

race x transgenderism

an examination of intersectionality by Rhett Richardson

Categories of identity that involve privilege or the lack thereof (examples include gender, race, class, and ability) interact on multiple levels and often simultaneously in a way that cannot be fully separated in the understanding of it.

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to describe that overlap and interaction of identities. Her specific example is that her identity as a black woman must be examined as *Black womanhood* rather than as *Blackness + womanhood*¹ (Crenshaw). Part of her argument, then, when using her example, is that gender and race intersect in such a way that gender is experienced differently depending on the race of the individual.

If gender and race are as inseparable as Crenshaw suggests, then

1. What does the intersection of race & transgenderism look like?
2. Does race inherently interact with being transgender?
3. How does this connect to Bryn Mawr College?

To narrow this focus, I will examine these questions specifically using some internet resources and

- Crenshaw's previously mentioned essay, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color"
- Emily Skidmore, "Constructing the 'Good Transsexual': Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press"
- Katrina Roen, "Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalization"

¹ From this point forward, I will use [identity]x[identity] to represent intersections of identities. The lack of spaces denotes their inseparable quality in terms of this conversation rather than "multiplying" the identities' privileges or lack thereof. Also, this makes the separate identities difficult to visually parse, thus visually representing how they are inseparable in this context. Thus, to continue the previous example, a Black woman would have her identity written in this context as *blackxwoman*.

examples of race/transgenderism intersections

The initial question cannot be answered in simple terms, since there are many racial and ethnic categories as well as many transgender identities. Thus it is difficult if not impossible to define the intersection of race/transgenderism other than through examples.

First, it's important to note a few very general facts.

- Trans women of color experience the most violence in female, PoC, and LGBTQ+ communities²
- Trans people of color generally experience a great deal of violence and oppression.³

Race and transgenderism also interact to create specific stereotypes.

- Trans Latina and black women have sexualized stereotypes that are often considered "masculine". This is heightened because both the *racetransgender* and *trans woman* components have these aspects written to them.
- Trans Latino and black men are stereotyped as hyper masculine. Again, this is both a *racetransgender* and *trans woman* intersection.

As a note, also, there are also different communities for racial transgender or "gender liminal" groups⁴ (examples include [boihood](#)ⁱ, [hijra](#)ⁱⁱ, [two-spirit](#)ⁱⁱⁱ, and [kathoey](#)^{iv}).

² <http://www.glaad.org/blog/ncavp-report-2012-hate-violence-disproportionately-target-transgender-women-color>

³ <http://www.glaad.org/blog/violence-against-transgender-people-and-people-color-disproportionately-high-lgbtqh-murder-rate>

⁴ Transgenderism as a category is a Western concept that cannot be thrust onto other cultures. Some of the communities I mention are not trans identities, but are sometimes labeled as such given their complication or operation outside of the Western gender binary. I include these identities because, when using a Western lens, there is no good way (in my opinion/knowledge) to create an umbrella for all identities that complicate or operate outside of the binary. I hope to not contribute to the continued marginalization of non-Western experience that Roen calls out in her article, and use the phrase "gender liminal" as she does to refer to people who experience a "transgendering process" (Roen 656).

racexgender vs. racextransgenderism

Gender is complicated by transgenderism; the existence of transgender people in Western society poses questions such as how we define gender and sex, as well as how transgenderism and gender itself interact.

racexgender

Masculinity and femininity are experientially different depending on race. Gender expression and presentation in these ways is related to both gender and transgenderism; in a way, expression/presentation is a liminal space between gender and transgenderism.

Western society often perceives the white stereotypes of binary genders to be the norm. For example, white masculinity is associated with independence, assertiveness, and hegemony; white femininity is associated with empathy, delicateness, purity, and demureness. Other actions of racial masculinity and femininity are somehow wrong. For example, Black women, no matter how feminine, are perceived as sexual, as masculine, as a 'mammy' stereotype, and/or as a "strong independent woman who don't need no man". If they are able to break that mold, their Blackness is invalidated.

racextransgender

Having "right" or "wrong" ways to act out gender and gender expression bleeds into the intersection of race and transgenderism. There is a right and wrong way to be transgender according to society. Christine Jorgensen, known because of her "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty", is seen as belonging to the correct way of being transgender.

