Reimagining Transgender[1]

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Abstract: 'Transgender' is often described either as an identity, or else as the full spectrum of gender nonconformity. In this essay, I suggest that these descriptions do not align with the conceptual labor that we often ask 'transgender' to do: directing attention to people who engage in forms of self-directed gender nonconformity that are heavily penalized.

Introduction

Let's start with political reality. Transgender lives are being fashioned into a cultural debate that serves to distract from a dying planet, a widening wealth gap, disappearing worker protections, shrinking social safety nets, and intentional undermining of democracy. Authoritarian leaders paint transgender people as extremists, using genocidal rhetoric to justify denying us healthcare, housing, employment, and parental rights.[2] Supporters who flock to their sides see us as delusional, all the while demanding that the size of a child's genitals settles the shape of their desirable future.

This context—this *here* and *now*—frames what I have to say in this essay, as well as the way that I have chosen to say it. In the most direct words that I can find, my hope is to to get beneath 'transgender' as an identity, and to argue that 'transgender' is more fundamentally about an experience. 'Transgender experience', as I'll call it, is the experience of engaging in forms of self-directed gender nonconformity that are heavily penalized. Understood this way, transgender experience is not the same thing as, or even coextensive with, having a transgender identity. Far more people have transgender experience than would

[1] I am especially grateful to MJ Crockett, Michael Della Rocca, Alicia Fowler, Daniel Wodak, and the editors of *Trans Philosophy* for helpful feedback during the development of this paper.
[2] For example, Florida governor Ron DeSantis propagates rhetoric that equates transgender people with pedophilic "groomers", and gender-affirming health care with mutilation and "chemical castration". See GLAAD (2002).

describe themselves as 'transgender', or reject the gender category that they were initially assigned.

I believe that grasping the difference between transgender experience and transgender identity is vital for getting a clear picture on what is at stake in the so-called "culture war" over so-called "transgender issues". Restrictions on gender-affirming health care, the demonization of drag, the eradication of LGBTQ education, and other sadistic legislative measures absolutely impact people with transgender identities. But these measures do not only target people with transgender identities; they target everyone with transgender experience. Authoritarians are not only waging war against the acceptance of transgender identity. Even more fundamentally, they are battling to uphold a social order where self-directed gender nonconformity continues to be punished. Although these punishments take the greatest toll on people with transgender experience, they restrict everyone's freedom to pursue gender nonconforming desires.

I Know What I Am

In his ethnography, *Imagining Transgender*, David Valentine (2007) describes his experience of interviewing "fem queens" in the Meatpacking District of New York City during the late 1990's. Going into these interviews, Valentine expected that most of the queens would consider themselves transgender, and avail themselves of community services described as serving transgender people. He soon discovered that, while some of the queens did use these services, many others did not. They did not see 'transgender' as a label that applied to them. As a result, they did not think that these services were intended for them. Consider Valentine's interview with Anita, a twenty-four year old Puerto Rican queen:

> DV: Do you know what this term 'transgender' means?
> Anita: No.
> DV: You never heard it before?
> Anita: No.
> DV: Um, but, OK do you know what transexual means?
> Anita: Transexual means a sex change right?
> DV: Uh, yeah. You don't consider yourself to be transexual?
> Anita: No.
> DV: No, OK. But, and do you consider yourself to be a woman?

> Anita: I consider… yes, yes, but *I know what I -- I know what I am*, but I… I… you know, I treat myself like a woman, you know I do everything like a woman. [...]
> DV: You… do you consider yourself to be gay then?
> Anita: Yes! [...]
> DV: Even though you live as a woman.
> Anita: Yes.
> DV: Right, OK.
> Anita: I know I'm gay and I know I'm a man.[3]

In this exchange, we see Valentine, a scholar of gender and sexuality, struggle to understand and be understood by Anita. In certain ways, Anita perfectly fit Valentine's paradigm of 'transgender'. Although assigned male at birth, Anita began feminizing hormones in adolescence, lives every day as a woman, and considers herself a woman. But in another, essential way, Anita did not fit Valentine's paradigm. According to Anita, she does not reject the gender category that she was initially assigned. Anita considers herself a woman, but she also considers herself a man. She is a "gay…man", she tells Valentine, who "knows what she is".

