Title of Proposal: The Epistemology of Transgender Political Resistance: Embodied Experience and the Practices of Everyday Life

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Abstract: Political resistance is often theorized through the lens of institutions: the courts, the ballot, and mass protests. Thus, literatures on resistance tend to avoid questions of embodiment and the experiences of everyday life in favor of macro-level cultural interpretations of policy-related ends. This has become particularly true of scholarship on trans people—and even of the popular media that reports on them, as well as the activist organizations that conduct advocacy on their behalf. In many instances, representations of trans peoples’ capacities as knowers, speakers, and agents are limited by already known classifications and already known goals. This limited view creates the conditions for epistemic injustice, limiting their capacities as understood political agents. Such discursive formulas create trans subjects whose politics are completely misunderstood, and whose goals are often blurred by the ally narrative of LGB(T). My work will provide a more holistic epistemology of transgender, through reading texts that attempt to represent both their political, legal, and social realities—asking what embodied aspects are missing, and how those lacunae constitute trans-specific epistemic injustices.
Introduction: Research Objective

In the discipline of political science, the most legible forms of political resistance are those explicitly directed toward the state: legislatures, courts, and policymaking in executive authorities. Scholarship on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activism and social movements is no exception. Because much of the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and (more recently) transgender equality in the United States has pursued institutional goals in seeking the equal protection of the law under the United States Constitution, that field of vision has generated a boon of research on how sexual communities successfully enacted political resistance (Muciaroni 2011; Reynolds 2013). However, within the ambit of LGBT identities, not all social agents’ politics are limited to these sorts of engagements. By focusing on voters, litigants, and organized protest, the discipline tends to overlook everyday embodied politics. Because trans people are more likely to be among the most marginalized of those falling under this umbrella and because many trans people challenge disciplinary and regulatory norms outside of traditional political processes, their forms of resistance are among the most erased (see Spade 2011; for examples particular to political science, see Egan 2012 and Gates 2012).

With the exception of those few occupying relatively privileged social locations, most trans people face varying degrees of social hostility as their bodies express gender/sex in non-normative ways. Trans people are targets of state-based violence through discriminatory criminal justice policies and the obstacles put in place to change sex markers on official government documents. Trans folks are also subject to normalizing violence by non-state actors, including harassment and assault. As a result, trans people have developed complex algorithms for deciding in these everyday moments when and how to resist, and what form that resistance will take. Because these quotidian strategies for resisting different forms of violence cannot be
reduced to the actionable items of state-directed mobilization of the broader LGBT community, they remain invisible outside of trans communities.

The failure to recognize the capacities of certain social agents—trans people of color, those who are homeless, those without access to transition-related care—as credible speakers and producers of knowledge is a form of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; more recently Medina 2012). This injustice is compounded when social scientists, popular media, and LGB(T) advocates directing their action at state institutions become the conveyers of marginalized trans people’s lived experiences and political desires. By comparing advocacy accounts that purport to represent trans people experiences with testimonies of trans people in various forums I hope to describe the distinct epistemic practices and political resistances that have emerged within these transgender networks and communities that have routinely been missed. My project in this dissertation is to demonstrate that quotidian forms of everyday resistance to gender norms—often cast as apolitical—do matter.

By focusing on this marginalized community (especially those further marginalized by race, class, and ethnicity) whose politics have been historically under-represented and misunderstood, this work will contribute to the wider literature on the nature of the political. It will make visible to social scientists an array of localized political practices and skills developed in response to distinctive forms of discrimination. It will encourage those in the mainstream of political science that they move beyond institutional approaches to understand the full panoply of politics organized around (trans)gender. It will expand upon the theoretical limits of the epistemologies of embodiment with regard to transgender experiences and encourage others to move beyond or to complicate standpoint feminism in order to understand how gender construction might be constitutively central to epistemologies of resistance and justice.
Theoretical Framework and Substantive Background:

