

**Inadvertent Praxis: What Can “Genderfork” Tell Us about Trans Feminism?**

By Ruth Pearce

**Introduction**

Trans feminism is an emerging form of feminist theory and practice, grounded in the experiences of trans<sup>1</sup> people but relevant to all<sup>2</sup>. Trans feminists seek to apply feminist ideas to trans discourses while establishing a place for trans subjectivity within the wider feminist movement, thereby expanding and fundamentally altering the remit of feminist liberation (Hill, 2000: 2).

In this article I examine a number of issues pertinent to trans feminism in the context of a gender-diverse Internet community. Curson (2010) argues that “some thinking and writing on the nature of gender by trans individuals, often in non-academic contexts, goes beyond the current level of sophistication of thinking within transgender studies itself”(144). Trans feminist ideas are explored with increasing

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<sup>1</sup> I use the broad term “trans” throughout this article to refer to the multiplicity of transsexual, transvestite and drag identities and communities that existed prior to the 1990s, as well as the diverse transgender, genderqueer and trans\* movements that have emerged more recently. It is important to note that “trans” is itself a contemporary descriptor – situated within a very particular socio-historical context – and, despite the term’s increasing popularity, many gender variant and/or transitioning individuals still prefer not to describe themselves as such. Nevertheless, in the absence of a genuinely universal referent the term will suffice.

<sup>2</sup> In an important early paper on trans feminism, Hill (2000) states that the movement “relates to transsexuals” experiences, but [...] is applicable to all women.” (2). However, trans feminism has since expanded to encompass (trans)gender pluralism in a way that is no longer rooted simply in ideas of womanhood.

regularity and intellectual rigour in the English-speaking world within a variety of non-academic contexts, including reading groups, conference workshops and dedicated events. This development is reflected and amplified online, with popular feminist blogs (such as the UK-based *The F Word*,<sup>3</sup> and the US-based *Feministing*<sup>4</sup>) and trans blogs (such as the US-based *Questioning Transphobia*<sup>5</sup>) frequently offering a platform for trans feminist writers. Such grassroots elements of the trans feminist movement have attracted remarkably little attention from within the Academy (which concerns itself primarily with trans feminist theory and related academic praxis) despite a growing range of contributions to contemporary forms of both trans and feminist advocacy. I therefore aim to address this gap in the literature with an initial discussion of how several concepts central to trans feminism are explored and utilised within a community context.

I draw upon research undertaken on Genderfork,<sup>6</sup> a popular, gender-diverse blog driven by user-contributed content, centring my discussion upon a pre-existing qualitative social analysis of the blog community. In doing so, I explore how relevant trans feminist principles are to those whom trans feminism seeks to champion, and investigate what Genderfork can tell us about this nascent movement. I argue that the blog is the site of an inadvertent trans feminist praxis, in which community members adopt principles that will be familiar to trans feminists without explicit reference to trans feminism.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thefword.org.uk>

<sup>4</sup> <http://feministing.com>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.questioningtransphobia.com>

<sup>6</sup> <http://genderfork.com>

This article is inevitably shaped by my white, middle-class transsexed female subjectivity. My situated identity affords me a certain amount of insight into gender variant experiences, but also a certain level of privilege. I therefore seek to prioritise the voices of a multiplicity of trans and gender variant people within my analysis, deriving my theoretical assumptions from their lived experience whenever possible. I draw upon the language of trans feminism, utilising many terms that have been coined by trans theorists or within trans communities in order to illustrate concepts that might initially appear quite alien to a cis<sup>7</sup> audience. I therefore aim to briefly define such terminology within the text each time a new word is introduced.

The first part of the article explores the background to my analysis. I begin with a discussion of anti-trans sentiments within feminism, and explain how transphobic arguments laid the groundwork for an explicit trans feminism. I then move to identify three key principles within trans feminism: the self-determination of (gendered) identity, a defence of bodily sovereignty and an intersectional analysis of gender difference. An introduction to Genderfork follows, accompanied by a related explanation of my methodological decisions. In the second part of the article, I separately examine each of the aforementioned trans feminist principles in the context of Genderfork content.

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<sup>7</sup> “Cis” (in contrast to “trans”) refers to those individuals for whom assigned gender, gender identity and preferred gender expression are aligned in a normative fashion. Cis is often regarded as an antonym of trans; similarly, “cisgender” may be considered an antonym of “transgender” and “cissexual” an antonym of “transsexual.” “Cissexism” refers to the institutionalised prioritisation and validation of cis interests and identities at the expense of trans individuals (Serano, 2007).

### Anti-trans feminism

The trans movement has had a complex and often difficult relationship with contemporaneous feminist trends. Anti-trans sentiment from within feminism is epitomised in Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1979), a work infamous for its attack upon the idea of transsexualism. Raymond reserves particular vitriol for trans women who describe themselves as feminist, accusing them of an attempted "male" colonisation of "feminist identification, culture, politics and sexuality (104)." She also offers an extensive critique of the specialist medical services that emerged to manage physical and social transitions from one normatively prescribed gender role to another. In her argument, the eponymous "transsexual empire" is a patriarchal psycho-medical conglomerate that (re-)enforces sexist norms by presenting transsexualism as a cure for gender deviance. She therefore contends that "the problem with transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence" (178), suggesting that feminist consciousness-raising would be better used to address any desire for transition.

Raymond's work relies upon "monolithic, stereotypical representations of trans individuals" (Bettcher, 2009: 3). The term "transsexual" is used within *The Transsexual Empire* to condemn a wide range of gender variant identities and behaviours, a theme expanded upon in Raymond (1994). Raymond's argument is rooted in binary thinking that recognises only female and male, woman and man. Trans women are portrayed as artificially, stereotypically feminine within everyday settings, and aggressively masculine within feminist spaces. Trans men are

dismissed as dupes of the patriarchy on the rare occasion that they warrant a mention within the text. Similarly limited representations of trans people have retained a place within radical feminist discourse, with Raymond's arguments echoed more recently by Hausman (1995), Jeffreys (1997), Greer (1999) and Bindel (2009).