Anita's insistence is the starting point for this essay. Whatever labels or categories Anita uses to describe herself, she knows what she is. I resonate with this insistence. Until I was in my mid-twenties, I begrudgingly reported to those who asked—and many did—that I was a girl or a woman. I accepted this classification, prescribed to me by my family, church, and broader society, as immutable and inevitable. I did not have the conceptual tools or community that I would have needed to step outside of these prevailing ideas of gender. And so, I carved out spaces to exist within them. As a kid, this meant calling myself a 'tomboy'. Later, I tacked the word 'butch' onto 'woman' or 'lesbian'. Since then, my ideas of gender have changed. Today, if asked, I will report that I am a man to some and a woman to others, but neither to myself. I call myself 'transgender' as shorthand for a personal history, both painful and joyous, that is saturated with self-directed gender nonconformity.

Whatever the categories, though, I know what I am. I am a person whose happiness requires pursuing desires that deeply conflict with my society's rules

[3] Valentine (2007, 114-115).

of gender. Directed by this knowledge, I have pursued—and continue to pursue—those desires. That choice has been life-saving and life-affirming, but it also has come with some severe costs. Even so, I suspect that, due to my whiteness and masculine presentation, these costs are lower than those that Anita has paid.

Those who pursue a form of life that defies society's most deeply entrenched rules of gender know that this choice always is accompanied by a demand for justification. This demand is an interrogation that, as Gayle Salamon (2009, 227) writes, is at once "both politics and ethics". People who lead lives of relative gender conformity often feel an urgent need to know why we have rejected their 'normal', 'natural', or 'commonsense' way of being in favor of something 'weird', 'disgusting', or 'unnatural'.[4] The response, "I know what I am, and this form of life makes me happier" will not satisfy their demand. For the demand is that they must know what we are, and come to know using only the "logics of…seeing" that are already familiar to them.[5]

The demand sets an impossible task. Although this is rapidly changing (thus the "culture war"), most people think about gender in ways that distort or erase the lives of those who follow their internal compass deep into the territory of gender nonconformity.[6] Faced with their justificatory demands, we do what we can. We stitch words and concepts together in an attempt to make ourselves understood, or else we invent new words altogether. For this reason, you'll find a wide array of self-affixed titles among us. We are 'trans men' and 'trans women', we are 'transmasculine' and 'transfeminine', we are 'butches' and 'femmes' and 'bois' and 'queens', and so many other things besides. But beneath this explosive bouquet of labels, we share something in common. We all desire to live in ways that deeply conflict with the gender rules that surround us, and we risk severe

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[4] Berlant (2012, 44): "[P]eople are schooled to recognize as worthwhile only those desires that take shape within the institutions and narratives that bolster convention and traditions of propriety. They learn, further, to be afraid of the consequences when their desire attaches to too many objects or to objects deemed 'bad'." See also Sedgwick (2008).

[5] Celine Leboeuf (2020, 299) uses this phrase to describe a parallel phenomenon surrounding racial ambiguity. The demand "What are you?", Leboeuf writes, indicates that the speaker will withhold recognition of your personhood until you conform to their "logic of…seeing".

[6] See Bettcher (2009, 110): "[I]f [a trans woman] is not avowing genital status, [a non-trans-friendly person will wonder] what is she doing and why? Indeed, since gender presentation is no longer taken to communicate genital status, this ignorance does not merely concern what she is doing with words, it concerns all gendered behavior and self-presentation."

punishments by following those desires. We choose to break established rules of gender, but in a similar way to choosing to eat food or drink water. A choice is there, but it is a choice that is essential to our pursuit of happiness.

In this essay, I want to suggest that, given the work that we ask the concept of 'transgender' to do, this concept is not only or even primarily one of identity. At an even deeper level, I think that 'transgender' is a concept that points us to this experience—the experience of engaging in forms of self-directed gender nonconformity that are heavily penalized.[7] Understood this way, transgender people are those who brave what Lauren Berlant (2012, 45) describes as the "costs of not acceding to normatively sexualized life narratives". This group does not include everyone. While no one is perfectly gender conforming, not everyone has taken on great risks through their self-directed gender nonconformity. But this group is much bigger than the group of those who embrace 'transgender' as a label, or who reject the gender category that they were assigned at birth. Not everyone with transgender experience has a transgender identity.

