


Trans Women of Color

Transphobia, Racism, Passing Politics, and the Importance of Peer-Support

Social Issue Research Project
Spring 2014

ETHS 2410
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Transgender: (*trans*) an umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

- Cisgender:** (*Cis*) A cisgender person is someone who identifies as the gender/sex they were assigned at birth. For example, your birth certificate says female, and you identify as a female woman.
- Transphobia:** also called cissexism, the belief and treatment of transgender people as inferior to non-trans people.
- TWOC:** trans woman (women) of color
- “Passing”:** In the trans community, to pass is to be perceived as the gender you identify as. It’s typically, but not always, used in the context of a trans person discussing their experience in the public world
- Gender Confirmation Surgery:** a term for the surgical procedures by which a person's physical appearance and function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble that of the other sex.

A Few Definitions:

My Social Issue:

The Intersectionality of Gender, Sexuality and Race

INTERSECTIONALITY is a term that was coined by (awesome black feminist) Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It is the view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity.

We must look at the intersecting factors of gender, race, sexuality, ability, class, and more when examining oppression and privilege.

As a queer woman, with many transgender friends, I am particularly interested in the intersection of gender identity and race.

Knowing that trans women of color are among the most oppressed, with the highest rates of violence, I decided to focus on this segment of the African-American population

Scholarly Research Articles

- **On Building A Trans-Inclusive Feminist Movement**

By Laura Kacere, Every Day Feminism February, 2014

- **Whose Feminism Is It Anyway? The Unspoken Racism of the Trans-Inclusive Debate**

By Emily Koyama, The Transgender Studies Reader, 2006

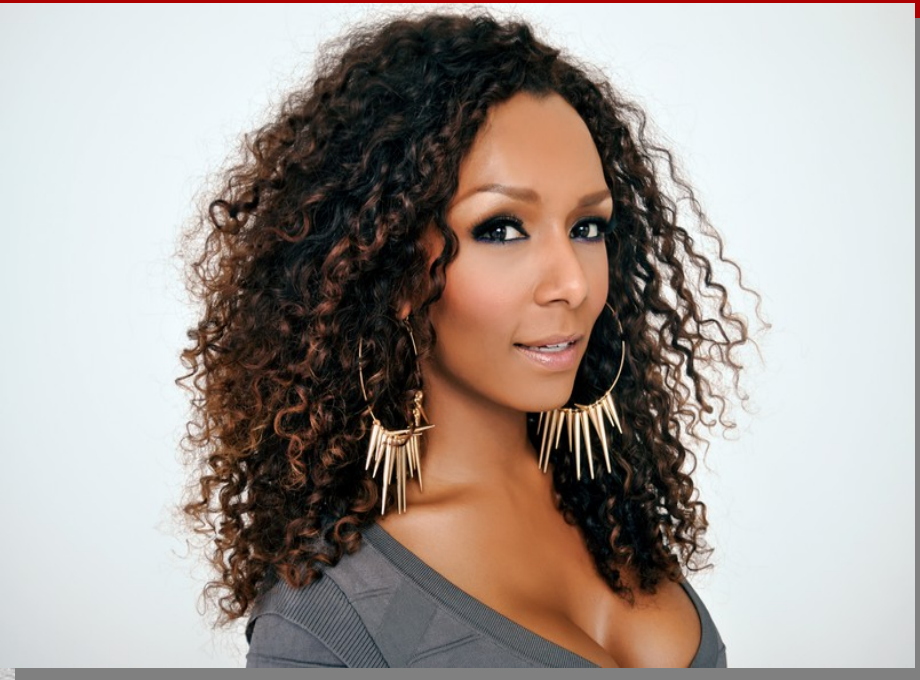
- **Transgender Theory and Embodiment, The Risk of Racial Marginalization**

By Katrina Roen, The Transgender Studies Reader, 2006

- Feminism and the LGB community has a history of exclusion of trans women (especially trans women of color)
- It is easy to forget that even progressive movements can be marginalizing to minority groups, and that they are capable of perpetuating oppression.
- White queers, and white trans people, cannot equate their struggles with queer/trans people of color. History matters; current racism and oppression matters.
- The medicalization of transgender, by requiring surgery and hormones in order to "pass" as "real women" leads to less acceptance of poor trans women and TWOC.
- An individual's cultural and gender identities are intrinsically connected. The gender binary, white-washing, and colonialism are linked on a broad scale.
- Trans people of color need their own specific services. They cannot be lumped in with the white queer and trans people.
- The unique influences of racism must be addressed, and their connection to homophobia and transphobia must be acknowledged

Scholarly Research:

Main Points



Janet Mock is a trans woman, an advocate and the New York Times bestselling author of *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*.