The following sections provide an account of embodied transsexual history that casts light on the agential aspects of trans subjects’ lives. In explaining embodiment, I turn to a discussion of Mahmood (2005), who asserts that embodiment is an ongoing set of performative acts—constitutive of identity. Thus, my assertion will likewise be that embodiment is a site of self-knowledge and truth, and thus a source of epistemic agency. I will then discuss how embodiment and epistemic agency are overlooked in much of the scholarship on new social movements, especially the study of groups challenging the naturalization of gender (and sex) in the binary gender system. I argue that when these literatures classify social agents in their collective action, they sap the epistemic agency of the individual. It ends with a discussion of how theorists and scholars can reassert the epistemic agencies of the subjects they study—reasserting the importance of embodiment and the epistemic practices that constitute my discussion of epistemic injustice.

Transgender History and Gender Normativity

Meyerowitz’s (2002) seminal history of transsexualism (a term she adopts throughout the text for historical purposes) in the United States situates the rise of transsexual visibility—and sets the groundwork for transgender activism and visibility—with the breaking news of Christine Jorgenson. Jorgenson, a former soldier who underwent sexual reassignment surgery in Europe, changed the narrative on the irrevocability and fixity of sex and gender. A media sensation, Jorgenson’s story spotlighted the new ways in which medical techniques and discourses could shape the destinies of trans people. This sensational representation had the unfortunate effect of foreclosing the possibility for some trans people to speak in their own terms.

Of course, some semblance of being “trans” as we might call it today persisted well before the 50s (Stryker 2008). Crossdressing, transvestism, and other unruly gender transgressive
practices drew the earliest sketches of trans being. It wasn’t until the twentieth century, however, that medical discourses “made real” these otherwise hidden or subaltern trans practices. Medical “treatments” for those wishing to undergo the extensive bodily modifications needed to change sex were made more regularly available. However, reactions to the mid-twentieth century media coverage of Jorgenson’s personal life as a male-to-female transsexual posed difficulties for emerging transsexual identifications. What language does one use to describe the condition in which one feels that their bodies are “not the right fit”? Exactly how does one who identifies as belonging to this category of transsexual receive the care they need—in a sense, does one have to be pathologized in order to secure the bodily comfort and self-determination that each person strives for in American liberal society?

Indeed, the scientific discipline of endocrinology, emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century, set the scientific validity of such pursuits, and placed that framework squarely in the hands of doctors and medical facilities. Science put a label, transsexualism, on the map for public discourse. And that discourse, framed mainly through the language of pathology, named a condition to be overcome, but not an identity. It suggested a non-agential psychological disjunction from standard gender/sex norms. That their pathology could, in one sense, be fixed completely obviated discussions of the agency of the transsexuals themselves. And the feminist movement of the 1970s took that narrative to the extreme (see Raymond 1979). Radical feminists saw sexual reassignments of male-to-female as a patriarchal cooptation of womanhood. On that view, only “biological” women could be “true” women and feel the oppressive sting of male dominance. Their critiques also suggested that female-to-male transsexuals were merely wishing to escape that self-same patriarchal gender-binary, mutilating their feminine bodies in the process.
In Meyerowitz’s telling, these transsexual people were far from mere intermediaries of the gender normative structures and medical discourses that made so much of their daily epistemic and cognitive habits. She writes of individuals learning the necessary scripts to get exactly those medical practices done in order to live a life that was self-determined and fully agential. Of course, this move itself reasserted the medical establishment’s role as gatekeepers of what constituted the “best treatment” for transsexuals—whether psychological or purely physiological treatments should go hand in hand, or if one were superior. Whether transsexuals sought relief from, the total abolition of, or mere comportment to the genders/sex binary was of little consequence for them. And in fact, that very narrative, one that positions trans people as immediate revolutionaries against the gender spectrum, misrepresents the histories of transsexuals and the networks they utilized to achieve their own bodily identity.

