

# Whither Trans Studies? On Fields, Post-Disciplines, and the Need for an Applied Transgender Studies

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The institutionalization of transgender studies as a field comes just as the academy has decided that “fields” are a less relevant and more cumbersome aspect of professional academic organization that prevents the kind of theoretical and empirical work needed to make scholarship relevant to contemporary society. A number of areas of intellectual inquiry have, accordingly, shifted to a “post-discipline” model of academic organization. But what would it mean to think of transgender studies as a post-discipline? First, it would mean a turn away from a focus on field-building within the humanities. Second, it would mean insisting upon transdisciplinary collaboration despite the academy’s failure to encourage such collaboration. But perhaps most importantly, it would mean a turn *toward* addressing the material conditions of transgender existence and the issues transgender people face in the world. In short, it would mean reorienting ourselves toward an *applied transgender studies*.

**KEYWORDS** trans studies; applied scholarship; postdisciplinarity; academic fields

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The field of communication first began to cohere in the 20th century as thinkers across several established fields and scholarly traditions began applying their respective theoretical assumptions and methodological tools to the same broad set of social questions. Scholars like economist Harold Innis, literary critic Marshall McLuhan, philosopher Theodor Adorno, political scientist Harold Lasswell, psychologist Carl Hovland, and sociologists Herbert Blumer, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Robert Merton converged to study the then-new mass media of radio and, later, television (Herbst 2008). Their new intellectual program was held loosely together by questions about these time- and space-warping technologies and the widespread effects they were having (or might come to have) on every domain of the social world (Peters 1993). Despite their profound intellectual differences (and different departmental homes within the university), these and other scholars eventually established an interdisciplinary core of theories and concepts around which a new field began to orbit as scholars debated these competing explanations for important social phenomena (Schramm 1983). Eventually, they went on to formally come together in newly founded schools and departments of communication at universities across the world. Yet, even as this new field institutionalized, communication scholars struggled to define what *exactly* it was they studied and what held them together as a cognizable discipline (Herbst 2009; Peters 1993; Waisbord 2019).

Transgender studies has faced similar struggles to define itself as a field. Transgender studies emerged in two distinct waves defined by different scholarly paradigms (Schilt and Lagos 2017). The first paradigm, which sociologists Kristen Schilt and Danya Lagos (2017, 426) refer to as the “gender deviance paradigm,” dominated transgender studies from the 1970s through the 1990s. In this wave, trans people were treated as *objects* of study, with cisgender researchers regarding trans people as tools to test the limits of sociological theories. The second paradigm, which Schilt and Lagos (2017, 426) call the “gender difference paradigm,” emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In this wave, trans people have been centered as *subjects* of study, with researchers regarding trans people’s lives as “sociologically important in their own right” (Schilt and Lagos 2017, 426).

It is the emergence of this second gender difference paradigm that has given birth to what we might now refer to as transgender studies *per se*, as transgender activists and scholars have pushed back against the pathologizing lenses of earlier medical and social scientific research, as well as challenged queer and feminist theory for their inability to fully account for transgender experience (Billard and Zhang 2022; Namaste 2000; Schilt and Lagos 2017; Stryker 2004). Instead, trans scholars have sought to give voice to their own lived experiences, “engag[ing] in the kind of identity politics necessary to gain speaking positions within discourse” (Stryker and Aizura 2013a, 3). To this end, much early trans studies writing has taken as its central question, “what does it mean to be transgender?” Trans studies’ investment in that question has been less about generating a canon of new theories than it has been about wrestling meaning over what it means to be trans away from other disciplines. And this is not an unimportant question. But its centrality has given rise to ontological and epistemological debates around the expansive and multiple meanings of the prefix *trans-* and what can and cannot be considered a transgender “object,” such that it runs the risk of decentering the material conditions of transgender life (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008).

Scholars working in transgender studies thus find themselves debating what it means to study “trans” topics and what it is that unites them into a coherent scholarly program. Like the field of communication, the field of transgender studies faces an identity crisis.