Stone (1991) – herself targeted by Raymond for her contribution to *Olivia Records* – responds to this trend in *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*. She accepts certain elements from the radical feminist critique of medical institutions and transfeminine conformity. Her article highlights the absurdity of autobiographical trans narratives that rely upon the idea of a perfect and remarkably rapid transformation from normative (assertive, dominant) heterosexual masculinity to normative (passive, submissive) heterosexual femininity, concluding: “No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, I’m suspicious” (Stone, 1991: 227). However, she argues that the medical establishment bears a great deal of responsibility for this situation, as practitioners frequently expect gender variant people to conform to certain gender norms in order to access medical resources. The paper ends with a call for a “posttranssexual” paradigm, in which trans people no longer seek to erase themselves through necessarily seeking to “pass” as non-trans.

In Stone's groundbreaking work we see how radical feminist critiques of transsexualism ironically served to spark an intellectual response from feminist trans advocates. The next decade saw more calls for both trans visibility and an engagement with feminist ideals (Bornstein, 1994; Califia, 1997; Feinberg, 1992, 1999; Namaste, 2000; Stryker, 1994; Wilchins, 2002). These writers sought a space

for gender variant subjectivities within feminism, drawing attention to interests and oppressions common to both women and trans people whilst laying the groundwork for a distinct trans feminism.

### **Principles of trans feminism**

Hill (2000) draws upon qualitative research to describe the emergence of a grassroots trans feminist praxis. He portrays a “genre of feminism” grounded in the needs of transsexed and intersex<sup>8</sup> women: a movement concerned with tackling the structural and social inequalities responsible for both sexism and transphobia (1). This trans feminism is informed by existing feminist ideals, but also resists transphobia and ciscentricism from within feminism, thus providing “a critique of the second wave feminism from third wave perspectives” (Koyama, 1999: cited in Hill, 2000: 2). In this sense, it is comparable to other feminisms – such as black feminism and fat feminism – that recognise cultural specificity and intersecting oppressions in opposition to the (predominantly white, middle-class) concept of “woman” as a singular oppressed class (Koyama, 2006; Salvador, 2006). Hill also emphasises the importance of pedagogy in trans feminism. His research participants regarded “reaching out” to other trans people, fellow feminists and wider society as “essential” to trans liberation (2000: 3-4). Being “out” as trans is portrayed as an important part

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<sup>8</sup> Intersex individuals are born with some combination of both female and male sex characteristics (for instance, an intersex individual might possess XY chromosomes and a typically female phenotype, or sexually ambiguous genitalia. Some intersex individuals are content in the gender they are assigned at birth, whereas others are not. The category “intersex” is therefore both analytically and socially distinct from the category “trans,” although there is some community overlap in the form of individuals who identify as both intersex and trans.

of this process, reflecting Stone's (1991) call to arms.

The emergent trans feminism explored by Hill is crystallised in Koyama's (2003) *Transfeminist Manifesto*. Koyama outlines and analyses the movement's principles and tensions, effectively providing a blueprint for trans feminist theory and practice.

She proposes two key principles of trans feminism:

First, it is our belief that each individual has the right to define his or her own identities and to expect society to respect them. This also includes the right to express our gender without fear of discrimination or violence. Second, we hold that we have the sole right to make decisions regarding our own bodies, and that no political, medical or religious authority shall violate the integrity of our bodies against our will or impede our decisions regarding what we do with them. (245)

The first of these principles – that of self-definition – is formulated in response to the challenges that gender variant people encounter whilst navigating the social world. Such individuals are commonly denied the opportunity to define and articulate their own gendered subjectivity; this occurs when trans genders are regarded as artificial and/or frivolous. Conversely, cis genders are typically regarded as both natural and serious: worthy of respect, and not to be questioned. Cis genders are therefore perceived as real and trans genders as unreal. Whilst a cis man's masculinity may be called into question if he does not conform to hegemonic ideals of manhood, he will still be regarded as a "man," albeit a man perhaps less worthy of respect. In contrast, a trans man's manhood can be rejected altogether if his trans status is

disclosed. The situation creates a double bind for trans people, with the gender presentation and identity of trans women (for instance) condemned as artificial if they engage in traditionally feminine behaviour and “masculine” (i.e. male) if they do not. Indeed, this very fallacy is committed by Raymond (1979) in her accounts of artificially feminine trans women and overly assertive “transsexually constructed” lesbian feminists (Bettcher, 2009: 3). For Serano (2007), this “trans-misogyny” – which extends to media representations of trans women as either predatory “deceivers” or “pathetic” fakes – arises from a more widespread tendency towards viewing any feminine behaviour (although not the female gender) as necessarily artificial (36, 44). Moreover, whilst a considerable number of trans people identify into a binary category of Western gender, others define their gender identity in non-binary terms. Non-binary identified individuals might subscribe to a “third gender” category, or describe themselves as being between, beyond and/or without gender(s). These genders – or, indeed, a declared lack of gender – are a source of confusion within societies that regard binary gender categorisation as both natural and real. Non-binary genders are therefore also rejected as unreal within the cissexist paradigm.

A new language of (trans)gender is evolving to account for and validate both non-binary identities and transitions within the binary. Gender variant individuals have historically used medical terminology such as “transvestite” (Hirschfeld, 1991) and “transsexual” (Benjamin, 1966; Cauldwell, 1949) to describe their own experience of (trans)gendered embodiment. These concepts are still commonly referred to within gender variant communities alongside contemporary identities such as “autogynephilic” that similarly draw upon discourses of pathology (Ekins & King,

2010). However, over the last two decades a myriad of new terms have emerged within the English language to account for and codify gender variance in a more affirmative manner. Internet communities have played an important role in this process because they enable members of the disparate and widely invisible gender variant population to come together and forge “new modes” and “different codes” of gendered understanding (Whittle, 1998: 393). “Transgender” and “trans” alike offer an alliance of difference and diversity, uniting transsexuals and transvestites with other “gender outlaws”, such as androgynes, butches, femmes, drag kings, drag queens and sissies (Feinberg, 1992, 1999; Whittle, 2006). “Cis” enables the de-centring and de-normalisation of normative genders within the discourse of gender variance, while “transphobia” and “cissexism” denote anti-trans prejudice and power relations (Koyama, 2002; Serano, 2007). Terms such as “binding,” “packing,” “tucking,” and “gaffing” describe gendering (and de-gendering) practises (Ekins & King, 2006). Identities such as “androgyne,” “bi-gender,” “genderqueer,” and “genderfluid” denote non-binary gender(s), while “pansexuality” and “omnisexuality” account for non-binary forms of sexual and romantic attraction (Bauer, 2008; Bornstein & Bergman 2010; Nestle et al, 2002). Gender-neutral pronouns such as ze/hir, it/its and the singular form of “they” further deconstruct binary gender norms (Feinberg, 1999). This new language enables the acknowledgement and articulation of complex identities, empowering individuals to more appropriately define and describe themselves.