Trans people in a post-Jorgenson world still face similar mis-readings, mis-genderings, and misunderstood narratives as to what constitutes their histories, their identities, and their politics. Indeed, in earlier editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) history, Gender Identity Disorder (GID) pathologized transsexuality. Although the most current DSM-V (2012) has replaced GID with Gender Dysphoria, transsexuality remains within the discomforting realm of medical discipline as a diagnosis. As a pathologized other, trans people face continued harassment, dispossession from their homes as youth, and homelessness. Many have transitioned, in one sense, through surgical intervention; others consider themselves transitioned without surgeries or hormonal treatments.

From this brief re-telling of trans history, trans people have had to respond to frequent material dispossession as well as discriminatory targeting through medical, political, and social discourses. Yet, social agents in their everyday lives respond to hegemonic normative structures
in peculiar ways. As Meyeorwitz points out, trans women were able to obtain the treatments they needed by knowing the medial “script.” In a post-Jorgenson world in which trans people continue to make their own histories and construe their own gender/sex discourses in agential ways, it is important to resituate the emphasis of trans narratives back into one of epistemic agency. To further highlight and perhaps broaden this point, I take Saba Mahmood’s (2005) ethnography of Muslim women of the Mosque-Piety movement in Cairo as instructive. She writes of how her Egyptian informants utilized the hegemonic gender and theological relations to define their own identity and agency. She contends that most resistance discourses foreclose adequate discussions of the lived and daily practices of social agents, especially those historically “othered” by Western scholarship, as fully agential. Here, Mahmood rightfully poses the challenge of thinking about embodiment as practice. The body, as a site of personal (and thus agential) construction, is the mediator of norms that are in the subject’s possession. Analysis of embodiment, agency, and people, for her, must entail an epistemological account of how subjects understand norms in their own terms and, in turn, perform them in their own terms as well.

Mahmood answers that all subjects have the capacities to act in relationally agential ways. One of her informants, for example, declares that the wearing of the veil is a symbol of Islamic values of feminine modesty. The continued wearing of the veil becomes habitual, a manifestation of epistemic agency. In other words, the women do not see the veil as mere subordination to hegemonic power, but as the reclamation of agency within a religion they are also reclaiming as their own. The women of the movement work through networks and associations in order to develop what it means (again, in their own terms) what modesty and femininity look like within the diversity of Islam. Mahmood, in the final analysis, argues that politics becomes embodied ethics and action.
Likewise, my work contends that transgender practices are embodied and create varying political capacities to take action within gender normative structures. Although every person exists within gender-normative structures, the question concerning trans epistemologies would be to interrogate how trans people of varying social positions within these structures engage, politicize, and enact (in their own terms) that hegemonic gender framework. For example, trans people must contend with responses to recent community practices that seek to reassert trans identity along the gender identity spectrum through language (often construed as one between cis- and trans-). As a number of trans-inclusive feminist blogs ironically assert in a recent post (“The New ‘C’ Word” 2014), trans people are frequently murdered and dispossessed by virtue of being “outed” as trans, yet cisgender activists are still complaining that the word “cis-” is derogatory. In this way, dominant groups “take up space” in the larger discussion of trans epistemic agency by discrediting the very language trans people use to describe their social world.

Political Movements, Identities, and Lived Experience

Classic models of social movements have clearly defined the individual psychic states, collective group goals, and carefully classified social phenomena. The rationalist model, most often used in political science, emphasizes the utility maximizing conditions that impose disincentives on individual agents in collective action (Olson 1965). The pluralist model, on the other hand, stresses socio-economic strains and a Madisonian tendency toward faction (Truman 1981). Other models of social movements, while keeping intact the economic and pluralistic attitudes of previous literatures, underscore the importance of movement resources, broad socio-economic processes, psychological or cognitive states, and organizational strength (McAdam 1999; Tilly and Tarrow 2006). This scholarship posited movements as tactical and strategic on
the part of individual members, and these notions still run through most analyses in political science.

The logical flow that underlies much of the problematic aspects of political science theories of movements tend to follow: (1) changes in the socio-economic status quo go on to (2) affect certain members of society, producing psychological states (animus, dissonance, social dislocation), the (3) produce the conditions for a social movement. The fundamental flaw with this logical progression, according to Jasper (1999) is the supposition that social movements are the product of individual psychic states, and not that of a consideration that social actors are in fact embedded within webs of association and emotional meaning (see also Goodwin 1996; Jasper and Goodwin 1998).