She launched #GirlsLikeUs, a movement that encourages trans women to live visibly.

She currently writes and speaks about her experience of living intersecting identities.

Her book discussed the importance of her relationship with other TWOC, as well as the way she has benefited from being able to “pass” well.

My intervention was inspired by her book, her website, her hashtag, and her media interviews.

Intervention Inspiration: Janet Mock

Intervention Proposal:

- What is it?

a peer-to-peer support network

Black trans women have specific needs when it comes to "passing", so my intervention would create a way to connect TWOC so they can share hair and makeup ideas, products, clothes, and information about doctors, hormones, mental health, and other resources.

- Who would be involved/participating?

I plan to work with Equality Utah, and/or the Utah Pride Center to create a program to connect trans women of color to each other.

Ideally, it would involve the local Utah community of TWOC, but an online community could reach others farther away if necessary

Intervention Proposal:

- **What is the Goal?**

To empower black trans women, and to help them “pass” as well as possible. Passing helps decrease violence among trans women of color, and makes employment and housing much more accessible and reliable.

To improve the quality of life for TWOC by improving their access to clothing, cosmetics, hair products, and even medical and mental health services.

- **How much would it cost?**

It should not cost anything to the organization, all that would be required is a space (either in the building or online.)

The cost will also be minimal to the participants (only shipping if an online exchange)

Potential Resistance to Intervention:

- What resistance might be encountered?

Ironically, a significant amount of resistance could occur within liberal, “progressive” communities:

- Within the LGBTQ community

Historically, white queers have excluded and oppressed anyone who does not fit an “acceptable” image; including people of color, trans people, disabled people, and others.

(For example, the HRC is an extremely transphobic “LGBT” organization)

They could resist by not allowing a space, not getting on board with the idea, or not promoting the program.

- Within feminist community

Feminists also have a history of exclusion similar to the LGBTQ community

With the help of the feminists this program could thrive, but it may take some convincing to get them on board

Potential Support for Intervention:

- **Within the LGBTQ community-** Not all leaders of the queer community are transphobic, and the Utah Pride Center has tentatively agreed to help organize and support a program.

If there are not enough people locally to sustain the peer-to-peer network, they will at least advertise an online community program.

- **Within the feminist community-** There is an entire branch of feminism dedicated to addressing the overlapping oppressions facing women, called **Intersectional Feminism**. These feminists acknowledge the complicated issues facing trans women of color, and will probably be on board to support a specific program to meet those needs. I am counting on the feminist community for marketing.
 - **Discuss Interview-** I interviewed a young black trans woman in New York, who has participated in a peer-to-peer makeup and clothing exchange, much to her benefit. She provided ideas and support, and connected me to other online networks for inspiration.
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Impact of Intervention:

- **Goals and Lasting Impact**

- Increase self esteem and decrease dysphoria in trans women
- Help trans women of color to “pass”, therefore decreasing their risk of murder, violence, suicide, homelessness, and unemployment
- Increase access to resources like doctors, hormones, and mental health services via peer referral
- Provide a connection to fellow TWOC, emotional support

- **Why is this important to the African-American Community?**

- 41% of TWOC have been homeless in their lives
 - More than 50% of TWOC attempt suicide
 - TWOC have a ONE IN EIGHT chance of being murdered; while white, cisgender people have a 1 in 18,000 chance
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- ***“...For most trans youth, many are often the only trans person in a school or community, and most likely, when seeking support, they are the only trans person in LGBTQ spaces. To make matters worse, these support spaces often only address sexual orientation rather than a young person’s gender identity, despite the all-encompassing acronym. Though trans youth seek community with cis gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer teens, they may have to educate their cis peers about what it means to be trans.”***

The Importance of Peer-To-Peer Support

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