In rejecting cissexist conceptions of gender validity, trans feminists tend to agree that all non-oppressive forms of gender identity and expression should be regarded as equally valid in both trans and cis people. However, trans feminists may also hold

quite different positions on the genesis of gendered characteristics. Hill (2006) argues that differing views of gender amongst trans people – which may be largely essentialist, largely social constructivist, or some synthesis of the two – reflect tensions within the wider feminist movement. Prosser (1998) and Serano (2007) posit that there is some biological basis to elements of gendered behavior. This may extend to feelings of body dysmorphia in trans people, which Serano accounts for with her concept of “subconscious sex” (2007: 78). However Koyama (2003) urges trans feminists to resist “the essentialist notion of gender identity,” explaining that: “To say one has a female mind or soul would mean that there are male or female minds that are different from each other in some identifiable way, which in turn may be used to justify discrimination against women;” she therefore urges that we “construct our gender identities based upon what feels genuine, comfortable and sincere to us as we live and relate to others within given social and cultural constraint” (248). This approach – which allows for deep-seated feelings of gendered belonging whilst drawing upon the queer theory of gender performativity articulated by Butler (1990) – challenges not only the female/male gender binary, but also the additional binaries that typically divide cis and trans: real/unreal, natural/artificial, frivolous/serious.

The second of Koyama’s (2003) trans feminist principles – that of body sovereignty – asserts the right of trans persons to make decisions about their own bodies. This principle clearly addresses access to medical resources for those who desire hormones and/or surgery. Trans people throughout the world frequently encounter difficulty when attempting to access specialist medical services, with state healthcare providers and private health insurers alike often refusing to cover interventions

related to physical transition (Grant et al, 2011; Whittle et al, 2008). Policies of non-intervention are usually defended with the argument that transition-related treatments are cosmetic and therefore unnecessary (thus also reinforcing the perception of trans gender as artificial). Trans feminists respond that all individuals have a right to medical treatment, and may further assert that many trans people cannot properly flourish without access to physical transition (Serano, 2007). A number of commentators also note that trans people who have transitioned physically are less likely to encounter harassment and violence because of their appearance<sup>9</sup> (Bettcher, 2007; Namaste, 2000).

The principle of body sovereignty also relates to several more traditional feminist concerns, such as fertility, abortion and genital mutilation. A number of countries refuse to recognise the gender identity of trans men and trans women until the individuals concerned have been rendered sterile through hormone treatments or surgery (Whittle et al, 2008). This approach effectively requires trans people to be sterilised in order to access rights taken for granted by cis individuals. While state-sanctioned sterilisation is taken for granted, trans fertility can lead to moral panic: this may be seen in the recent international media furore over trans male pregnancies (Halberstam, 2010). Opponents and supporters of trans fertility both argue that pregnant men (and, indeed, pregnant non-binary individuals) threaten to undermine traditional gender roles and binary gender distinctions. Less attention has been paid to non-binary individuals and men who wish to access abortion services, but such individuals are still likely to encounter confusion and (therefore) difficulty.

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<sup>9</sup> This argument does not of course apply to those trans people who – through choice or accident – cannot pass as cis following transition.

The mass-mutilation of intersex infants also remains largely invisible. Intersex babies with ambiguous genitals often undergo “corrective” surgery shortly after birth in order to assign them an appropriately female or male sex/gender. (Hird, 2003). These procedures resemble transphobic and sexist assaults insofar as they serve to reinforce binary gender norms through the means of physical violence directed at an unacceptable body. Trans feminists condemn all efforts to manage gender through external societal and/or institutional control of human bodies.

Koyama explicitly centres the experiences of trans women when unpacking the principles of self-definition and body sovereignty. She uses the term “trans woman” in a broad context, referring to “those individuals who identify, present or live more or less as women despite their birth sex assignment to the contrary;” however, there is an explicit focus on the experiences of trans women as opposed to trans men and individuals “who do not conform to the male/female dichotomy or those who are transgendered in other ways” (2003: 244). In a postscript added to later editions of the manuscript, Koyama addresses this “overemphasis” on trans women, explaining that it stems from the idea that feminism necessarily should concern itself with the category of “woman.” She acknowledges this privileging of trans women as “a mistake” that resulted in her neglecting the “unique struggles that female-to-male trans people and other transgender and genderqueer people face” (259). This theoretical shift is often echoed in later trans feminist work, with Bettcher (2009) describing a trans feminist politic centred around trans women as “inadequate” as trans men and other gender variant individuals may also be subject to misogynist forms of discrimination and violence (9.3). An effective trans feminism should therefore be capable of acknowledging and incorporating what Monro (2005, 2007)

describes as “gender pluralism”: a multiplicity of (sometimes contradictory) trans subjectivities, which may involve sexual fluidity, the rejection of gender, and/or an awareness of the gendered self as somehow innate. This acceptance of trans diversity and difference is necessary for a trans feminism that truly embraces self-definition and self-determination.

Koyama’s (2003) postscript also highlights a second failing of the *Manifesto*: an “inadequate intersectional analysis” (259). The original essay thoroughly interrogates the manner in which sexism and transphobia can intersect, but makes little mention of how trans feminism might also acknowledge and address issues such as classism, disablism and racism. Understanding how various axes of difference intersect with gender variant identity is important if we are to acknowledge the diverse multiplicity of trans subjectivities. Moreover, it is worth noting that trans people in the Western world are particularly likely to experience homelessness (Grant et al., 2009; Mitchell & Howarth, 2009), and may be especially susceptible to disability (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009: 55), while non-white individuals and sex workers are considerably more likely to experience transphobic discrimination, harassment and violence (Bettcher, 2007; Grant et al., 2011; Namaste, 2000). The importance of an intersectional trans feminist analysis is highlighted by numerous writers (Bettcher, 2007, 2009; Feinberg, 1999; Koyama, 2006; Namaste, 2000) and within grassroots activism, as epitomised within blogs such as *Questioning Transphobia*. If we are to follow Koyama in regarding self-definition and body sovereignty as two primary principles of trans feminism, then an acknowledgement of (and engagement with) intersectional oppressions should therefore form a third key principle.

