullah and Blaney have noted, “knowledge of the other, inflected by the equation of difference and inferiority, becomes a means for the physical destruction, enslavement, or cruel exploitation of the other” (2004, 2, 11). While difference in global politics may be incendiary and it may be undertheorized or mistheorized in IR, trans- theorizing about disidentification might offer another path.

Disidentification (derived from but separate from the psychological use of the term in the 1960s and 1970s) in trans- theorizing plays two roles: discussion of the irritation of feminist disidentification with trans- bodies (why does feminism eschew trans- persons when an affinity seems natural?), and discussion of trans- people’s disidentification with their assigned biological sex (what does it mean for identity that people can reject “their” sex?). The lesson from the first discussion for IR might be tolerance. As Heyes explains:

Much that has been written about trans people by non-trans feminists has not only been hostile but has also taken an explicit *dis*identification with transsexuals’ experiences as its critical standpoint. This move runs counter to familiar feminist political commitments to respecting what the marginalized say about themselves and seems to ignore the risks of orientalism, (Heyes 2003, 1096)

The second sort of disidentification discussed in trans- theory, of trans- disidentification with assigned biological sex and corresponding social genders, might be more interesting for the study of global politics. First, it suggests that, contrary to the debate about culture and identity in IR, the question of whether identity is primordial and fixed (Woodward 1997) is not a yes/no question, and can be answered with hybridity (Bhabha 1994). Many trans- people see their gender identity as primordial/fixed while their sex identity needs to be changed to reach accord with their gender identity. Others see their sex identity as primordial/fixed but not represented in their physical being. Still others see their sex identity and their gender identity as both fluid and flexible. Asking when people *disidentify* with their assigned or primordial states, nations, ethnic groups, and genders may be a more productive way to get at the question of conflict and difference in global politics generally and the question of intransigent conflict specifically. Also, asking when people *are disidentified* from their primordial groups, either by explicit rejection or by “the experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under as sign to which one does and does not belong” (Munoz 1999, 12, citing Butler 1993) might help us to understand both cultural conflict and individual violence in global politics.

 Perhaps disidentification as an action is interesting, but so is disidentification as a strategy. As Munoz explains, “to disidentify is to read oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not cultural coded to ‘connect’ with the disidentifying subject (1999, 12). In other words, the process of disidentifying is the process of divorcing one’s perception of self from both in-group and out-group narratives of belonging and identification in sociocultural contexts, asking “what would I be were I not situated in a particular context?” While feminist theorizing has shown the risk of decontextualizing scholarly work and political perspective, especially for the purpose of purporting objectivity, the trans scholarship suggests a different purpose for disidentification both as a thought experiment and an event and/or series of events. Munoz notes that “disidentificatory performances …circulate in subcultural circuits and strive to envision and activate new social relations …[which] would be the blueprint for minoritarian counterpublic spheres” (1999, 5). Two important elements of this idea stand out: first, that the public/private dichotomy is unrepresentative of the lived experiences of trans people, who often experience a “counterpublic” sphere where political and social interaction takes place, but does not mirror the hegemonic public sphere. Second, disidentification changes social relations. In these terms, it is not ignoring context in the ways that we have come to think about it in IR (as ignorance of contingency, power, and interaction), but instead denying context the power to dictate how we interact, such that “disidentification is … the survival strategies that minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform” (Munoz 1999, 4).

It is possible, then, to think of disidentification as a potential (theoretical and empirical) tool to diffuse conflicts and synthesize among differences. In theoretical terms, feminists have argued that knowledge is always perspectival and always political, and cannot be divorced from the knower’s subjectivities (e.g., Tickner 1988). They have noted that recognizing the perspectival and political nature of knowledge means that feminists should engage in dialogue and empathetic cooperation with “the other” to try to see and/or feel the perspective of others (e.g., Sylvester 2000; Citation to author removed; Confortini 2010). Intentional disidentification with one’s own perspective and looking for the alterity in self can broaden our theoretical viewpoints as students of global politics. Beyond theoretical synthesis, however, it is possible that strategic disidentification might be useful as a tool of conflict resolution in the policy world, useful as one of many potential tools to reconcile interests that appear to be diametrically opposed.

**Conclusion: Looking Crossways**

Catherine MacKinnon once argued that “inequality comes first; differences come after. Inequality is substantive and identifies a disparity; difference is abstract and falsely symmetrical” (1987, 8). In other words, MacKinnon was arguing that difference only become recognizable/significant to the extent that inequality is distributed along it. There are many places where we do not yet fully understand how difference works in global politics, and even more where we do not yet fully grasp how it maps onto inequality – yet, some argue, these dimensions are the essence of understanding global politics and should be the priorities of scholars in the field of IR.

This article works to establish the initial plausibility of a new approach to studying difference by arguing that (feminist) IR should come to value trans- gender theorizing, not only towards the end of “making the world safe and just for people of all genders and sexualities” (Serrano 2007, 358) but also towards the end of better explaining and understanding global politics generally. This article does not mean to argue that trans- gender studies provides *the way* to think about global politics; or even *the direction* feminist work in IR needs to take to approach global politics. Instead, through looking at global politics from a trans- feminist perspective, I am interested in exploring the ways the concepts of trans- theorizing might help us understand IR, and the ways that trans- theorizing might help us better understand existing theories and practices of global politics.