While the fields of communication and transgender studies may experience similar tensions over what defines their areas of inquiry, they have taken profoundly different approaches to resolving them. Transgender studies has sought to resolve these tensions by tightly narrowing its scope in ways that exclude topically relevant work from other disciplines, but that give greater cohesion to its theoretical and methodological approaches. Accordingly, for the last decade or two, transgender studies has been undergoing a process of institutionalization within the humanities, where it is defined by its subsidiary relationship to queer theory and, to a lesser extent, cultural studies (Keegan 2020a, 2020b; Stryker 2020). And these disciplinary efforts to establish transgender studies as a humanistic field have borne tremendous first fruits, with a prestigious cultural studies journal, several prominent book series, and a small but growing number of institutional homes.

Whereas trans studies has pursued *disciplinary* efforts, communication has sought to resolve its definitional tensions through *postdisciplinary* efforts at field-building. As former editor of the *Journal of Communication*, Silvio Waisbord (2019), writes, communication is a “post-discipline.” In contrast to traditional academic fields, post-disciplines are “primarily concerned with producing knowledge about specific phenomena detached from clear-cut disciplinary allegiances,” and they serve as “intellectual trading zones where scholars trained in various disciplines seek to coordinate and synthesize analytic approaches by developing common concepts, languages, and theories around specific problems and questions” (Waisbord 2019, 127). Post-disciplines are characterized by theoretical and methodological pluralism and by fluid boundaries as scholars address the multiplicity of audiences that share their empirical concerns. We can see how communication fits the post-discipline model in the disciplinary diversity of its founders (and current participants) and in its uniting focus on specific questions raised by the empirical phenomena surrounding communication technologies. Other post-disciplines—like development studies, environmental studies, and science and technology studies—anchor themselves similarly, drawing on networks of scholars archipelagated across fields of study, each with their own theories and methods, to address issues of shared pragmatic concern.

Transgender studies is not the field of communication, of course, nor should it be. But the example of communication (among other exemplary post-disciplines) shows us a different way to think about, to define, and to *do* trans studies—particularly where it concerns the field’s organization and epistemological orientation. Trans studies could serve as an “intellectual trading zone” for the full diversity of interested scholars (similarly archipelagated across disciplines) to produce new visions of trans life that center on shared empirical and pragmatic questions. Trans studies could—and in our opinion, should—make camp at the intersections of humanistic, social scientific, and biomedical inquiry, incorporating critical and empirical methods from a variety of disciplines to better account for trans materialities. Yet, it has chosen not to. We argue that this choice has been made at great cost to the field and the wider trans community.

Given its opposition to medical and social scientific research—which is understandable, considering how such research has historically worked to pathologize trans people and to gatekeep their access to gender-affirming care and legal protections—trans studies has been at best ambivalent and at worst hostile toward data and empirical methods (Labuski and Keo-Meier 2015; Namaste 2000; Stryker and Aizura 2013a). This ambivalence continues even as state institutions and technologies of surveillance use data to control and discipline trans populations (Beauchamp 2019; Fischer 2019; Scheuerman et al. 2020). As anti-trans movements in the US and globally continually threaten the welfare and life chances of trans people, we contend that transgender studies must recenter the material and open itself up to the empirical.

Our vision of the field thus expands upon the existing, albeit limited, institutionalization of transgender studies in interdisciplinary humanities. We advocate for a multi-theoretical and multi-methodological post-discipline of transgender studies that affords the analytic flexibility and intellectual pluralism needed for trans studies to make itself of importance to addressing the problems of the world. But what would it mean for trans studies to establish itself as a post-discipline? First, it would mean a turn away from a focus on field-building within the humanities, opening up the field of inquiry to interested scholars approaching trans studies from a wider range of disciplinary homes. This would necessarily involve building and maintaining bridges between the hard-won humanistic disciplinary homes where trans studies ostensibly takes place and the newer spaces being carved out across the social, biomedical, and even natural sciences. Second, it would mean insisting upon transdisciplinary collaboration despite the academy's failure to encourage such collaboration. But perhaps most importantly, it would mean a turn *toward* addressing the material conditions of transgender existence and the issues transgender people face in the world (see Billard et al. 2021; Hoffmann 2022; Johnson 2022a, 2022b; Johnson, Rogers, and Taylor 2021). In short, it would mean reorienting ourselves toward an *applied transgender studies*.