I concentrate upon self-definition, body sovereignty and intersectionality for this article. However, these principles by no means delineate the boundaries of trans feminist concern. Scott-Dixon (2006: 25-28) briefly outlines seven themes key to trans feminism: these include “self-definition and self-naming,” “bodies, ability and sexuality” and “intersectionality, multiple identities and differences”: concepts that broadly tie in with the principles identified by Koyama. Other themes noted by Scott-Dixon include “safety, shelter and women-only spaces,” “groups, power and organising” and “legislation and discrimination;” these areas of interest broadly concern trans feminist praxis that draw upon the aforementioned principles. Finally, the very first theme in Scott-Dixon’s overview is entitled “sex/gender systems of power.” This theme draws upon the Foucauldian concept of capillary power relations (Foucault, 1978), thus reinforcing the trans feminist association with the “third wave” of feminism. It incorporates:

[...] the focus on and analysis of how gendered structures of power and privilege operate to proscribe and constrain choices, and how gender (and other intersecting dimensions such as race, class, sexuality, age and so forth) serves as a marker of social differentiation, organisation and stratification. (25)

Scott-Dixon’s description of gendered systems of power therefore operates less as a guiding principle for trans feminism, and more as an overarching concern to be addressed within any trans feminist context (whether theoretical or practical).

### **Introducing Genderfork**

Genderfork is a blog – a website that displays “dated entries in reverse chronological

order [...] containing links and other kinds of interactivity between websites and [...] conversational features [...] for instance, a comment section” (Karlsson, 2007: 138). This interactivity is a key element of its appeal. Genderfork was originally an individual project, but has grown into a popular<sup>10</sup> community space in which the majority of content is contributed by readers (whom I refer to as “users” in recognition of the key role they play in producing and interpreting the (hyper)text). Any user may submit their thoughts about gender, questions, a personal profile, a picture, a video, a web link or recommendations for a book, film or work of art. A team of volunteers select contributed content for publication, with the blog’s front page usually being updated at least once a day. The publication of blog posts on Genderfork is therefore mediated by this team. Any user may directly comment upon any post; in such comments users typically respond to entries and discuss their own feelings about gender and gendered subjectivity. All of the blog’s content is public, meaning that anyone can visit the site and read any post or comment.

The very first post on Genderfork announces the founder’s intention to “explor[e] androgyny and other gender intersections.” The blog’s current remit arguably extends beyond this, with the Genderfork “frequently asked questions” page stating that the site is a “supportive online community for the expression of identities across the gender spectrum.” This non-prescriptive description reflects the diversity of the

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<sup>10</sup> Analytics for Genderfork – kindly provided in personal correspondence by Genderfork administrator Sarah Dopp – indicate that the site received 540,362 visits from 180 countries during 2010. The majority of users live in predominantly English-speaking Western countries, with 354,653 visits from the United States, 45,241 from Canada and 43,754 from the United Kingdom in 2010.

blog's users, who variously describe themselves using terms such as "androgynous," "dyke," "feminist," "genderqueer," "gay," "intersex," "lesbian," "queer," "straight" and "trans." Genderfork is not specifically a trans community space, but is instead a space in which trans individuals are explicitly made welcome. The blog therefore provides a platform for exploring the relevance and appeal of trans feminist principles within a gender diverse, trans-friendly space.

I base the following discussion of trans feminist principles upon user-contributed content and comment-based user discussions on Genderfork. I draw my data from a qualitative research project undertaken in 2010, in which I undertook a retrospective investigation into how androgyny, gender ambiguity and gender variant identities are explored and managed within the blog. Concentrating broadly upon the site's textual content, I re-analyse my original data through the lens of trans feminism. The Genderfork community now extends into social networking platforms Facebook and Twitter, but the research took place within the original blog itself, providing a snapshot of the hypertext at a particular point in time. My observations encompassed the blog's entire contemporaneous archive, from 15 September 2007 until 31 May 2010.

I place the voices and identities of Genderfork users at the centre of my analysis. I refer to users with the pseudonyms that they have chosen for themselves on the site: names that have already been selected for use within a public setting. In taking this approach, I acknowledge Genderfork users as authors who have contributed to the hypertext, and cite their work appropriately. This approach is also based upon an acceptance of the fact that further anonymization is rendered impossible by Internet

search engines, as any quotation from the blog cited within this paper may easily be found in its original context. I refer to Genderfork users by their preferred pronouns where possible, and with the third-person singular (gender-neutral) form of “they” if their preferred pronouns are unknown to me.

### **Analysis**

An exhaustive review of the data collated during my original Genderfork project revealed that a considerable number of Genderfork users describe themselves as “feminist” or refer to overtly feminist texts. Some users refer to being both trans and feminist, while others refer to trans issues in a feminist context or vice-versa. However, there was no explicit discussion of trans feminism. In spite of this, much of the site’s content might be considered evidence of an inadvertent trans feminist praxis, and it is to this subject that I now turn.

I regard a great deal of Genderfork content as trans feminist insofar as it addresses trans feminist concerns and offers contributions to trans feminist thought. I do not presume to assert that Genderfork users are themselves trans feminists – I have no way of knowing how individual users relate to the term – but instead justify my claim with the aid of two questions. How relevant are trans feminist principles to Genderfork users? What can Genderfork tell us about trans feminism? I answer these questions in the context of Koyama’s three central trans feminist principles, as Genderfork users variously explore gender variant identities, seek to transform their bodies, and confront intersecting oppressions.

### *Self-definition*

One of the central features of Genderfork is the exploration of gendered identity. A considerable number of posts and comments on the blog hence centre around self-definition, as users variously describe their gender(s) and discuss gender issues with one another.

I don't think I'm ever going to have a "gender identity." I'm unspecified, neutral. I'm not M or F, not even any kind of X or GQ<sup>11</sup>; I'm N/A. (anonymous user)

This tendency is particularly evident within the "profile" posts. Users wishing to contribute a profile are given the opportunity to respond to a number of prompts. These encourage contributors to outline personal details such as how they identify, who they are attracted to, and which gender pronouns they prefer. For instance, within hir profile Emile writes:

You can call me... Emile

I identify as... mostly nothing. "No, no gender for me, thanks." Also: asexual, loner, geek, politically queer and pan/a-romantic, among other things.

As far as third-person pronouns go, ... "ze" and "hir" are preferable, but I'm not picky.

