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Beyond Trans: Does Gender Matter?



Synopsis

Goes beyond transgender to question the need for gender classification. *Beyond Trans* pushes the conversation on gender identity to its limits: questioning the need for gender categories in the first place. Whether on birth certificates or college admissions applications or on bathroom doors, why do we need to mark people and places with sex categories? Do they serve a real purpose or are these places and forms just mechanisms of exclusion? Heath Fogg Davis offers an impassioned call to rethink the usefulness of dividing the world into not just Male and Female categories but even additional categories of Transgender and gender fluid. Davis, himself a transgender man, explores the underlying gender-enforcing policies and customs in American life that have led to transgender bathroom bills, college admissions controversies, and more, arguing that it is necessary for our society to take real steps to challenge the assumption that gender matters. He examines four areas where we need to re-think our sex-classification systems: sex-marked identity documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses and passports; sex-segregated public restrooms; single-sex colleges; and sex-segregated sports. Speaking from his own experience and drawing upon major cases of sex discrimination in the news and in the courts, Davis presents a persuasive case for challenging how individuals are classified according to sex and offers concrete recommendations for alleviating sex identity discrimination and sex-based disadvantage. For anyone in search of pragmatic ways to make our world more inclusive, Davis' recommendations provide much-needed practical guidance about how to work through this complex issue. A provocative call to action, *Beyond Trans* pushes us to think how we can work to make America truly inclusive of all people.

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Customer Reviews

"[R]efreshing.Â Davis situates the struggle for transgender dignity and rights squarely within the larger framework of personal freedom and privacy concerns, and shows how removing institutional barriers to living beyond the gender binary can help everyone live fuller, freer lives."-Reason Magazine

"Both clear-eyed and eye-opening, *Beyond Trans*Â challenges all of us gender-nonconforming and cisgender, trans and gender-conforming, individuals and organizations to ask ourselves why and how we are using sex classifications, what harm they might be doing, and just how they re even defining sex. A provocative and compelling book."-Joshua Gamson,author of *Modern Families: Stories of Extraordinary Journeys to Kinship*

"In a lively and accessible style, Davis questions the administrative and social practices of labeling individuals sex or gender solely in correspondence with the binary categories of female or male. He challenges the validity of sex-identifying documents and sex-segregated facilities or institutions even competitive sports as solutions to privacy, safety, or equality. This is a thought-provoking and highly relevant subject, perfect for today s political and cultural debates."-Jamison Green,author of *Becoming a Visible Man*

"Davis argues that current precedent that restricts discriminating against people on the basis of gender could be used to challenge laws or practices that discriminate against people perceived as falling outside the gender binary. More broadly, we can all work toward a change in perspective. Demanding that people conform to stereotypes of masculinity or femininity does everybody harm. So instead of trying to fit more people into society s preexisting categories, we might try rethinking whether we need those categories at all."-Quartz.com

"ReadingÂ *Beyond Trans*Â is like having one s window shades thrown open after arising from a long night of sleep: the sunlight burns the eyes, but it awakens them . . .Â *Beyond Trans*Â features accessible, clear prose and direct argumentation. Anyone with an interest in trans rights and the public application of gender theory would benefit from Davis book.Â *Beyond Trans*Â is as much a call to remediate the harm done to trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming individuals as it is a plea for good reasoning."-Popmatters.com

"This highly recommended work offers clear, real-world discussions of issues facing transgender people, along with practical applications and solutions."-Starred Library Journal

"Davis challenges readers to consider why binary sex identity categories are used so pervasively in our everyday lives, and whether such routine categorization is needed . . . The author, a transgender man of color, approaches this topic as both an expert scholar and an individual whose own identity has been subject to hostile scrutiny." Â -Starred Publishers Weekly

In this important and original book, Davis argues that most bureaucracies should get out of the business of administering sex by classifying people as Female or Male. Drawing on a number of

case studies, including identity documents, bathroom bills, college admissions, and sex-testing for athletes, Davis shows most policies for sex classification are not rationally related to legitimate government interests. Drawing on a range of literatures and methods, including critical race scholarship, feminist theory, auto-ethnography, and doctrinal legal analysis, *Beyond Trans* is applied political theory at its best. -Paisley Currah, co-editor, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*

