

transgender

let's start with a question that Anick Prieur asked: what aspects of gender/sexuality are "**problematized**" in a society — particularly meaningful and therefore most under surveillance, scrutiny, critical observation — morally laden, and thus either hidden or carefully performed?

the term comes from Michel Foucault, French social theorist discussed on pp. 126-27

Foucault wrote about ancient Greeks (Socrates, Plato), arguing that for them sexual desire or preference (in men) was matter of taste (like wine or beer) — taste preference (for women or men) was *not* problematized, not "an issue" — wouldn't get on Jerry Springer, wouldn't occur to someone to think it was important to understand the origin or source of homosexual desire — it would be like asking what is the Origin of a preference for Coke versus Pepsi? would such a study be funded? of course not. who cares?

what *was* problematized for the ancient Greeks was the *amount* of sex (moderation in all things) someone had and whether they took the *active/passive* position (a problem only for men)

according to Prieur, in contemporary working class urban Mexico, what's problematized? similarly, **manhood**, **machismo** (includes not only virility, often conflated with fertility, but also ability to provide for a family) — exaggerated, flaunted — also fear of losing it: WHY? "fragility of manhood"

if you try it, you might like it — and then you'll be a different person than you thought you were, less of a man — all men have *potentiality* for homosexual preference [classic homophobia: fear of one's own desires] (female homosexuality not so problematized, b/c women share passive orientation)

SO, Q: what's "problematized" in terms of gender/sexuality in the US today?

as revealed in US "coming out" narratives (personal origin stories)
in proliferation of sexuality-based categories: lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer
in proliferation of sex/gender categories: intersexual, transsexual, transgender

this is what your papers ask you to address...

today: **transgender**, **transsexualism**

what do transgender and transsexualism each refer to?

following Heyes:

transgender = "living a gender" one is not "perinatally assigned" — ascribed by virtue of sex, as in sex/gender system ("or that is not publicly recognizable within Western cultures' binary gender systems") — *sustained consistently as a life*

historical example: Billy Tipton, jazz musician (not discovered until after death)
Brandon Teena

transsexual, transsexed = anyone who undergoes or *hopes* to undergo physical interventions to bring sexed body more closely in line with gender identity

“transitioning” usually refers to transsexualism — taking hormones, applying for operation

together, “trans people”: gender they feel, identify with ≠ sex of body born with

implies *transitioning* b/w binaries within the sex/gender system
“crossing and mixing” body markers, gender markers, sexualities

have you heard these terms used in slightly different ways?

transgender also used as akin to “queer” — as resisting binary categorization altogether, become another kind of umbrella for transsexual, transvestite, cross-dresser, drag queen, intersexual, androgynous, feminist men — those who opposes sex/gender restrictions in the way Heyes writes about

but this runs risk of becoming so inclusive as to lose meaning

transvestite/cross-dresser: many varieties

vestitas, drag queens — might use implants, but not trans (either sexual or gender)
strategic cross-dressing as man to be able to have life denied to women (in Civil War, in theater — Victor/Victoria) — not strict identification as other
dressing up for fun, for excitement (often married men who are straight; performance)

trans terms are recent enough that their meaning is not fixed — be sure to define explicitly what you mean by such terms in your papers

let’s talk about **transsexualism** — having or hoping for bodily modifications
FTM & MTF

today it is treated as medical condition: **Gender Identity Disorder** or Gender Disphoria (similarly to how homosexuality was pathologized in the DSM as late as 1970s)
not a “choice”

contrast to transvestites or drag queens, which are seen more as lifestyle “choice”
and not medically regulated

adolescent or adult needs psychiatric evaluation to proceed with transition beyond cross-dressing, living as other gender — receiving hormone treatments, surgical adjustments

FILM: YOU DON'T KNOW DICK

what does transitioning entail *socially*?

origin/decision stories of transsexual persons? compare w/ jotas?

what do personal origin stories do...

at a personal level, subjectivity? — self-definition

like jotas: “These people work to become what they think they were born to become” — resisting victimization, claiming a “**home**” (Heyes)
even if label is imperfect, necessary to have a sense of self

at a social level, ideology? — often reinforcing status quo — keeping people in their places

Heyes argues against a strong “feminist critique” of trans lives — did you manage to discern what this feminist critique comprised?

summed up by quote from Janice Raymond, “What good is a gender outlaw [Kate Bornstein title] who is still abiding by the law of gender?”

rather than challenging binaries (feminist goal), read as *reinforcing* binaries

Did we see evidence of this in the film, or was this argument complicated?