Such posts offer users the opportunity to assert their gendered subjectivity and share their thoughts in a public context. Both Emile and the anonymous user quoted above do not define their gender: a personal act with immense political connotations. In refusing to conform both to the gender dichotomy and to the wider assumption that all people have a determinable gender, these users posit a non-gendered

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<sup>11</sup> "GQ" is a common abbreviation for "genderqueer."

subjectivity as both serious and real. This does not necessarily mean that they reject the possibility of gender altogether: indeed, Emile later adds that ze is attracted to “any sex/gender combination.” Ze does not ascribe an exclusively essential or social origin to gender, opting instead for an assertion of gender complexity: “gender is more than just a person’s body and how they dress it.” This non-prescriptive approach to gender definition is typical of Genderfork. The blog encompasses a spectrum of gender possibilities reminiscent of Monro’s (2005, 2007) gender pluralism, with some users describing themselves in terms of non-binary gender, others (both trans and cis) describing themselves as female or male, and many intentionally mixing elements of female, male and (gender)queer. Indeed, as one user comments in an enthusiastic response to Emile’s post:

Yay, my opposite! Where you’re neither gender, I’m both. (Lyn  
Aven)

Genderfork users hence advocate a radical form of gender liberation in which individuals reject the prescriptive definition of gendered referents in favour of a fluid, interpretative approach. This approach does not necessarily attempt to establish gender variance as natural; indeed, many users echo Stryker’s (1994) provocatively monstrous rejection of a “natural” gender order. By focusing upon self-determination rather than gendered origin (through biology or society), Genderfork users move away from the essentialism/social constructivism debate. Gender variant identities are rendered “real” within the resulting gender pluralism, constituting a powerful intersubjective reality that encompasses both those who believe that their gendered feelings are to some extent innate and those believe gender to be little more than a socially constructed convention. From a trans feminist perspective, this gender pluralism provides a strong

example of liberating social practice.

Genderfork is therefore a space in which non-binary gender, feminine masculinities, masculine femininities, androgyny and transsexed binarism become real through mutual recognition and celebration. This celebration is sometimes quite frivolous – as evidenced by playful photographs and whimsical film shorts – but it is significant in consequence for those whose gender is recognised publicly by others, perhaps for the first time.

[...] my gender identity is not related to genderfucking or “playing” with gender for shock value. I like performers who do this, as they disturb the foundations of the gender binary. But it’s entirely different from being genderqueer, actually having a fluid and ambiguous gender, and dealing with this in your day-to-day life. (Naomi)

By posting about their gender on a website that anyone can read, Genderfork users offer a powerful statement. Having established the intersubjective reality of gender pluralism through mutual recognition, they portray gender diversity as real to the wider world. This resembles the trans feminist pedagogy described by Hill (2000), as Genderfork users provide educational material to others by talking openly about their gendered experiences.

The value placed upon self-definition within Genderfork emerges in direct opposition to the cultural restrictions imposed by Western binary gender norms:

I want people to understand... that the gender binary system is more destructive than they realize. It’s the

reason boys are teased in school for not being good at sports, and why girls are told to sexualize themselves at an early age. It gives people a reason to hate and ostracize others for not fitting in and expressing themselves. (Chase)

when I was kid, everyone told me girls can do whatever boys can do. Unfortunately, [sic] they were ONLY referring to occupations. I wasn't allowed blue shoes or black t-shirts or short hair. It is sexist to deny children (or teens or adults) oportunities [sic] to feel COMFORTABLE with their bodies, faces, clothing, etc. (Chris)

Chris notably highlights the sexism inherent in the very act of gendering. Serano (2007) describes this phenomenon – “the belief that female and male are rigid, mutually exclusive categories, each possessing a unique and nonoverlapping set of attributes, aptitudes, abilities and desires” – as “oppositional sexism” and argues that it lies at the root of transphobic and homophobic attitudes (13). She contrasts this concept with “traditional sexism,” which she describes as arising from the idea that maleness and masculinity are superior to femaleness and femininity. The embeddedness of oppositional sexism ensures that non-binary identities can be particularly confusing and unnatural for female- and male-identified individuals.

My mum is entirely supportive of my MtF<sup>12</sup> sister, but on the whole she still thinks in terms of the binary. [...] [Transsexualism] still pretty much fits into the binary,

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<sup>12</sup> “Mt” is a common abbreviation of “male-to-female.”

whereas with GQ you have to define whole new perimeters. (Marion)

The principle of self-definition thus has consequences for gender diversity that reach beyond the lives of gender variant people. We see through Genderfork that individuals who seek to break down binary gender norms necessarily form a principled resistance to oppositional sexism: a resistance relevant to all who are impacted by gender limitations.

A number of Genderfork users warn that terms such as “genderqueer,” “androgynous” and “trans” risk becoming “just another box” (Chris), thereby limiting the potential for self-definition. The concept of a “third gender” in particular might become a normative restriction if established within the wider Western social consciousness. There are many cultures within which genders other than female and male are defined in accordance with certain role restrictions in much the same way as binary Western norms (Monro, 2007; Roen, 2001; Sue-Ellen et al., 1997). Moreover, the establishment of a “third space” does not necessarily entail the abolition of traditional sexism. The oppressive power relations that arise from the current binary gender system privilege malehood and masculinity; this situation would not necessarily be different under a system that recognises more than two genders. The abolition of gender is no solution either: as Bettcher (2009) argues, it is “transphobic” to regard female and male genders as necessarily oppressive, insofar as this approach “requires disregarding the self-identities of trans people from the outset” (9.3). It is therefore essential that trans feminists follow Genderfork users in championing a non-prescriptive gender pluralism rather than a mere expansion or expurgation of gendered options.

In their articulation of gender variant identities, Genderfork users also interrogate the language that has emerged to account for new understandings of gendered identity. Numerous posts and comments explore the possibilities of non-binary and transsexed subjectivity by drawing upon conceptual terms that expand the boundaries of gendered meaning. We can see how this language is used within Emile's profile post, as ze assumes some level of reader familiarity with gender-neutral pronouns and the concept of panromanticism (which refers to a romantic attraction to others regardless of gender). This emergent lexicon can be confusing for newcomers. Some users ask what is meant by particular words and concepts, while others admit that it took them time to understand the new terminology.

Questions and comments about the language of gender variance indicate that a process of pedagogy is once again taking place. In this instance, newcomers are introduced to fresh, liberating concepts that might better articulate their gendered identity.