Instead, Jasper asserts that social movements are a result of collective attribution to a given cause and, as a result, must be understood through recourse to how these collective causes are calibrated within distinctively discursive and emotional ways of understanding movement dynamics. How a movement posits itself in the social world, the extent to which it is framed in the media, as well as the discursive fields in which the movement emerges (for instance, among spectators at protests or those viewers of protests at home) must have equal bearing on what accounts for the movement’s mechanics (see also Gould 2009).

Following these methodological suggestions, a range of new social movement literatures emphasizes the importance of the contentiousness and internal dynamics of social movements (Tilly and Tarrow 2006). In order to account for these dynamics, they adopt analyses of networks, discourses, framing, and re-emphasize the dualistic concept of culture—whereby culture is defined both as an exogenous quality outside of social agents and one that is internalized and mediated through an agent’s biography (Jasper 1999; Hardy and Philips 2004;
Snow 2007; Mische 2003). However, activists still stand in for, and thus represent, every member of that aggrieved group.

This shift toward incorporating emotion, culture, and discourse in the study of such movements has encouraged more local accounts of meaning and identity attribution among movement members (Jasper 1999; Gould 2009). However, political science literatures have continued to highlight the importance of institutional processes. The courtroom strategies of LGB rights movements have more often than not played a central role in this scholarship. Work tends to discuss the growing notions of a sense of shared fate amongst LGB(T) constituents as a result of marriage equality (Egan 2012; Varnell 1995). Before the marriage equality movement became mainstream, Hertzog (1996) first emphasized the growth of LGB voting blocs and shared consciousness as political agents. Other legal scholars like Ball and Bronski (2011), too, have emphasized the use of courtroom strategies in the movement toward reaching equality for LGB(T) people, and the ways in which their status as an aggrieved community explains the litigiousness of that group.

Of course this scholarship does not indicate that trans people are fully excluded from the mainstream movement and the intellectual work that describes it. Indeed, many mainstream groups focused on litigation and legislation have taken up the trans community’s needs for nondiscrimination in the workplace (such as their active role in seeing the Employment Nondiscrimination Act [ENDA] being legislated). I argue, however, that their inclusion tends to eliminate much of the cultural complexity of trans embodiment. Adopting the litigation strategies of LGB groups, or being included within those self-same groups for the purposes of “shared fate” narratives, necessarily entails finding “ideal clients” whose legal injuries will most likely provoke institutional change (Galanter 1995 speculates on this in his class-based critique of
litigation; see also Halley 1998 for her discussion of “imitating” legal strategies of the Civil Rights movements in defining the legal injuries of gays and lesbians). This strategy markedly excludes the poor, the homeless, the already incarcerated, or those who do not have access to transition-related care. The legal strategies themselves often miss the embodiment and knowledge claims trans people regularly make in their communities, and until recently, in the larger public sphere.

**Classifications and their Effects**

The classifications that are needed to carry out studies of social movements and politics are not inert. They do not simply translate; they transform and interact with the subjects they seek to represent. The study of “social kinds” has often tried to emulate the study of natural kinds. In that endeavor, scholars have forgotten that humans are not quarks, or atoms. Social kinds as a term comes from Hacking’s (1999) work on social construction, defined as any constructed definition on individual or groups within the social world. Humans may, and often times do, defy the social kinds used to describe them in the world scholarship has constructed for them. Is there a fixed and ideal type of gay man, or lesbian woman, or bisexual, or transgender, or intersex person? Or, is there a “looping effect” in which the social kinds interact with the social agents that describe them, altering their behaviors (Hacking 1999)? For example, in Meyerowitz’s study, transsexual women *performed* the scripts expected of them by the gatekeepers to medical transition. Adhering to the parameters described in the diagnosis confirmed the medical model’s construction of the classification. Finally, they may also feel interpolated by a social category, and seek to stay within its limits. Social agents and networks construct their own realities from the pieces of discursive material around them. This constructed meaning, often made through appropriated language and mediated discourse, is what Coulon calls indexicality (1995). The question is, however, what politics do they take up when social
scientists and activists aren’t looking? If we are take embodiment and epistemic agency seriously, subjects must be able to discuss their practices in their own terms (Mahmood 2005).