To quote Skidmore in her essay, "Demure blonde women **represented the gender norm** of white womanhood in the mid-twentieth century and **regulated the gender intelligibility of all women in visual representations**. Therefore, the phrase "blond beauty" simultaneously aligned Jorgensen's body with an **idealized femininity** and asserted her desirability as a woman to an assumed male viewer" (Skidmore). This includes racial perceptions of gender and how white delicate femininity is the only acceptable kind of womanhood as well as "passing".

To be "correctly" transgender, you must not only pass as either male or female, one must also pass specifically as the acceptable forms of male and female - meaning white masculinity and femininity. This does not necessarily mean that trans people

are supposed to be white-passing or light skinned; instead it means that the only acceptable way to be trans is conforming to the acceptable gender expressions within the *white male/female* stereotypes of gender. Reading into the trans people of color experience - like the aforementioned example of trans Latina women - one can see the effects of "incorrect" ways of being transgender. Skidmore begins to detail this in her essay as well, providing several trans women of color experiences to compare. In one example, Skidmore tells a brief history of Delisa Newton, a black trans woman who was able to have gender reassignment surgery. Articles and pictures presented her as demure, when the other trans women were generally not. However, Newton, unlike the other trans women of color mentioned, was given a space to speak out about the racism. Skidmore notes that Newton's ability to do so was almost certainly because of her ability to "pass" in the style of whitewomanhood (Skidmore).

While gender itself does not necessarily include a *transgender* or *cisgender* label, these examples of specific trans identities show exacerbated racegender experiences.

connection to bryn mawr [#bmcbanter]

While these conversations have been ongoing, recent events on campus have created what have been two separate conversations - how race is handled at Bryn Mawr and how transgenderism is handled at Bryn Mawr.

The following are questions that I cannot fully answer, especially given that I am not a person of color. I still think they are very important to be posed.

- How do we⁵ navigate our accessibility⁶ to trans folks and our accessibility to people of color, when, as mentioned, trans people of color as a group are some of the most oppressed - at the very least within the United States if not globally? Does that change the conversation at all?
- I have heard many current students and recent alums assert that Bryn Mawr (or, more generally, historical women's colleges) is currently a space for people identifying with any

⁵ "We" here refers specifically to Bryn Mawr community members but can be extracted to refer to as broad of a sense as possible.

⁶ This accessibility includes explicit application information, actual admission, financial aid, resources once here for support and for mental and physical health, and changes of the community mind-set given racism and transphobia (especially transmisogyny).

sort of marginalized gender identity. If race and gender are inseparable as Crenshaw states (racegender), then do not only transgender men, but also cisgender men of color belong at Bryn Mawr?

- How do we acknowledge that transgenderism and race intersect? How do we then apply that to the larger campus conversations?

conclusion, remaining questions

It is important to note that I only skim the surface of this conversation, given that I do not follow any one racegender identity in depth, and also given that I hold this view with a Western, English-speaking point of reference.

Originally, I set out wondering if I could name *transgenderism* and *gender* as separate but distinct categories. *Gender identity*, I believe, includes both gender and its adjectives (cisgender, transgender, butch, femme, etc.) and is the easiest and perhaps only possible way to examine the interaction of racegender. An ongoing question that I had in reading and writing this paper was, "If the *trans/cis* dichotomy is not a gender itself, can one study genderxtransgenderism?" I think if I was able answer this question, this paper would have more defined conclusions.

citations

(Note: This does not include any links that are inserted in the document itself.)

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6) (1991): 1241-1299.

Roen, Katrina. "Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalization." *Transgender Studies Reader* (2006): 656-665. Anthology.

Skidmore, Emily. "Constructing the "Good Transsexual": Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press." *Feminist Studies Vol. 37: Race and Transgender Studies* (2011). Web Document.<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/f/fs/0499697.0037.203?view=text;rgn=main>.

ⁱ <http://genderqueerid.com/post/52144260437/hello-i-once-heard-somebody-say-the-term-boi>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.wordsense.eu/hijra/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://culturallyboundgender.wordpress.com/2013/03/09/toward-an-end-to-appropriation-of-indigenous-two-spirit-people-in-trans-politics-the-relationship-between-third-gender-roles-and-patriarchy/>

^{iv} http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J041v09n02_06