[...] certainly, as we began to seek out other genderqueered people to relate to, none of us just \*knew\* all the lingo that goes with it. It's stuff we learn. (Cat)

It is important to note that this pedagogical process is focused almost entirely inwards within Genderfork, targeting existing community members. The apparent necessity of this work highlights the inherent difficulty of non-binary and trans/gendered language and the fact that it is potentially inaccessible to those with less time and/or motivation to learn from others.

The language of non-binary gendered folks is a foreign

language, and like a foreign language, I don't expect people to know how to communicate, or even know how to start. (Nicholas)

The above comment – posted in response to a question about the appropriateness of certain language in reference to non-binary individuals – highlights the potential exclusivity of this new language. There are, moreover, users who feel that neologisms such as “genderqueer” and gender-neutral pronouns do not appropriately describe their experience of gender. However, Nicholas also expresses a reflexivity typical of Genderfork users in their statement: “I don't expect people to know how to communicate.” Their comment therefore echoes Cat in recommending patience to those who have already had the opportunity to learn.

The trans feminist principle of self-definition is therefore deeply relevant to Genderfork users. Moreover, the limitations of new terms and concepts within Genderfork thus pose an important challenge for trans feminism. The language of gender variance is not simply of academic or trans concern. A wider educational programme is essential if the language of liberation is to be accessible, rather than the preserve of a minority. However, Genderfork also offers a tentative glimpse at a society in which individuals are taken seriously and respected as “real” regardless of their gendered identity and appearance. Trans feminist pedagogy may hence benefit from the example of Genderfork by seeking a suitably non-prescriptive gender pluralism; as Koyama (2003) recognises in her postscript, a mere acknowledgement of binary transitions and/or a third gender category provides an insufficient challenge to sexism.

The gender pluralism and pedagogical activities found in Genderfork therefore form an inadvertent yet inspirational trans feminist praxis. Genderfork users do not regularly refer to feminist theory, but instead draw upon many of the same trans community concepts that inform trans feminism in order to develop practices of recognition and respect that may themselves be described as trans feminist.

### *Body sovereignty*

The trans feminist principle of body sovereignty is also of great relevance to a large number of Genderfork users. This principle intersects complexly with that of self-definition as many of the considerable minority of users who are undertaking (or considering) a physical transition discuss the challenges inherent in their respective body projects. Such challenges may be physical. For instance, some users contemplate a non-binary transition:

I identify as... a hermaphroditic androgyne. Someday, they'll have a surgery for that. (Mx. Anomaly).

Mx. Anomaly indicates the possible desire for a sex reassignment surgery that directly reflects their androgynous identity. This desire resembles that of those transitioning men and women who seek phalloplasty and vaginoplasty surgeries in order to "match" their body with their identity. The hope for physical transition is not so straightforward for all Genderfork users though:

I am not a boy. I do not wish to be a boy. But I'm not really a girl. I def do not want a penis... but I wouldn't mind having the rest of a boy's body. (Caitlin/Caito)

I identify as... a genderqueer I suppose because I am a

gay male that wants to have a vagina but is not  
transsexual (Caleb)

Both Caitlin/Cato and Caleb imagine a non-binary transition resulting in a body that mixes elements of a typically “male” physique with “female” genitals. These similar preferences arise from quite distinct identity positions: Caitlyn/Cato identifies as a gurl/boi/person and prefers female pronouns, whilst Caleb identifies as a “gay male.”.Caleb’s emphasis on their sexuality suggests a desire to be perceived as male by others, but they also expresses ambivalence regarding their preferred pronouns: “I don’t care what you call me as long as you acknowledge me.”. Caitlyn/Cato and Caleb’s respective profiles demonstrate that body preference is not necessarily determined by gender identity in a simple, categorical fashion. This may also be seen in content contributed by users who describe themselves as transsexual men or women whilst opting not to undergo genital surgery (although, interestingly, Caleb associates the desire for a vagina with male-to-female transsexualism, suggesting that they is perhaps not acquainted with the idea of “non-op” transsexualism). All of these positions extend the idea of gender pluralism into the realm of the body, thus positing a non-binary model of gendered embodiment. The accounts of such users suggest that a trans feminist position on body sovereignty cannot simply account for transitions simply from female to male or vice-versa, but must look beyond the sex binary as well as the gender binary.

Some of the Genderfork users who do transition into a female or male body link this process to a greater comfort with androgyny:

I have a sneaking suspicion that my favorite parts of  
being post-op (MtF) will include wearing a strap-on, and

the ability to wear boxer shorts without feeling weird.

(anonymous)

In this account, the anonymous contributor associates a surgically reassigned “post-op” female body with a certain level of gendered confidence. The implication is that she will no longer feel uncomfortable whilst engaging in penetrative sex or wearing boxer shorts following surgery because her body is more physically reassuring. Serano’s (2007) concept of subconscious sex suggests that this user harbours a deep-seated understanding of how her physical body should be: an understanding that exists independently of gender cues but influences the user’s experience of gendered embodiment. Through ending her physical dissonance, the user feels that she will be able to successfully perform a masculine femininity without having to link it to her body image. In contrast, a different user suggests that they feel most comfortable “living as a man” in a “woman’s” body:

I used to be a boy. Now I’m a woman, living as a man. My shrink, and my parents, can’t understand why I would need to do such radical things to my body in order to find comfort with masculinity. I tell them, masculinity is not about having a penis, nor is femininity about having a vagina. If it takes rearranging my parts to discover my gender, then so be it. (anonymous)

Whilst the first anonymous user seeks to break down gender boundaries from within a “female” body, this second account portrays an individual who has found comfort in a binary gender role that contrasts directly with the societal assumptions that might be made about their body. Once again, the concept of subconscious sex comes into

play: the second user does not appear to regret their transition into a female body, but instead enjoys a new-found “comfort with masculinity.” These experiences affirm the importance of subconscious sex as a concept that accounts for physical transition without promoting a restrictive, essentialist account of the link between (binary) gender identity and gendered embodiment.

The second anonymous account of physical transition also raises the issue of societal attitudes towards bodily change. The user’s “shrink” and “parents” alike are confused by their decision to transition into a complexly gendered state. For many users, such confusion results in opposition to their transition. The account of Mx. Anomaly highlights the fact that reassignment surgeries continue to focus upon the creation of normative female and male bodies, demonstrating that medical institutions continue to manage gender in the manner criticised by Stone (1991). This institutional control of queer bodies does not simply prevent non-binary surgeries: in many countries, it can also result in non-consensual genital reassignment for intersex infants. A number of Genderfork users explain that their parents actively supported surgical “corrections” whilst opposing the idea of a transition later in life:

It makes me sad to know that my parents, the ones who so willingly took me to the doctor and had my genitals mutilated when I was too young to speak, are so hesitant to let me get hormone therapy and a nose job.