Borrowing from ethnomethodology, I suggest that trans groups have developed particular ways of dealing with the problems of dislocation, poverty, police targeting, violence, and general discrimination that are reflected in their daily practices, language, and extended networks. Thus, what observers might take to be trivial, mere reactions to discourse (the wearing of a hat to cover one’s hair on a trip to the grocery store; a pair of baggy jeans that covers an otherwise feminine bodily form; the particular decision to wear cosmetics on a particular day to a particular location) are actually expressive forms of agency and self-knowledge—in general, the very bodies of trans and queer subjects become sites of politics and new political understandings (see also Alcoff 1993; Haraway 1991). Although every person is inscribed within the context-specific normative framework of gender, it is especially important to highlight that trans is an identity that is being constantly enacted, materially performed, and recomposed (Butler 1990).

If trans subjects are treated through the lens of pure classification, ignoring their embodied politics, epistemic practices, and modes of gender enactment, then literatures, authors, speakers, and representatives engage in the act of epistemic injustice. Overcoming ideal types and moving toward the notion that social kinds are fluid and interactive open the possibility of scholarship that speaks with, not merely for, the trans community.

*Truth in Representation: Between Lived Experience and Discourse*

There is a gap between lived experience and discourse. My contention is that this gap is a non-trivial matter in the social sciences. For anthropologists like Latour (1999), such a gap can be overcome so long as we take account of the chain of references that accrue from phenomenon to representation. Meaning circulates in a chain of representations that must, in order to maintain the veracity of the truth-value, be able to refer backward. In other words, truth circulates like
electricity along a circuit, to paraphrase Latour. And thus, the production of truth is an ongoing interaction of human practices and the phenomena of discourse: “[A truth-claim] is a strange transversal object, an alignment operator, truthful only on condition that it allows for passage between what precedes and what follows it” (Latour 1999, 67; more on the transversive in my discussion of Figure 5 [see appendix]). For sociologists of knowledge, we must be able to retrace our steps in order to maintain our truth-claims about the social world.

The translation of lived experience into generalities, the particular in the abstract, creates a problem in the political and social discourses on trans people. Figure 1 [see appendix] represents an individual life as s/he moves through the complex of socio-political and economic forces. S/he must navigate, unravel, remake, and mediate gender norms in unanticipated ways. However, when social scientists, activists, or popular media investigate these ways of navigating normative structures, they create the conditions for possibly removing a litany of characteristic linguistic and personal particularities of the lived experience. Figure 2 represents the flow of these movements and shows the narrowing effects that representation has on the lived experiences of subjects. Such movements and narrowing representations are likely to produce epistemic injustices—developed by philosophers like Fricker (2007) and Medina (2012). Such injustices can involve misrepresenting a social agent’s capacity to be the knower and producer of her/his identity. For instance, Mahmood’s project is to resist Western feminism’s consistent denial of agency to Muslim women. In other words, Western feminists have represented the lives of Muslim women in narrow, agency-sapping ways. Are they producers of their own knowledge of the veil, or merely intermediaries for a religious force that exacts the veil upon them? Likewise, are trans agents simply enacting the gender binary, or are they speaking in their own
terms about their embodied experiences within it? What I am calling transgender epistemologies elaborate the work that transgender social agents do in their own terms.