In its exploration of these ideas, this essay uses a methodology outside the norm of analytic philosophy. We often assume that an answer to a question of the form 'What is X?' will delineate necessary and sufficient conditions for something being X or an instance of X. For example, answers to questions like, "What is a person?" or "What is free will?" typically go something like, "Something is a person if and only if…", or 'Someone has free will just in case…' [8] I have many concerns with this methodology.[9] For present purposes, my most pressing worry is that this approach is ill-suited for an inquiry into 'transgender', which I do not think has definitive or fixed boundaries. This exploration calls for a different approach. In particular, I believe that it calls for us to consider the work that we ask transgender to do, and to then rebuild this concept using core meanings suggested by that conceptual labor.[10] The essay before you is an exercise in this method. My goal is to examine what meanings lie at the center of 'transgender's' conceptual labor, not to demarcate this notion's borders.

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[7] Chu (2017)
[8] For example, analytic philosophers will answer questions like, "What is a person?" or "What is free will?", in the forms, "Something is a person if and only if…", or 'Someone has free will just in case…'
[9] Dembroff (2020), 12.
[10] See Haslanger (2012) for further discussion of this methodology.

What I have to say is limited in scope. I will offer considerations in favor of the idea that we ask 'transgender' to point to the experience of self-directed gender nonconformity that is, as a contingent fact of patriarchal society, heavily penalized. I'll argue that this experience is not the same thing as either transgender identity or the full spectrum of gender nonconformity. I won't provide a complete philosophical picture of gender nonconformity, or a schema for determining exactly when gender nonconformity is self-directed or heavily penalized. I will not speculate on why, for people like me, flourishing requires the pursuit of gender nonconforming desires, nor will I comment on the important connections between transgender identity and related identities from the past, such as 'transsexual', 'transvestite', or 'invert'.[11] As for the historical and cultural scope of transgender experience, my only view is that wherever we find self-directed gender nonconformity that breaks established rules of gender, there we find transgender experience.[12] Whatever words and concepts we mix, match, and produce to answer others' demands for justification, we know what we are.[13]

Transgender Experience & Transgender Identity

My view—that 'transgender' centers on transgender experience—contrasts with the common definition of 'transgender' as an identity that each person either has or does not have. According to this picture, to say someone that is 'transgender' has less to do with their lived experience, and more to do with the labels that they use to describe themself. A transgender person is someone who rejects the gender categorization that they were given at birth. A cisgender person, by contrast, is someone who accepts (or, at least, does not reject) this categorization. That picture produces what is now a widely assumed binary: you're transgender if you reject your initial gender categorization, and you're cisgender otherwise.

[11] Meyerowitz (2004); Stryker (2008); Halberstam (2018); DeVun (2021).
[12] Some insist that 'gender' must be understood very locally, others believe it can be understood more broadly—even globally. I'll remain neutral on this here, but I want to note that the historical and cultural scope of 'gender' has direct implications for scope of 'gender nonconformity'.
[13] See Talia Bettcher's (2009, 98) argument that trans people have "first-person authority over their own gender". Our gender nonconformity is an expression of internal awareness about what is required for our personal health and well-being. We have first-person authority over this, despite whatever is considered 'natural' and the 'normal'--see Baynton (2001).

This binary is rooted in an all-or-none perspective. It implies that every person either straightforwardly rejects their initial gender classification or they do not—an implication that has been rightly resisted by feminists and lesbians with ambivalent relationships to the category 'woman'.[14] For these reasons, I am skeptical of the transgender/cisgender binary, but I won't dwell on that point now. Setting aside the binary, it is true that some people do not identify with their original gender categorization, and most (but not all) other people unreflectively do. This fact alone, as well as the growing number of people moving out of the second group—sometimes, into the first—is hugely significant.

But 'transgender' and 'cisgender' are not only asked to describe groups distinguished by their self-identifications; these words are regularly relied upon to provide information about who is penalized for their unwillingness to live by the rules of gender, and who is advantaged by these penalties. As philosopher Luce deLire writes, "to be cis means to benefit from hostility toward trans people".[15] This description is particularly apt in the context of institutional settings, when 'cisgender' and 'transgender' are asked to do the work of distinguishing between people with distinct institutional experiences and social needs. Yet even in these contexts, 'transgender' is often defined as above—as an identity—creating a mismatch between explicit description and actual use of 'cisgender' and 'transgender'. While 'transgender' is defined as identity, it is asked to highlight people who have been penalized for their self-directed gender nonconformity.