(anonymous)

The experience of this anonymous user highlights the horrific irony of intersex genital mutilation, whereby non-consensual body alteration is regarded as normal and appropriate while consensual body alternation is perceived as abnormal and

inappropriate. Such accounts highlight the importance of establishing body sovereignty as a principle that is ultimately based upon consent, whereby “no political, medical or religious authority shall violate the integrity of our bodies against our will or impede our decisions regarding what we do with them” (Koyama, 245).

The principle of body sovereignty is therefore important to Genderfork users insofar as it relates directly to gendered embodiment. Feminists have long been concerned with the relationship between societal pressure and the demand for cosmetic surgery, but the desire for physical transition is hardly regarded as cosmetic by Genderfork users. Moreover, the accounts of those who hope for a non-binary transition in the face of social opposition show that the pressure to conform to particular gendered standards cannot be the only factor driving the desire for physical change. The experiences of users who wish to transition and users who have experienced non-consensual surgery therefore demonstrate how important it is that trans feminists pay take care to assert the rights of individuals to modify their bodies while also defending the rights of individuals not to have their bodies modified against their will.

However, there is little Genderfork content relating to other issues of bodily consent and coercion, such as fertility and abortion. These issues are undoubtedly as relevant to gender variant individuals as they are to women, but may be less likely to gain attention within trans and queer spaces. The onus is therefore upon trans feminists to explore how issues such as fertility and abortion matter within a gender variant context.

*Intersectionality*

The acknowledgement and celebration of diversity is central to Genderfork. In functioning as the site of “a supportive community for the expression of identities across the gender spectrum,” the blog celebrates all forms of gender diversity: from cis, straight androgynous people, to transsexed women and men, to non-binary individuals, to intersex people of all genders. However, the site’s team of volunteer administrators<sup>13</sup> regard this gender pluralism as just one of axis of difference among many. A statement on the Genderfork “frequently asked questions” page illustrates how the team commits itself to diverse representation on the blog:

Q: Why don't I see more [insert group here] represented on your site?

A: This is the hardest part of our work, and we know we're not doing a perfect job. We try to show a diverse mix of genders, ages, ethnicities, body types, classes, styles, cultures, and anything else we can think of, but we're also limited by what material is sent to us, and what's on the copyright-friendly resources we pull photos and videos from. If you're seeing an under-abundance of something you care about, the best thing you can do is *go find it*, and send it to us as a recommendation. We *guarantee* you that someone else who reads the site will be very, very grateful.

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<sup>13</sup> The team consists of Genderfork founder Sarah Dopp and a small number of volunteers who fulfil specialist roles, such as “profiles curator” and “photo curator.” Volunteers are very occasionally recruited through one-off posts that invite users to apply for any position that needs filling.

This statement echoes the recognition of difference found within both trans feminism and the wider third wave. It acknowledges that diversity within the “gender spectrum” goes beyond the category of gender itself. The respective gendered experiences of a black, abled androgynous person and a white, disabled androgynous person are likely to be quite different in a world that boxes and oppresses individuals on the ground of difference. Moreover, whilst a small majority of Genderfork users live in the United States, the international reach of the blog ensures that the community includes individuals from many different countries and cultures. In acknowledging – and seeking to account for – difference in this wide sense, the blog’s administrative team recognises intersecting axes of difference and takes the trans feminist position that multiple factors matter in any true celebration of gender diversity.

The presence of this diversity statement on the Genderfork “frequently asked questions” page is of particular interest because the page serves to visibilise and explain the otherwise largely hidden work of the volunteer team. Most of the “answers” explain the process by which the blog’s content – contributed largely by users – is selected by team members. The commitment to diversity is one of several reasons given to justify this editing process; other explanations include the sheer quantity of contributed material, an intention to represent everyone once, and a desire to spark “lively discussion”. It is also noted that anyone can directly contribute content by commenting on a post. The inclusion of the diversity statement in this account shows how seriously the volunteer team take the concepts of difference and intersectionality. It also indicates the degree to which the diversity of textual narratives and visual depictions of bodies is directly managed on Genderfork. While the majority of images and profiles posted on the blog depict individuals from the

United States in particular and Western cultures more generally, these representations nonetheless showcase a wide range of “genders, ages, ethnicities, body types, classes, styles [and] cultures.” The fact that an intervention from those with administrative privileges is apparently required to achieve this might appear to demonstrate that the Genderfork community is not necessarily as diverse as it aims to be: after all, if an appropriately representative range of contributions arose directly from users, there would be no need for this kind of content management. However, the volunteer team must also contend with the institutionalised ageism, racism, disablism, classism and other factors that contribute to the prioritisation of certain bodies within even gender variant media. By directly intervening in favour of diversity in Genderfork’s content output, the volunteer team seeks to directly address the impact already made by a multitude of inequalities.

A number of debates have taken place amongst Genderfork users in regards to intersectionality. A discussion centred around the racialization of gender within pop culture aptly illustrates what is at stake within such conversations. In a post entitled: “Recommendation: Lady Gaga’s Genderforking Style,” psuedony explains that, “Gender controversy seems to follow this lady,” in probable reference to the pop icon’s surreal high-femme image and rumours about her gender.<sup>14</sup> The majority of users who comment upon the post express their approval for Lady Gaga, but Laura tempers their praise with a note of caution:

I am not so ready to jump to supporting Lady Gaga as  
“someone who pushes boundaries.” This is the argument

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<sup>14</sup> psuedony’s post was written in 2009. At this time, rumours circulated to the effect that Lady Gaga might be intersex and/or trans.

I see in a lot of spaces (feministing [sic] is one mainstream place I can think of), but I think it's important to note that Lady Gaga is still white. She still has the privilege to do what she does.

In a later comment, Laura later expands upon their argument to explain that Lady Gaga's challenging of gender boundaries is enabled in part through her white privilege:

It is because she is white that she is validated. And it's important to recognize her privilege in this scenario because people with other identities might not be able to "push these boundaries" in the ways she is.