The issue I provoke within social science literatures is the amplification effect that I diagram in Figure 3 [see appendix]. This purely discursive field is a terrain in which representations of the subject now take up new mediated (academic, activist, political, legal, media-driven) meaning. The problem emerges of amplification: the growth of certain types of representations that speak for the distinctive, individuated worlds of the subject (I will speak later of these representations of “passable” trans people). The jump from lived and material world to discourse doesn’t have to mean the total loss of localized meaning, although it often does. If Figure 4 [see appendix] represents the rigidity of social scientific and sometimes activist literatures (that is, to maintain an objective distance from the lived experience of subjective life through representation and discourse), then Figure 5 [see appendix] represents the ways that lived experience and discourse are dynamically linked—and should provoke scholars, activists, and media representatives alike to hesitate about objectifying and the usage of representational statements.

Thus, to complete what Latour had suggested about “transversive” objects of truth, representations do not move in one direction. Discourses that amplify representations of the subject can and do interact with that discursively defined group (again, see Hacking 1999 for the “looping effect”). Subjects can feel interpolated by that discourse, or reject it wholly—live within it or seek to identify by difference. In other words, it is a question of how the reproduction of lived experience through discourse is received and (re)enacted by the subject. Each enactment or rejection by a given subject must be understood as context-specific. And thus, every discourse
should be understood not only by referencing the scholarly, activist, or media-related source—but through its recomposition that takes place in everyday life.

*The Epistemology of Transgender Political Resistance*

I define transgender, along with Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, as a term used to denote any set of identities that “cross over, cut across, or move between” already constructed gender binaries (Currah 2006). The Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE) organization defines trans (or trans*) as any gender identity or expression that differs from the gender/sex assigned at birth. Transgender includes those who undergo gender-confirming (sex reassignment surgery), or not. I will use trans and transgender interchangeably. Many within this ambit of trans may reject that label entirely, adopting either a binary identity (man or woman) or a non-binary identity altogether. The complications of language and identity notwithstanding, the importance of this analysis is embedded with how subjects speak for themselves.

The theoretical treatment of what is political has usually borrowed from Weber’s axiomatic definition of power which takes politics to be the umbrella “exercise of state power” in which “any set of relations of subordination, that is of command on the one side and obedience on the other, even if these do not take place in the framework of a state or draw on the resources of the state” take place (Geuss 2001, 14). I follow Foucault’s (2003) assertion that politics and power exist at the level of individual practice, and are thus bound coextensively with individual relations. That is to say that for a practice to be political it does not have to rely on the resistance/subordination dichotomy. This dichotomy has been nicely critiqued by Mahmood (2005). The political is therefore the construction of embodied practices and sets of enactments within the context of a subject’s personal inter-relations. These actions always have reference to the structural norms that give those actions intelligibility.
When I argue that trans people identify in different ways—trans*, transsexual, men and women of trans* experience, transgender, genderqueer, mtf, or ftm—I mean that each term and identification or expression contains particular and individual significance, representing varied responses to the gender binary and discourses on it. It can often be resistance, acceptance, or simultaneously both (Currah 2006). Transgender epistemic practices are embodied, and often politicize the seemingly inconsequential (clothing or cosmetics, as discussed earlier), the everyday codes on which most of gendered social life is based. We can say that as a result, and in most instances, the lumping of T within the LGB ambit reduces and erases, through simple representation, the personal narrative and diverse gendered practices of trans social agents.

My development of a transgender epistemology, one that hinges on embodiment within sexed and gendered norms, suggests that trans people face particularly different forms of epistemic injustices that do not easily map onto other groups. That is not to say that trans epistemologies should be privileged from some misread sense of inherent uniqueness. Rather, the terrain that trans people negotiate varies markedly: questions of passing raise issues of access to gender confirming surgeries and hormones that raise questions of class and racial status. Marginalization does not, in itself, create the necessary and sufficient conditions to uncover a universal “marginalized knower.” However, embodiment and subjectivity invite the particularized ways that epistemic failures take place, and the particularized knowledge that is produced (Code 1993).

