

***Navigating Trans<sup>\*+</sup> and Complex Gender Identities***  
**Edited by Jamison Green, Rhea Ashley Hoskin, Cris Mayo and  
sj Miller (2020)**  
**New York: Bloomsbury, 204 pp.**

*Reviewed by Evan Hazenberg*

The collectively authored *Navigating Trans<sup>\*+</sup> and Complex Gender Identities* is an interesting book, written primarily for a nonacademic audience – nominally for educators working in a US context, although some sections will have a wider appeal. It is framed in terms of developing resources and cultures of activism, advocacy and allyship, and as such is not theory-driven but rather practice-focused. There are four substantive chapters sandwiched between an extensive set of opening remarks and closing contents. Each chapter has a different purpose and is aimed at a slightly different audience, so the book as a whole has a disjointed feel. Because the chapters are functionally independent of each other, united only by the larger aims of the book, it makes sense to consider each chapter in turn before thinking about the larger context.

The first chapter, Cris Mayo's 'Transgender generations and technologies of recognition,' provides a nice reflection on intergenerational differences in experience, focus and expectation in trans communities. Mayo makes some very astute observations and highlights several sources of tension that tend to permeate trans communities, often around terminology, and particularly in communities that (try to) span different age groups. The idea of recognition resonates with the third chapter, 'Critical consumption

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of transgender and nonbinary representations in popular culture and social media' by Rhea Ashley Hoskin, Jessie Earl and Ashleigh Yule, which explores the ways that media represent trans and nonbinary people and experiences. They frame this representation as packaged for cisgender palatability, and consider the consequences of such representations on trans and nonbinary communities and people. The authors provide accessible frames for analysing media content and lay out why this is a worthwhile endeavour. The fourth chapter is the shortest: Jamison Green's 'Advocacy beyond: continuing commitments, personal and social growth' provides a concise commentary on the differences between advocacy, activism and allyship and why all three are needed in working towards social change. In an increasingly fractured and fractious social and political landscape, working together across constituencies towards long-term goals may seem like an impossible task, but Green makes a compelling case for getting involved and staying the course.

The second chapter, sj Miller's 'Working through concerns and fears: tips for communicating and messaging about gender identity complexity for cisgender people,' is the most challenging to read and the least focused. It's not clear what this chapter is intended to be: it is partly a workshop guide and manual for educational contexts, partly a theoretical framework for conceptualising complex gender identities, partly an enumeration of stats around injustices faced by trans communities, partly a rallying cry for educational institutions to invest in a culture change and for individual people to take up that call and partly a resource pack for supporting that work. As a result of this diffuse purpose, it fails to come together to argue a clear point or present a clear course of action. The other chapters have an identifiable target readership, but are written in a way that makes them accessible – and potentially interesting – to anyone. In contrast, this chapter seems to have several nonoverlapping target audiences, and it is hard to imagine any one group of people who could engage with it fully without finding parts of it either too theory-heavy, or too conceptually basic, or too condescending in tone. The content would have been more coherent across two separate chapters, each pursuing its own agenda unencumbered by the competing demands of the other.

There are effectively three glossaries in the book, exploring overlapping sets and subsets of the rapidly expanding lexicon of terms relating to gender, sexuality, orientation and gender identities. In one sense, these lists are interesting, particularly for a readership assumed to be unfamiliar with many of the concepts referenced; but in another, they present a missed opportunity to critically engage with the social processes that prioritise completely idiosyncratic terms at the cost of any sense of shared community identity. This may be partly down to the noncritical nature of the book,

although neoliberalism as a political, social and educational template is alluded to elsewhere. It may also reflect how profoundly deep-rooted these norms are, that the naturalness and inevitability of three glossaries worth of identity terms – many differentiated by the finest of semantic nuances imaginable – goes unquestioned. The term *trans*<sup>+</sup> itself is used without much explanation or definition, and where it is defined it doesn't seem to have a markedly broader field of reference than the earlier term *trans*<sup>\*</sup>.

What seems curiously absent from the field of trans language and linguistics as a whole is a consideration of (a) what is driving this shift towards total terminological individualism and (b) what are the consequences in terms of community organisation and political activism. Mayo's chapter dances around this issue by noting that some older trans people feel actively driven out by younger members on terminological grounds (terminology reflecting ideology), but the question deserves a much closer and more critical examination than this one chapter can offer.

The book's academic contributions are relatively light. Hoskin, Earl and Yule's chapter is the most academically structured, written for a general audience but developing an analytical frame and applying it to a range of popular media material. Miller's chapter also engages with theoretical issues around trans and complex gender identities, but the theory is never fully explained or developed, with the reader instead directed to Miller's previous publications for a more fully elaborated and theoretical discussion. As a resource for community work, the book is on more stable ground: Mayo and Green provide grounded observations and suggestions for working with and across communities. However, Miller's chapter, which ought to provide the most direct and practical advice, fails to deliver on its potential. As a coherent intellectual artefact, the book never really comes together, although parts of it will interest different readers. Most of the chapters are engaging and interesting in their own right, the appendices could be useful starting points for discussions in cisnormative institutions and the glossaries are a potentially rich source of data for a full linguistic exploration of terminology.