Laura's point is that a non-white musician with a similarly extravagant and surreal approach to gender presentation is less likely to achieve popular acceptance within the Western world's cultural mainstream. They thereby highlights the intersection of race and gender (variance) within pop culture, and the manner in which a certain level of privilege on one axis of difference may enable an individual to overcome particular difficulties related to another axis of difference. From a trans feminist perspective, this intervention complements the pro-diversity policy of the volunteer team. Whilst blog's administrators utilise an intersectional analysis to inform their diversity work, Laura draws upon the concept of intersectionality to inform her critique of white privilege within Genderfork content.

Similar points are raised about age and appearance by users elsewhere on Genderfork:

And isn't another problem the fact that the term androgynous in its most common use doesn't actually mean partly male, partly female. As used, it most typically refers to skinny women with fabulous features and short hair. (Jools)

Sometimes I wonder if the only people who are recognized as genderfucking are skinny, young hipsters. Most of the pictures I see of people on Genderfork are of people at least 10 years younger than me, with androgynous faces and flat bellies. I just wonder where this 30-something boy in a skirt fits into the picture. (anonymous)

Such discussions highlight a tension within the blog that is caused by the site's inevitable reproduction of wider inequalities: many users wish to see a truly diverse representation of gender, but this task is made difficult by the very imbalances they seek to address. As the diversity statement notes: "we're [...] limited by what material is sent to us."

The above examples demonstrate that whilst some Genderfork users (including, importantly, the team of administrative volunteers) prioritise an intersectional analysis in their approach, the principle does not carry the same weight as self-definition and body sovereignty within the blog community. A universal respect for individual identities and body choices may be found among users, but the very recognition of intersecting oppressions can spark debate and controversy. This may

be because intersectionality is a more complex and less immediately intuitive principle: indeed, the concept seems as likely to baffle feminist scholars as it is non-academics (Davis, 2008). The presence of privilege may also play a role: for instance, most of the “skinny young hipsters” referred to by the anonymous “30-something boy in a skirt” user probably do not stop to consider that older, larger individuals are under-represented on the blog when they decide to contribute a photograph. Of course, this situation also highlights the fact that individuals who are more privileged are more likely to be confident in themselves, and therefore more likely to contribute content.

Both the administrative intervention on the part of Genderfork’s volunteer team and the individual interventions on the part of users such as Laura and Jools are therefore entirely necessary from a trans feminist perspective. These individuals recognise that Genderfork must be sensitive to the myriad of factors that shape our experiences of gender in order to truly celebrate gendered diversity. The appeal to intersectionality indicates an awareness of feminist theory, most probably accessed by users through academia, feminist blogs or grassroots groups. This suggests a possible explanation for trans feminist praxis within Genderfork. The concept of intersectionality is itself widely recognised within third wave feminism, but specifically gender variant ideas of self-definition and body sovereignty that originated from within trans feminist works or groups may have successfully entered the queer consciousness through feminist as well as trans/gender variant channels.

### **Genderfork as a trans feminist space**

To conclude, I return to two questions I have sought to answer throughout my

analysis. The first of these questions asks how relevant trans feminist principles are to Genderfork users. The fact that Genderfork users do not reference explicitly trans feminism would appear at first to demonstrate that trans feminist theory has a somewhat limited discursive impact upon this community. However, the extent to which Genderfork users put trans feminist ideas into practice within the hypertext suggests that certain concepts of gender liberation have gained a significant cultural impetus within gender diverse spaces.

By drawing upon the user-contributed content of Genderfork, I have shown that trans feminist ideas are deeply relevant to members of this blog community. This is the case because Genderfork has developed into a truly gender diverse space out of respect for the diverse identities and experiences of its users. Assertions of gendered identity are recognised and upheld in an atmosphere of mutual recognition. The idea of body sovereignty is also understood in gender pluralist terms, and built around the idea of consent in a manner that acknowledges both users who desire and/or undertake a physical transition and those that have undergone non-consensual medical interventions. These positions form the basis of an effective, albeit inadvertent trans feminist praxis in their adoption of a gender pluralist approach to liberation.

Most users tend to pay less heed to an intersectional analysis. It may seem that most Genderfork users are therefore interested in those elements of trans feminism that directly impact them, with mutual recognition emerging in a context common to all users (i.e. gender diversity). In this assessment, trans feminism principles are important to Genderfork insofar as they address the oppression of gender variant

individuals. However, the interventions undertaken by individual users and the blog's volunteer team do provide a trans feminist response to issues of intersectional diversity: one that is perhaps more directly informed by feminist theory. The success of Genderfork's diversity policy – while inevitably limited – demonstrates the importance of basing group practice upon an intersectional analysis.

In my second question, I asked what Genderfork might tell us about trans feminism. In reviewing my data, I came to realise that the blog's users have a great deal to offer trans feminists. The community's gender pluralist approach offers a cohesive model of gender liberation, with the emphasis upon individual autonomy rendering gender variant identities “real” through intersubjective recognition. This gender pluralism is made possible through extensive use of new language that builds upon the “different codes” that have developed within trans Internet communities since the 1990s (as described in Whittle, 1998 and Stryker, 2008). Genderfork challenges trans feminists to make full use of this language, bringing it into our streets, our homes and our classrooms. The experiences of blog users also highlight how a flexible respect for definition may be utilised in challenging both oppositional and traditional forms of sexism, contributing to a wider gender liberation.

The respect for all gendered identities must also extend to the desire for bodily change. Trans feminists frequently champion the availability of transition-specific medical resources for trans men and trans women, but the accounts of many non-binary individuals on Genderfork show that the issue of transition has a wider relevance. Genderfork also demonstrates the importance of consent as a concept central to body sovereignty. Consent is vital to any form of sex reassignment and to

issues of fertility and abortion alike. By highlighting consent in discussions of body sovereignty, trans feminists may successfully link the intersecting struggles of trans/gender variant people, intersex individuals and women.

Finally, Genderfork demonstrates both the advantages and limitations of a top-down attempt to account for intersecting inequalities. Most of the work on intersectionality is performed by isolated individuals or imposed by the team of administrative volunteers. Intersectional analyses are not afforded the same space and respect as discussions centred around self-definition and body sovereignty. In contrast to the recognition of gendered identity (where gender exists in the abstract, stripped of a certain level of complexity), factors such as age, class, disability and race are not universally acknowledged by users. Although efforts to ensure the representation of diversity should be welcomed, trans feminists should be aware that any top-down approach cannot be sufficient: intersectionality, like gender pluralism, must be acknowledged whenever possible within broader social interactions.

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