Any given testimonial exchange can be a chance for epistemic failures and vices. The testimony of a trans person, for example, can be immediately discredited by the epistemic vices of culturally biased, gender normative listeners. Questions of whether the person “passes” as a woman or man may foreclose uptake on the part of a biased listener. Thus, I argue that
transgender social agents, along with their contingent social locations of race, ethnicity, etc., are more stricken with epistemic barriers to speak as embodied/sexed knowers than many marginalized cisgender producers of knowledge. For example, although recently part of ongoing media coverage in popular news (Laverne Cox has become the first trans woman to be nominated for an Emmy Award), representations of transgender people appeal to a cultural narrative of “passing.” The images of Janet Mock, Laverne Cox, and others keep certain narratives of trans lives hidden, or, more often distort them in order to comport to certain aesthetic standards of passing. Alliance blogs and Facebook groups dedicated to transgender causes are filled with such questions. Pictures of individuals asking “Do I pass” or “Am I passable?” Of course, these types questions were there long before the media frenzy of celebrity figures like Mock (see especially Meyerowitz 2002 and her discussion of Christine Jorgenson).

But the need to become passable, to look and act like those figures we see in popular representations, preoccupy the social interactions of trans people. This gap between what is imagined as a passable woman or man, and what embodied practices a subject enacts, creates the real possibility for epistemic failure, and the ongoing issue of epistemic injustice.

Statement of the Argument:

I start from the following proposition: That identities, always embodied, are continually shaped by contingent socio-historical processes and socio-political discourses. What kinds representations stand in for trans people’s lived experiences across socio-political discourses? Will these same represented people maintain the capacity as individual producers of knowledge within those discourses? Can they or have they been able to speak in their own terms? Social scientists, activists, and popular media often commit epistemic injustices when they make subjects the object of inquiry, or the object of special knowledge. If that is true, then distinct
epistemic practices and political resistances have emerged within these transgender networks and communities that routinely get missed.

Written and spoken discourses about trans subjects produce social knowledge that I argue may actually sap the epistemic agency of the subjects themselves. At best, current academic literature suffers from a relative lack of attention paid to the epistemic agency of its trans informants, and the kinds of specialized knowledge these agents produce about the varying politics trans people engage in. Trans people and their practices produce political identities and epistemologies that differ substantively from cisgender LGB identities and epistemologies. Embodied practice recomposes an entire array of gender/sex norms and thus performs politics in distinctive ways—and they should be understood in those terms. What kind of self-knowledge is lost or goes misunderstood for those who “do not pass” and be held as credible in their testimony of as “woman” or “man” or “neither”? What kind of epistemic vices are introduced in spite of the positive media coverage of Mock and Cox, and how do these impact the presentation of transgender subjectivity? I argue for developing an “epistemology of transgender”—which is to say, how an examination of the ways in which trans-identifying subjects produce knowledge that resist contemporary representations thrust on them. In what ways are trans people denied the status as credible knowers of gender/sex? In what ways are they erased from the narrative altogether about gender/sex agency and politics?

Research Design:
My methodology is a textual and discursive analysis of transgender representations in two ways. The reading itself is conventionally “queer,” adopting the techniques deployed in Sedgwick’s (2003) notions of a “reparative” reading of texts. In that sense, we take knowledge as doing, rather than something that simply is. Knowledge and truth, for Sedgwick, circulates in active ways throughout a text. But more forcefully, a reparative reading understands that,
especially in subaltern contexts, the reader/scholar must attempt to nurture the non-normative in order to get at its meaning. In other words, “a reparative impulse…is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer an inchoate self” (Sedgwick 2003, 150). Here Sedgwick is speaking of how to view the performance of camp or drag, taking the stance that it is only by seeking out the hidden genealogical elements of those performances, and the satire and identifications being enacted within, that we can fully appreciate the depth of what is being represented. This way of reading also borrows from Foucault’s (2010) own methodological “archaeology” of uncovering knowledges embedded in discourse, which is to say discount nothing. In this way, I aim to read memoirs, biographies, and view documentaries of trans lives through a reparative reading—one that accretes the histories and narratives of the trans experience(s) in their own terms. This also follows the method of (de)subjugating knowledges that Susan Stryker (2006) has also written about.

