

TRANSGENDER/TRANSSEXUAL

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Despite the inclement weather, almost all of the 115 people registered for the TRANSGENDER/TRANSSEXUAL Symposium made their way to York on Friday Nov 29, 2002. Participants included students and faculty from York as well as many from other universities, colleges, social service agencies and various communities.

Co-sponsored by the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies and the Social Science Division (Arts), this event focussed on trans theorizing, organizing, and cultural production. In the first of three presentations in the morning, Professor Bobby Noble (York and Queens) gave a paper titled "*I was a lesbian man*" drawn from a forthcoming book entitled Masculinities Without Men? Female Masculinity in Twentieth Century Film and Fiction. He examined the 'border wars' over the identity of Brandon Teena, the subject of the film "Boys Don't Cry".

In her paper "*Who gets to be a woman? Feminism, sexual politics and transsexual trouble*", Professor Patricia Elliot (Wilfrid Laurier) discussed the recent human rights case of Kimberly Nixon, a male-to-female transsexual (MTF). A British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal upheld Nixon's view that she had been discriminated against when Vancouver Rape Relief refused to allow her to participate in volunteer training because she had once been a man. Although Vancouver Rape Relief has recently appealed this ruling, many women's services in BC and across the country have been developing and clarifying organizational policies and practices in regards to MTF transsexuals.

Professor Viviane Namaste (Concordia) presented "A Labour History of Male-To-Female Transsexuals in Montréal and the Limits of Queer Theory". She grounded her critique of Anglo-American queer theory in the everyday experiences of transvestite and transsexual artists which she shared with the audience through slides and Québécois music.

In the afternoon, a panel of speakers reflected on trans organizing. Mirha-Soleil Ross (transsexual video maker, performer, sex worker and activist) discussed organizing for trans prostitutes' rights. Trish Salah (York doctoral student and union activist) reflected on coalition politics, trans-inclusion and 'impossible' sexes; and Eleanor MacDonald (Queens) addressed the challenges of trans organizing.

The day concluded with a poetry reading by Trish Salah with selections from her new book *WANTING IN ARABIC*, and a multi-media performance piece 'FOR ALBIN' by Mirha-Soleil Ross.

Although one day could not possibly do justice to the complexity of TS/TG, this event did offer an opportunity to deepen our understanding of transsexual and transgender experience and the theorization of these subject positions. It also engaged with questions of strategy: about constituency building inside these communities as well as the developing of coalitions and alliances with other marginalized groups. In its design, the Symposium program also attempted

to bridge some of the exclusivities that operate in the Graduate Program in Women's Studies: the troubled space of 'interdisciplinarity', and the tension, sometimes submerged, between theory and practice.

In order to support the goal of advancing the collective understanding of transsexual/transgender theory and practice, I put together a package of readings sent to all participants (which included texts written by the Symposium speakers, articles about current strategic debates and some theoretical material). Prior to the Symposium, the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies sponsored a discussion of these reading materials. The bibliography, which was included in the reading package, follows.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the contribution of Kristine Klement, an MA student in Women's Studies who helped to organize the Symposium, and to thank Allyson Mitchell, a PhD student, who videotaped the day. For your information, the tapes will soon be available for viewing in the Sound and Moving Images Library.

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<http://www.ifge.org/>

FTM International

<http://www.ftm-intl.org>

People with a History

<http://www.fordharm.edu/halsall.pwh/index-am.html>

The Gender Education and Advocacy Web Site

<http://www.gender.org>

Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies in Universities (listings for North America)

<http://www.people.ku.edu/~jyounger/lgbtqprogs.html>

The Intersex Society of North America

<http://www.isna.org>