There is some reason to think that the two meanings coincide. Rejecting your original gender categorization is extremely taboo; it is itself a heavily penalized form of gender nonconformity. We are forbidden from articulating self-conceptions that conflict with what others insist is an unshakeable and unquestionable truth—that we always have been and must be either a girl/woman or a boy/man.[16] Rejecting this narrative challenges a dominant ideology that disguises social regulation as an immutable fact of the body. Confronted with transgender identity, those in the grip of this ideology choose

[14] Cailin O'Connor (2019) argues that binary taxonomies can make human coordination more efficient, but quickly create entrenched and self-perpetuating social divides between the two groups. See also Darwin (2020, 358). I am not claiming that this is the only use of 'transgender' that would create a transgender/cisgender binary; my point is that it is a widespread use that does create a binary.
[15] deLire (2023, 58)
[16] The basis for these categorizations change over time and place. See Herdt (2020), Meyerowitz (2004).

among three possibilities. Some insist that transgender identities are deceptive. Others claim that people with these identities are delusional.[17] Those able to listen above the din of their anxiety start to question their belief that these categories reduce to immutable facts of the body. Unfortunately, because many people are unable or unwilling to take the third path, people with trangender identities are frequently attacked, belittled, and excluded. Transgender identity, then, is reliably accompanied by transgender experience.

The reverse is where the synonymy breaks down. Transgender experience is not reliably accompanied by transgender identity. This is what Valentine discovered through his conversations with people like Anita—people who are severely penalized for their self-directed gender nonconformity, but who do not reject their original gender categorization. Faced with someone like Anita, transgender identity can no longer serve as a proxy for transgender experience. To say that Anita is not transgender (or worse, to say that Anita is cisgender) would in many contexts communicate the weighty falsehood that Anita benefits from a life of relative gender conformity. But to say that Anita is transgender, when we define it in terms of identity, patronizingly misrepresents Anita's own description of herself.

When we understand 'transgender' only in terms of transgender identity, or when we assume that transgender experience goes hand-in-hand with transgender identity, we forget that many social differences (e.g., historical, geographical, racial, class) mediate the conceptual and linguistic tools that people use to describe themselves. What we desire and how we articulate those desires are shaped and directed, even if not determined, by the material and cultural conditions that we inhabit. As Dean Spade (2015) and Valentine (2007) point out, ignoring this variability has serious costs in the context of organizations and social services designed to aid transgender communities. When these organizations reduce 'transgender' to transgender identity, Valentine writes, they "cannot account for the experiences of the most socially vulnerable gendervariant people". They end up further marginalizing the very people that they intended to serve.

[17] Bettcher (2007) has extensive discussion of the "evil deceiver or make-believer" trope about those with transgender identities. This trope is actively weaponized within academic philosophy—see, e.g., Stock (2019) and Byrne (2020).

The same is true within feminist and gender justice movements. From local meet-ups to grassroots political groups, dangerous exclusion comes with flattening 'transgender' into transgender identity. This flattening not only limits people's access to necessary resources, it also deepens a transgender/cisgender wedge between gender nonconforming people based on who does or does not reject their original gender categorization. This wedge further the dangerous illusion—perpetuated by groups like "gender critical feminists"—that these groups have separate interests and goals. Now, in particular, is not a time for unnecessary division. The war against self-directed gender nonconformity is only furthered when we undermine political solidarity across those who are punished for their self-directed gender nonconformity, whatever categories they use to describe themselves.[18] Our shared, defiant pursuit of happiness is what is truly at issue. With it, we collectively challenge widely assumed narratives about how sexual features and behaviors dictate how human lives are "supposed" to go.

Transgender Experience is not All Gender Nonconformity

My project of explicitly centering transgender experience within our understanding of 'transgender' is not entirely revisionary. "When it comes to gender and sexuality," Berlant (2012, 3) writes, "there are no introductions…only reintroductions." What I'm advocating actually is a return to the past—a *re*centering…with some clarification. The original meaning of 'transgender' within theory and activism was not singularly focused on transgender identity. It was understood in broader terms that emphasized a wide expanse of gender nonconformity. Far from trying to fit these experiences into a binary, early champions of the term 'transgender' stressed that gender nonconformity comes in colorful and diverse shapes, and that it is a fool's errand to try to contain them within strictly delimited boundaries.