--Transgender studies "Why and when is it important to say whether somebody is a man or a woman? Those are the provocative questions Heath Fogg Davis poses in this informative exploration of gender markers . . . But even more provocative are the questions of how we determine what counts as man and woman in the first place, and why we imagine there can be only two genders. This is a great book for students and specialists alike who are interested in the profound transformation of gender we are all experiencing in the early twenty-first century." -Susan Stryker, co-editor of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* and author of *Transgender History*

--Transgender history "We will soon be reading books that are truly new, indeed revolutionary, in arguing that the future of gender will be the end of gender binaries altogether.Â How can future writers debate essential sex differences when there are more than two sexes, or when some women and men who choose to become the other, and when some people want to be both or neither?Â Heath Fogg Davis's *Beyond Trans: Does gender matter?*, one of the first among many that I am sure are in the pipeline, invites readers to question why we care so much about labels and categories on drivers licences, passports and bathroom doors, and in sports and schools." -Times Literary Supplement --Times

Heath Fogg Davis is Associate Professor of Political Science at Temple University. He is the author of *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption*.

I received a copy of this book from Net Galley in exchange for an honest review. This is an excellent and thought-provoking discussion about the failings of a binary system to meet the needs of transgender, intersex and non gender-conforming individuals. By examining the effects of mandating binary gender identification on documents like drivers licenses, bus passes, college applications, FAFSAs, or in places like restrooms, or in sports participation, people with complex gender identity are placed in difficult (if not impossible) and sometimes even dangerous situations. From the absurd unfairness of sex-marked bus passes to the unfairly personal demands of birth sex-mandated bathrooms, from women's colleges to sex-segregated sports, *Beyond Trans* takes us on a journey that probably just scratches the surface of what any transgendered, or

non-gender conforming person has to endure. One example Fogg Davis presents for our consideration is that of Coy, a five year old transgender girl who would like to use a girls bathroom in her elementary school. Told she can't or to use a teacher's bathroom, her family sues and wins. Now let's fast forward to puberty. To forestall development of secondary sex characteristics until legal adulthood, Coy's parents may allow her pediatrician to prescribe hormone blockers. (This will allow her to decide at age 18 what she wants to do about surgery, hormonal treatments, etc.) Now fast forward to age 18. In addition to making all these important personal medical decisions, imagine Coy wants to apply to a historic women's college like Smith or Mt Holyoke. Coy has lived 13 of her 18 years, virtually all of her life she will clearly recollect, as a female. Will she be admitted? Some schools might still refuse her. Some institutions like Mt Holyoke have sought to embrace individuals "identifying as female," albeit with a long list of clarifiers. But is this enough? (Indeed, this particular case made me contemplate just how long we expect someone to be female to be female and how ridiculously unfair it is.) Just the idea that often someone has to complete radical surgery to be able to get "certified" as a sex different from that on their original birth certificates gives me pause. Having known a transgender woman who chose not to complete full transition surgery because she just isn't sure she wants more surgery, I just can't accept how unfair the situation is. Do we really need to know if she's 100% female because she has no trace of male genitalia? SMH. The argument for biometric identification on drivers licenses, metro passes and other documents in lieu of sex markers sounds like a good one to me, even with its potential risks. But, based on dinner table debates of the entire topic, many sadly have a long way to go before relinquishing their binary world view. This is a slender volume of 192 pages of which only about 52% is discussion. An appendix offers a thorough Gender Audit for institutions. I happily bought a copy of the book to be able to share it.