In articulating a concept of applied transgender studies, we understand it as a program of research focused on identifiable and pragmatic social, cultural, and political problems of relevance to transgender people, both at the individual and collective level. Importantly, we *do not* understand applied transgender studies as a rejection of humanistic inquiry or as a turn toward social scientific inquiry. Rather, it is about building our field around a pragmatic focus on the improvement of the conditions of transgender existence—which can be achieved through humanistic work, through social scientific work, through a synthesis of humanistic and social scientific perspectives (see, for example, Labuski and Keo-Meier 2015; Singer 2015; and Thomson and King 2015), and through modes of scholarship that fall outside the humanities/social science distinction altogether (such as biomedicine; law; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM]; etc.). At present, such work is underrepresented in the field of trans studies; yet, without generating this applied research, the laws, policies, and practices that determine the life chances of transgender people are loathe to change. This journal, and the Center for Applied Transgender Studies that publishes it, aims to facilitate this work and, in doing so, to develop a robust area of applied transgender studies.<sup>1</sup>

1 The *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies* is published by Northwestern University Libraries

This article, with which we open the inaugural issue of the *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies*, lays out our vision for the field more fully. It justifies the importance of a post-disciplinary model of organization and demonstrates how applied transgender studies brings us closer to actualizing the field's promise. Finally, it calls on other trans studies scholars to join us in this intellectual and political endeavor.

## THE STATE THE FIELD OF TRANSGENDER STUDIES

Susan Stryker (2004, 212) famously described trans studies as “queer theory’s evil twin.” Indeed, as Stryker and other scholars (e.g., Bettcher and Gregory 2009; Keegan 2020b; Stryker 2004; 2006) have documented, trans studies has often defined itself by simultaneous kinship with and opposition to queer theory and feminist theory. As a disciplinary endeavor, trans studies struggles against the gravitational pull of queer theory that wants to subsume it as a mere extension of sexual analysis into the realm of gender (Keegan 2020a), yet at the same time it has been harshly accused by its own proponents of being little more than a repackaging of queer theory’s central ideas “with the label TRANS hastily slapped over their expiration dates” (Chu and Harsin Drager 2019, 103). Moreover, as Sally Hines (2010, 6) points out, “questions around the position of trans women within feminism cut to the heart of discussions around the constitution of ‘woman.’” This is particularly evident in the ways trans studies challenges the core model of male–female domination that lies at the heart of much of feminist theory, while also refusing to dispense with it entirely (Billard and Zhang 2022; Billard et al. 2020; Keegan 2020b). Indeed, the question of trans people’s inclusion in women’s spaces has been one that transfeminists have worked diligently to unpack by insisting on the need for an intersectional perspective (Koyama 2006). The resurgence of these tensions even became the subject of the “TERF Wars” monograph of *The Sociological Review* that sought to contextualize the “debate” within and across feminist circles and highlight the relationship between trans communities and feminist social movements (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020).

As trans studies has become more institutionalized, its relationship to the fields of queer theory and feminist theory has complicated its place within the organizational structure of the academy. As trans theorist Cáel Keegan (2020b) shrewdly notes, queer theory and women’s studies have worked to coopt transgender experience for their own theoretical ends and professional advancements without attending to the specificities of transgender life and perspectives. Keegan (2020a) further argues that trans studies has been defined in opposition to queer theory because queer theory (alongside gender studies) serves as the primary institutional context through which trans studies enters the academy, and queer (and feminist) theory offers the canon of texts against which trans studies is read. However, trans studies need not (only) be

(NUL) on behalf of the Center for Applied Transgender Studies (CATS). We owe an immense debt of gratitude to NUL’s Digital Publishing Librarian, Chris Diaz, for his tireless labor to secure the necessary agreements between CATS and NUL, to get the journal set up, and to manage the journal’s ongoing production. We also owe thanks to Northwestern’s Dean of Libraries, Sarah M. Pritchard, for believing in the value of the journal and putting the full resources of NUL behind it.



defined in opposition to queer and feminist theory. This positioning is only relevant to the extent that trans studies narrowly traces its origins to debates in queer and feminist theory.