Jack Halberstam (2018, 8), commenting on this early meaning, writes that the term 'transgender' originally arose in order to serve a particular need: the political need for a shared concept that would join together the "many lived forms" of gender variance. Susan Stryker (2008, 19) echoes this in *Transgender History*:

[18] Corredor (2019).

> [T]he term ['transgender'] implies movement away from an initially assigned gender position. It most generally refers to any and all kinds of variation from gender norms and expectations… What counts as *trans*gender varies as much as gender itself, and it always depends on historical and cultural context. It seems safe to say that the difference between gender and transgender in any given situation, however, involves the difference between the dominant or common construction of gender and a marginalized or infrequent one.

Transgender, Stryker tells us, points to the experience of "movement away from an initially assigned gender *position*", not "...gender *categorization*". Her description, which emphasizes the dynamicity of movement, suggests that transgender is better understood as a process than as a thing. Transgender is a *doing*—one that different individuals undertake to different degrees, and in different ways. Along similar lines, Julia Serano (2016, xii) writes that 'transgender' refers to a "broad coalition of gender diverse people (as originally intended)", Leslie Feinberg (1997, x) uses it to talk about people who "traverse, bridge, or blur the boundary of the gender expression they were assigned at birth", and in sweeping language, Riki Wilchins (2017, 58) describes 'transgender' as anyone who "transgresses gender". These descriptions are not the same, but a clear theme runs through them: 'transgender' has to do with not obeying the entrenched rules of gender.

The meaning of 'transgender' suggested by this theme is often called the "umbrella meaning". Although the identity-based meaning is common in the public sphere, the umbrella meaning prevails within trans and queer studies, particularly within humanistic disciplines. This meaning has its critics, in no small part because it can be easily interpreted as the idea that transgender covers the entire spectrum of gender nonconformity. Interpreted this way, 'transgender' seems to apply to everyone. After all, no one perfectly obeys gender rules all the time. As men and as women, people are told they ought to have bodies that look certain ways and that do certain things; that they should walk and talk in certain ways and never in others; that they should love and desire certain people and act disgusted by others; that they should have certain emotions and never feel or express others; that they should enjoy certain foods and mock others; and so on and so on. The rules for men and for women are gerrymandered and extensive, as well as fluctuating and contested. They are

beyond anyone's perfect attainment. Combining this with an interpretation of the "umbrella meaning" as the full spectrum of gender nonconformity, Rebecca Reilly-Cooper (2016) concludes—albeit sarcastically—that "every single one of us is transgender".

Reilly-Cooper's quip is largely based on the observation that, because the umbrella meaning points to a spectrum, it gives us no clear cut-off between 'transgender' and 'not-transgender'. And it's true: the umbrella meaning does not give us fixed or precise boundaries around 'transgender'. That's fine with me—I think the project of trying to articulate such boundaries is pernicious. But it's also important to point out that this fluidity isn't unique to 'transgender', and it doesn't mean that everyone falls beneath this concept. 'Disability', for example, covers a spectrum of incapacity and impairment, but that doesn't mean that everyone has a disability. Maintaining a distinction between 'disability' and 'non-disability' is helpful for the social and political work that we ask 'disability' to do—namely, focusing our attention on people who have incapacities or impairments that bring serious costs or restrictions into people's lives.[19] For similar reasons, Reilly-Cooper's argument is a bad one. Just because 'transgender' is a spectrum doesn't mean that everyone is transgender.

All the same, she has a point. Because we distinguish certain people and not others as 'transgender', we should try to say more about what we track with this description. What kind of gender nonconformity—if not *all* gender nonconformity—do we ask 'transgender' to illuminate? My proposed answer to this question breaks down into two parts: *self-directedness* and *costliness*.

There are many ways—costly ways—that people fail to conform to their society's gender norms. Many of these ways are outside of their control. For example, in societies that expect men to be physically fit and financial providers, men with physical disabilities and those who cannot find work break gender norms. In societies that tell women they should have straight hair and light skin, many women of color break the rules of gender, simply by being women of color. Where gender norms embed social prejudices of race, class, sexuality, and disability, there can be no practical separation of gender nonconformity from differences of race, class, sexuality, and disability. But 'transgender' does not track all of these differences. 'Transgender', I believe, tracks nonconformity that

[19] Barnes (2016). Similarly for being old, being thin, being bald, etc. See Sorensen (2018) for an overview of the philosophical literature on vagueness, and see Barnes (2010) for a framework for ontic vagueness.