Goes beyond transgender to question the need for gender classification. Beyond Trans pushes the conversation on gender identity to its limits: questioning the need for gender categories in the first place. Whether on birth certificates or college admissions applications or on bathroom doors, why do we need to mark people and places with sex categories? Do they serve a real purpose or are these places and forms just mechanisms of exclusion? Heath Fogg Davis offers an impassioned call to rethink the usefulness of dividing the world into not just Male and Female categories but even additional categories of Transgender and gender fluid. Davis, himself a transgender man, explores the underlying gender-enforcing policies and customs in American life that have led to transgender bathroom bills, college admissions controversies, and more, arguing that it is necessary for our

society to take real steps to challenge the assumption that gender matters. He examines four areas where we need to re-think our sex-classification systems: sex-marked identity documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses and passports; sex-segregated public restrooms; single-sex colleges; and sex-segregated sports. Speaking from his own experience and drawing upon major cases of sex discrimination in the news and in the courts, Davis presents a persuasive case for challenging how individuals are classified according to sex and offers concrete recommendations for alleviating sex identity discrimination and sex-based disadvantage. For anyone in search of pragmatic ways to make our world more inclusive, Davis's recommendations provide much-needed practical guidance about how to work through this complex issue. A provocative call to action, *Beyond Trans* pushes us to think how we can work to make America truly inclusive of all people. (via Goodreads) I received an eARC from Netgalley and the publisher, New York University Press, in exchange for an honest review. So often, nonfiction and research about trans and gender-nonconforming people is just really bad. This is a huge problem in research and academia, but I'll go on about that in another post, not in this book review. This book, was not. It was awesome. It was feminist, intersectional down to its bones, and gives wonderfully reasoned arguments about gender identity. Heath Fogg Davis is a biracial black transgender man and an Associate Professor at Temple University. His focuses are on anti-discrimination law, transgender civil rights, political theory, race, gender and sexuality studies. You can read some of his published research on his Temple U site. This book was very academic, and yet also very personal. It's an extensive collection of case studies similar to what you might find in a doctoral thesis, only book length. Davis did a great job of explaining the terms and discussion points that those who are less knowledgeable about transgender, nonbinary and genderqueer people's issues. He also presents tangible solutions to each of the problems that he discusses, which was awesome. I honestly don't feel qualified, as a cisgender person who knows nothing about most policies, to review and parse the arguments that Davis made. What I'm going to do in this review instead is talk about the things Davis does, so that people interested and knowledgeable can find it. More often than not, I think there are better, more efficient ways for an organization to meet its policy goals than invoking sex classification. • Davis argues that sex markers should be removed from personal identity documents in order to prevent sex-identity discrimination, and because there are more accurate ways for the government to gather that demographic information. He believes that the safety and privacy issues in public restrooms could easily be solved by constructing them differently. Davis argues that women's colleges should get the HBCU treatment and be called

historically female colleges and formulate more accurate sex-related questions in order to get more accurate data and foster a more feminist education. The final case study involves sex-segregated sports, which would use actual physiological measures for categorizing instead of the more imprecise category of sex. My hope is that change makers will use it as a template for making their organizations better for everyone. I saw that my genderqueer friend Monika had reviewed this book, and I am linking their review with permission here! If you see other trans, nonbinary or genderqueer reviews of this book, I'd love to link them up here! I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in these issues and the government and organizational policies that surround it. You can pick up a copy on , Indiebound, or your other favorite bookseller!

There are many things in Davis' book to think about. What struck me most was: 1) becoming aware of the prevalence of sex-classification - all of the forms and sources of identification which ask or label us as M or F - which there really isn't a good reason to collect; 2) how we have historically compressed a range of human sexual identity down to an either/or choice which is not always applicable; 3) that "separate and equal" rarely is, and that the strategy of accommodation continues to reinforce binary sexual identity and sexism; 4) that we all suffer when we force people into boxes.

Beyond Trans by Heath Fogg Davis is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early June. This book critically discusses internal and external gender designation (modification of personal characteristics, only to be put in a box or to be accepted inside of a box-shaped room), the discriminative grey area of seeming neither male nor female exclusively because of someone's appearance, addressing harsh requests and questions from strangers, the concept of conveying one's identity through biometric markers (fingerprints, palm veins, iris and face shape, hand geometry, and DNA), the need for safety and privacy, and questions about both assimilation and accommodation.

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