Fields are not natural things; they are constructed by the narratives that scholars craft about the history of ideas and they are enforced through disciplinary institutionalization. The narrative of transgender studies has been shaped in myriad ways by a single scholar, Susan Stryker, who is rightly credited as a (if not *the*) founding figure of the field. Through her scholarship and her herculean institutional service—co-founding *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* (Stryker and Currah 2014), establishing the Transgender Studies Research Cluster at the University of Arizona’s Institute for LGBT Studies (Stryker 2020), organizing the first international trans studies conference, and co-editing three transgender studies readers (Stryker and Aizura 2013b; Stryker and Blackston 2022; Stryker and Whittle 2006)—she has undoubtedly played a pivotal role in the establishment and institutionalization of transgender studies as a humanistic field positioned largely in relation to queer and feminist theory. And trans studies does indeed have a rich lineage in the cultural studies of gender and sexuality (e.g., Prosser 1998; Namaste 2000, 2005; Stone 1991; Stryker 1994)—just as it has lineages in other humanistic areas of inquiry, like Black and woman of color feminisms, disability studies, Indigenous studies, postcolonial theory, etc. (Adair, Awkward-Rich, and Marvin 2020; Bey 2017; Bey and Green 2017; Malatino 2020).

But trans studies can trace its origins to debates in biomedical and social scientific inquiry, as well. Studies of trans people have been conducted, for example, by anthropologists researching Indigenous gender practices that fall outside the Western sex–gender binary (e.g., Williams 1986); by medical researchers studying treatments for transsexualism, including hormone replacement therapy and surgical interventions (e.g., Benjamin 1966); and by sociologists studying the sociocultural construction and maintenance of gender norms and categories (e.g., Garfinkel 1967); among others. The field of transgender studies has understandably disavowed much of this research for its stigmatizing and pathologizing construction of transness, for its sometimes implicit and often explicit racism, for its relationship to colonialism and global flows of capital, and for other related reasons (see, e.g., Everhart forthcoming; Gill-Peterson 2018; Irving 2009; Snorton 2017)—even if the same critiques could (and should) be made of the humanistic field of trans studies as descended from queer and feminist theory (see, e.g., Aizura et al. 2020; Ellison et al. 2017; Namaste 2009; Richardson and Meyer 2011; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013). But where relevant areas of scholarship in the humanities have been recuperated for the purposes of building up a field of trans studies, relevant areas of biomedicine and the social sciences (not to mention STEM) have been cast aside, and scholars hailing from these disciplines have, in some ways, been barred admission from “the field” (Billard 2020).

There is yet another way of thinking about and defining academic fields that may be illuminating for thinking through transgender studies: that of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1983, 1984, 1988, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) field theory. Put simply, according to Bourdieu a field is a social topography, a “configuration of relations” among a set of interacting actors and institutions, which are structured by established power dynamics. In the specific context of academic fields, we can think of the set of actors (researchers, educators, administrators, editors, etc.) and institutions

(professional societies, publishers, departments, schools, colleges, etc.) that occupy various positions vis-à-vis one another, each with different kinds and amounts of capital and power (Bourdieu 1988; Charle 2018). From this perspective, we can understand the field of transgender studies as being primarily defined by the following actors and institutions:

1. the journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, which is held to be the sole journal dedicated to trans studies, since the *International Journal of Transgender Health* (formerly the *International Journal of Transgenderism*) and *Transgender Health* are excluded from the field of interaction;
2. the two book series dedicated to trans studies currently published by top university presses, namely the “ASTERISK: Gender, Trans-, and All That Comes After” series from Duke University Press and the “Queer / Trans / Digital” series from New York University Press;
3. a small collection of institutional homes for trans studies, including the Transgender Studies Research Cluster at the University of Arizona, the Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Transgender Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Chair in Transgender Studies at the University of Victoria, and (as of 2021) the Center for Applied Transgender Studies; and, finally,
4. the network of researchers and educators who are tied up in the webs of relationality among the actors/institutions listed in the preceding three points—the vast majority of whom are defined by their precarious relationships to the academy (Adair, Awkward-Rich, and Marvin 2020).

This paucity of institutional settings for transgender studies and dearth of actors included in the field of interaction has been—in more ways than one—a significant limitation to the field.

This necessarily coarse assessment of the state of the field sets us up to think more deeply about how the field might be reconfigured in ways that will improve it. But it also does so without considering the problems of theorizing about transness with an eye toward personal scholarly achievement—rather than public service—in the face of the material circumstances most trans people face throughout the world. While we will touch upon this ethical question in passing in our later discussion of what applied transgender studies should be and do, we leave deeper consideration of this point for other work (e.g., Billard 2019).

## **THE POSTDISCIPLINARY TURN IN ACADEMIA**

The institutionalization of transgender studies as a field comes at a strange time. It comes just as the academy, more broadly, is pushing against the limiting boundaries of “fields,” as the academy has decided that “fields” are a less relevant and a more cumbersome aspect of professional academic organization that prevents the kind of theoretical and empirical work needed to make scholarship relevant to modern society. This new aversion to disciplinarity—marked by the omnipresence of “interdisciplinary” as a buzzword used to describe everything from new PhD programs to departmental seminar series to individual scholars’ research agendas to the journal *TSQ*—has several roots. Some of those roots relate to neoliberal discourses of “innovation,” which is

said to “*necessarily* occur in the spaces between” disciplines but not *within* them (Chandler 2009, 739). Others relate to the acknowledgement that the issues scholars concern themselves with are multifaceted and thus cannot be sufficiently addressed from one disciplinary perspective alone (Menand 2001).

Regardless of its motivating impulses, the contemporary academy’s aversion to disciplinarity has spawned a seemingly endless list of new approaches to scholarship (most of which are difficult to distinguish from one another), including interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinarity, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Of these, interdisciplinarity is likely the most familiar, arguably tracing its origins to the 1920s and becoming dominant in the US academy in the 1960s (Chandler 2009; Klein 1990). By the mid-1990s, however, interdisciplinarity had become a subject of crisis among scholars, even as administrators continued to advocate for it. Competing camps emerged of those who were outright against interdisciplinary and those who were pro-interdisciplinarity but concerned that true interdisciplinarity “wouldn’t be possible without strong disciplines” (Chandler 2009, 739). Still others argued that disciplines were collapsing altogether and that new organizations of knowledge were emerging in their place (Menand 2001).

While this may seem like mere semantics, we suggest that learning from this particular intellectual history is useful at a moment where trans studies has reached a zenith in popularity, especially given that this history is contemporaneous to the inception of trans studies. We are convinced by the proponents of postdisciplinarity who argue that what gives scholars unity is their emphasis on and attention to the very real problems facing modern society (e.g., Brewer 2013; Waisbord 2019). Science and technology studies scholar Mario Biagioli (2009, 821) suggests that, in many ways, postdisciplinarity offers the best of what scholarship can do:

A positive feature of this research model is that, while prizing fine interpretive skills and the ability to make sense of new scenarios... it de-emphasizes issues of disciplinary identity. [A post-discipline] employs various methodologies to analyze different [problems], and yet these bricolages do not seem to precipitate identity crises.