is self-directed, or that is sourced one's own will—it concerns transgression that flows from desire.[20] 'Transgender' appears when people choose gender nonconformity, and not as an "effect of helplessness before [their] own sexual and gender orientation".[21] Transgender entails an assertion of self.[22]

But self-directed nonconformity is not the whole of transgender experience. I have yet to meet someone who has never—not once—chosen to break a gender rule. Maybe you're a man who occasionally paints his fingernails, or a woman who stops shaving her legs in the winter. Maybe you explored queer sexual desires for a period during college, or decided that marriage and children weren't for you. These actions, like all self-directed gender nonconformity, risk social penalties. That risk is highly contextual and variable; the penalties for self-directed gender nonconformity also are a spectrum. But we do not ask 'transgender' to draw our attention to everyone who has ever been penalized for self-directed gender nonconformity. That is everyone—or, at least, most everyone. Instead, we ask this concept to help us see that certain people suffer *severe* penalties for their nonconformity—the kinds of penalties that deeply harm or that restrict life opportunities.[23]

All of this maintains that 'transgender' is a spectrum. Gender nonconformity, self-directedness, and costliness all are relational notions that do not have fixed thresholds or forms. That's as it should be—how we use 'transgender' is a contextual matter that depends on background assumptions about what is relevant to the conversation. At the same time, it's important to recognize that certain rules of gender are more widespread and viciously enforced than others. Rules about what sexual features men and women ought to have, what sexual behavior men and women should engage in, and how men and women should present to signal their sexual features—what Harold Garfinkel calls "cultural genitals—are, for example, among the most ubiquitous and brutally enforced gender rules. For this reason, I think, stereotypes of transgender people are typically of people who deviate from these central rules of gender: people who

[20] Butler (1990); Vasvári (2006); Foucault (2012). What these transgressions look like and how they are received depends on factors like race, ability, and class. See Snortion (2017); Smith & Hutchison (2014); Cohen (1997); Stryker, Currah, and Moore (2008, 12).
[21] Wilchins (2017, 55)
[22] Self-directed gender nonconformity is an example of what I call 'agential identity' in work with Cat Saint-Croix (2019), or externally actualized desires to relate to others in new ways.
[23] Under what I hope are the more liberatory conditions of the future, 'transgender' will not need to do this—or perhaps any?—conceptual labor.

have modified their sexual features, who are not heteronormative, or whose "cultural genitals" do not communicate their sexual features. These are common forms of transgender experience, but they are not the only ones.

Not that I'm going to give you a list. My aim, in centering 'transgender' on self-directed and costly gender nonconformity, was not to provide a litmus test for being transgender. I do not think such a test is possible or desirable. By asking about the meanings suggested by the conceptual labor we put to 'transgender', I mean to ask about who should be centered within transgender politics, and not who should be excluded from it.[24] The minute we begin to ask who "really" is transgender is the minute we turn away from this center to fixate instead on policing borders.

Final Thoughts

I've suggested that, given the work that we ask 'transgender' to do, transgender experience lies at the heart of 'transgender'. That experience concerns not only a doing, but also society's reaction to that doing. Its hallmark is self-directed gender nonconformity that is severely penalized. The fact that this nonconformity is penalized does not mean that transgender people would be better off just obeying the rules of gender. In my own case—and that of many others—self-directed gender nonconformity has been my only passage between the Scylla of dissociation and the Charybdis of self-destruction.[25] It brings social consequences, but as I know from experience, the attempt to conform guarantees existentially worse outcomes.

Transgender people are exponentially more likely to be victims of sexual and domestic abuse, to be marginalized from the workforce, to lack access to health care or social safety nets, and to be victims of violence.[26] But our pursuit of gender nonconforming desire is not the pursuit of self-destruction. It is the pursuit of pleasure, ease, and presence in our bodies and in our relationships. It is the pursuit of happiness. Far from a harbinger of woe, 'transgender' is a testament to the magnetism of realizing desire, and of the intimate connection between this realization and human flourishing. The desire to be what we know

[24] Scheman (1997)
[25] Mock (2014); McBee (2014); Tobia (2019); Feinberg (1993)
[26] James, et al. (2016)

that we are is powerful—for some, it is more powerful than the most viciously enforced paradigms of who and what we ought to be.

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