Trans- theorizing is likely to be especially useful to theorizing global politics to the exent that it shows “that basic conceptualizations - ways of opposing home and the economy, the political and personal, or system and lifeworld – presuppose and reinforce” masculine, heterosexual, cissexual norms. Therefore, at the very least, as IR has come to recognize privileges associated with gender, race, class, and nationality; trans- theorizing suggests IR theorists look further. Not only is “cisgender” privilege an important axis of privilege to recognize (even as the “other” to it, trans people, are often invisible), it also begs the question of what other privileges in the theory and practice of global politics are assumed to be so normal that they are invisible. It then behooves IR theorists to ask what other social, political, or cultural attributes or characteristics are *so* normalized that we do not even see when the alternative to them is being oppressed or silenced.

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1. Susan Stryker (2008) uses the term “homonormative” to describe the normalization of homosexuality into heterosexualized lifestyles, values, and assumptions [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I use the term trans- throughout most of this article to denote not having chosen between the terms transgender and transsexual and their (potentially) different connotations. In this parlance, sometimes the term “transgender” can be distinguished from the term “transsexual” much like the term “gender” can be distinguished from the term “sex.” In Bettcher’s understanding, “transsexual ma be used to refer to individuals who use hormonal and/or surgical technologies to alter their body in ways that may be construed as at odds with the sex assignment at birth or which may not be readily intelligible in terms of traditional conceptions of sexed bodies (2006, 46). Other theorists, like Susan Stryker or Riki Anne Wichins, reject the reification of biology involved in separating the terms “transsexual” and “transgender” and use the word “transgender” more inclusively. Still others are interested in moving away from labels for alternate genders and sexualities and into a world where they do not need to be described or specified. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These terms, however, are controversial, because many people argue that they did not “transform” from one sex to another, but were always a particular sex and needing their body to conform to that self-identification. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. An “FTM” trans- teenager who was raped and murdered in transphobic violence, and became the subject of the movie *Boys Don’t Cry* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. An “MTF” trans- teenager who was raped and murdered in transphobic violence after being “outed” at a party [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As Shotwell and Sangray explain, “this neologism helps us recognize normative gender privilege – or, at least, …it is a useful, short term for the experience of feeling at home in one’s assigned gender (2009, 67). Still, some argue that these terms are either trivial or themselves problematic. As Shotwell and Sangray note, some people have argued that “trans communities, through the use of the term *cisgender*, oppress women” (2009, 67). Others see these terms as problematic because they erase differences *within* categories rather than holding scholars and actors accountable for dealing with and understanding difference in complicated ways. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sheila Jeffreys (2002) once characterized transsexualism as an effort to eschew gender hierarchy individually without dealing with it collectively, claiming that “FTM transsexualism is a problem for all women who want to change the power relations of male dominance rather than engage in surgical social climbing.” Other feminists have also argued that “men” posing as “women” in “women’s” gyms, women’s showers, and other “safe” spaces for women increase both the actual and perceived threat of sexual violence and make women’s lives materially worse for it. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Vivian Namaste, for example, contends that Judith Butler’s characterization as gender as performative (derived from the existence of a category of “trans” which Butler understands as clearly performed) is beneficial to feminists interested in helping women break out of the cages of gender expectations of behavior based on biological sex, but does not resonate with many trans- people who see their “sex” as primordial (see Stryker 2006, 10, 1). Namaste argues: “Given that the field of Anglo-American feminist theory has relied on transsexual women to ask theoretical questions since the early 1990s, it is perhaps appropriate at this point in history to evaluate the extent to which transsexual women themselves have been served by such an academic feminist project (2009, 12). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This work has little in common except the insistence on taking the subject of global politics *as embodied* seriously [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This double-bind plays out in stories of violence against trans people on a regular basis. For example, Gwen Araujo, an American trans (MTF, pre-operative) teenager was killed by four men, two of whom she had been sexually intimate with, who beat her to death after discovering that she was “really male.” At their trial, her killers suggested that she might have deserved the violence for her deception, and used a “trans panic” defense, “using allegations of ‘sexual deception’ as a main tactic in his defense [for murder]” (Bettcher 2007, 44). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Passing is an idea that is not without controversy in trans communities or outside of them. In the trans- communities, some people see passing as how life should be – they *are* a (insert sex here), they look like one, and people believe they are one – life is normal, and as it should be. In other trans- discourses, “passing is portrayed as complicit with normative gendering and therefore as contrary to the gender-transgressive ethic of transgender politics” (Roen 2002, 501). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In other words, an “FTM” trans person has “passed” when people believe “he” is a “man” at work, in a social setting, on the street, or in a romantic setting. An “MTF” trans person similarly has passed when people believe “she” is a “woman” in her daily life. As Bettcher notes, “passability as non-trans may not always be an all or nothing affair” (Bettcher 2007, 52). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sometimes, passing is talked about as a lifestyle (no one would know that person is trans-), and sometimes it is talked about as an event (that person passed at a party last night). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)