A second way of reading, what I will call legal-archaeological, establishes how representation in legal and political texts often distances legal subjects from their lived experiences. Narrative analysis of advocacy documents, legal briefs, and other movement-related texts is a common and respected research tool in legal studies, political science, and the interdisciplinary area known as “law and society.” Calavita, for instance, invites researchers to develop insights into the ways political actors understand, interpret, construct and categorize the phenomenon at hand in light of the hegemonic systems of knowledge that inform not only the “content” of what they know, but their “ways” of knowing (2010, 109). Latour (2010) uses this archaeological method of reading knowledge and embedded truth-claims in the law. In particular
he centers on the importance of texts and textual readings in order to uncover how the legal apparatus must operate. The entire functioning of law, for Latour, is founded on the precision of files—files that build over time and assemble documentation that constructs a litigant’s legal reality. Latour’s methodological insight on this count useful. Judges and lawyers are entirely bound to the texts that are assembled before them. Within these files is documentation that distances the subject of the law from the realm of law itself. Indeed, “We are in the realm of facts, speaking the language of plain truths” (Latour 2010, 19). And this realm, this semantic universe of legalisms and rules, translates the litigants’ lived moment into some fact, a fact that then interacts with other chains of hidden meaning. “the reality of law is to be found…in the hidden structure of legal chains, which…legal theorists are able to reveal by means of a work of reconstruction” (Latour 2010, 142).

My methodology borrows from both Latour’s and Sedgwick’s ways of archaeological reading and reparative reading—but I do not center on how reality and representation necessarily differ. As I have outlined in Figure 5, representations, discourses, and lived experiences interact in dynamic ways. Rather, I am looking what trans-specific knowledges are produced by trans subjects in their own terms while I seek out separate constellations of representations enacted by political agents with institutionally-oriented goals. My central concern is to see how lacunae emerge within the institutionally-oriented discourses and representations as they stand against subaltern trans knowledges.

The reparative reading of trans accounts focuses on personal narratives of numerous forms—for instance, memoirs, biographies, and personal testimonies of trans-identifying people. The Graduate Center also has an online digital archive of LGBT letters and correspondence that, in fact, contain a number of references to non-normative gender/sex identity. In examining these
records, I also employ Miranda Fricker (2007) and Jose Medina’s (2012) approach, understanding in what relations these speakers and knowers were situated. Although Fricker focuses much of her analysis on fictional accounts (notably *To Kill a Mockingbird*), she analyzes the contexts in which speakers and listeners engaged with each other to produce the enabling and disabling effects of epistemic failures. Medina also looks at published testimonial exchanges of speakers and their listeners to clarify the various epistemic vices and virtues that permeated those spaces. Both authors employ the reparative reading, supplementing the archaeological qualities of the knowledge claims being transmitted in these texts.

The public sphere is an ongoing structural engagement of discursive content. Newspaper articles from numerous sites such as TransAdvocate, Black Girl Dangerous, HuffPo Gay Voices, and other popular sources of news coverage for gender/sex issues will see how writers are talking about the community. Are these writers themselves trans? What political investments are made in discussing certain areas of trans life and not others? Public events occur frequently amongst activist organizations. They are meeting places, public spaces open to diverse dialogue and testimonial exchange. I would take these opportunities as moments witnessing testimonial exchanges, of understanding the types of representations and semantic universes employed within them. Public speakers (from politicians to well-known journalists or community s/heroes) will also be particularly important in the development of how knowledge of the self is transmitted through already marginalized yet recognizable, living representatives of trans groups. Activist organizations frequently publish information about their activities for the communities they represent and for the general public. My research will be to engage with how these publications circulate and interact with the internal dynamics of the identities they claim to represent.
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Preliminary Bibliography


Appendix

Figure 1: Lived Experiences

Figure 2: Movement of Representations
Figure 3: Movement of Representation: The Realm of Discourse

Figure 4: The Mediation and Rigidity of Social Science Objectivity
Figure 5: The Transversive Connections of Lived Experience and Discourse

Discourse is interactive with lived experience, helping to define it—as much as lived experience serves as a foundation for discourse and representation.