While we would contend that Biagioli’s is a somewhat sanguine view of postdisciplinarity, we agree that it offers much to be desired as a mode of academic organization. In making the epistemological shift to view theories and methods as *tools* for analyzing and addressing societal problems, rather than as *products* created for disciplinary ends, postdisciplinarity creates new forms of knowledge and new relationalities among scholars. We assert that a core strength of trans studies is precisely this postdisci-

2 While the differences between these various concepts are hard to nail down—particularly because of the inconsistent ways they are used by individual scholars and the tendency to slip between them as synonyms—Choi and Pak (2006, 351) offer the following distinctions:

Multidisciplinarity draws on knowledge from different disciplines but stays within their boundaries. Interdisciplinarity analyzes, synthesizes and harmonizes links between disciplines into a coordinated and coherent whole. Transdisciplinarity integrates the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context, and transcends their traditional boundaries.



plinary perspective and ability, and that it could be even further strengthened with a reorientation toward applied scholarship.

A number of areas of intellectual inquiry have already shifted to a post-discipline model of academic organization (or else were formed as post-disciplines), including communication, development studies, environmental studies, and science and technology studies, among countless others. While each of these fields tackles different subjects in different ways and for different reasons, they are united by their distinct visions of the *value* of scholarship. Here we don't mean value in the capitalist sense that often defines assessments of scholarly worth in the modern neoliberal university and justifies the defunding of the arts and humanities. Rather, these fields concern themselves with *public value*, which "is defined in terms of humanitarian futures and societal good," as they work to produce knowledge that is "of use in addressing society's problems" (Delbridge 2014, 106).

Postdisciplinarity, then, necessarily entails political investments and ethical values. As eminent sociologist John David Brewer (2013, 201–02) writes,

These ethical values are explicit. They are its point... [Postdisciplinarity's] research and teaching agendas are designed to engage with publics, locally organic ones as well as powerful ones, privileged and poor ones, in order to involve all stakeholders affected by the "wicked problems" we are experiencing; and the scientific commitments to analysis, explanation, and understanding are matched with the desire, at best, for solutions and at least amelioration.

In short, a post-discipline approach to field-building affords the theoretical and methodological flexibility and pluralism needed for areas of inquiry to orient themselves to the identification, analysis, and, ultimately, improvement of the material conditions they study.

### **DEFINING A PROSPECTIVE POST-DISCIPLINE OF "TRANSGENDER STUDIES"**

We have argued that if the field of transgender studies has been institutionalized, it has happened within the interdisciplinary humanities and that this disciplining of trans studies is not only at odds with its goals but has also limited the scope and focus of the field. We then argued for the benefits of a *postdisciplinary* approach to scholarly organization, as evidenced by a number of extant areas of academic inquiry. That then brings us to the task of outlining what a post-discipline of transgender studies would look like and detailing how a prospective *post-discipline* of transgender studies would be preferable to the currently emerging *discipline* of transgender studies.

First, a post-discipline of transgender studies must have a clear and unwavering set of political investments. Thankfully, the field has, from its outset, had a clear politics, invested as it is in work that "[contests] the objectification, pathologization, and exoticization of transgender lives" (Duke University Press n.d.). Yet not all scholarship about trans people, especially scholarship by interlocutors who lack lived experience or by those invested in pathologization, has met this low political bar. At the same time, trans studies has a very particular kind of politics: a *politics of theory* that concerns itself with the rectitude of critical inquiry. But what is missing from the field—and what is demanded by a post-discipline—is a *politics of everyday life* that concerns itself

with “contributing our specialized skills and knowledge toward the mitigation of social problems” (Billard 2019, 3514). As the prolific sociologist and advocate for public scholarship Michael Burawoy (Burawoy et al. 2004, 104) writes, researchers must carry their scholarship “into the trenches of civil society, where publics are more visible, thick, active, and local, or where indeed publics have yet to be constituted.” If we study issues of domination, marginalization, and social injustice, but do not orient our work toward alleviating them in real, material ways, our scholarship may benefit our careers at the expense of the very communities we research.

Second, a post-discipline of transgender studies must be open to a wider range of actors from a wider array of disciplinary homes, and it must actively foster new forms of relationality among those actors. Rather than building a disciplinary home for scholars working in the humanities, whether implicitly or explicitly, we must instead build a postdisciplinary community that welcomes and values the contributions of scholars from across biomedicine, the humanities, law, the social sciences, and STEM. This means we must recognize, appreciate, and incorporate into our own thinking and practice the theories and methods of scholars trained in disciplines outside our own to the extent they share our topics of focus and political investment in improving the material conditions in which transgender lives are lived. And that requires, as a starting point, that we read and cite across lines of disciplinary difference to a greater extent than we presently do.

Finally, and relatedly, a post-discipline of transgender studies must have a more expansive and more robust institutional architecture. Waisbord (2019, 123–24) writes that the post-discipline of communication is “held together by an institutional architecture of professional organizations, academic units, and journals,” rather than by any coherent canon of theories or set of standard methodologies. However, transgender studies is not so lucky as to have such alternative sources of unity outside of the journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*. While *TSQ*’s contribution to the field has been monumental, it has also been critiqued for its narrow focus on humanistic inquiry (see, e.g., Ashley 2020; Billard 2020; Cull 2020; Turner 2020). In some ways, these critiques are warranted, because the journal *has* formally announced itself as the “journal of record” for the field of transgender studies (Institute for LGBT Studies, n.d.). In other ways, these critiques are perhaps asking too much of *TSQ* as a journal focused on cultural studies. Regardless, *TSQ* was, until the launch of the *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies*, the only venue dedicated to trans studies research not explicitly focused on health. These health journals—the *International Journal of Transgender Health*, published by Taylor & Francis, and *Transgender Health*, published by Mary Ann Liebert—are the only other journals that exclusively publish research on transgender topics, but they lack any substantive dialogue with the broader field of trans studies.

Importantly, *TSQ* has always been firmly trans-led whereas the *International Journal of Transgender Health* is associated with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health and *Transgender Health* was founded by a scholar connected to, but not a member of the trans community. In this way, the *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies* serves as a bridge between these journals that have built up the field at ostensibly opposite ends of a disciplinary spectrum.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, we aim to make further

3 The editorial board of the *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies*—developed, as it was, with

space for meaningful and engaged research with trans communities, uplift and center scholarship from trans perspectives, and, importantly, expand transgender studies into the post-discipline that we believe it can become. Our goal is not to carve out an alternative space for empirical inquiry, which is already in many ways valued over and pitted against cultural analysis in the neoliberal university, nor is it to serve as an addendum to the field or parallel avenue for social scientists to publish work that is out of scope for these other journals. Rather, we envision applied transgender studies to be an elaboration upon the existing field of transgender studies that recognizes the painful history of biomedical inquiry and pathologization, as well as the recent interventions from within and outside of the sciences that center the self-determination, agency, and lived experiences of trans people.

What is needed, then, is a greater degree of dialogue among the four journals currently publishing scholarship on transgender topics. The research published in each should meaningfully engage with the work published in the others, and there should be greater overlap in their editorial boards, their author lists, and their scholarly commitments. We may also need to launch additional journals with either more general foci or with a greater variety of specialized foci as the field expands. Additionally, we need to create new intellectual spaces in which to bring together scholars working across the various areas of study that would comprise a post-discipline of transgender studies, and to bring them together in collaborative, rather than combative, ways. The Center for Applied Transgender Studies was established to provide one such space, but it cannot be the only one.

We also need more tenure stream jobs focused on transgender studies and we need programs in trans studies at universities (Adair, Awkward-Rich, and Marvin 2020), though they should be housed independently or crossdisciplinarily, rather than within the confines of queer theory and gender studies programs and departments (Keegan 2020a, 2020b). Finally, as Stryker (2020) has called for, we need a professional society (other than the World Professional Association of Transgender Health), and this society should be steadfast in its commitment to a postdisciplinary field. That society should also host regular conferences, where the kinds of crosscutting conversations a post-discipline requires can be had. These kinds of institutionalization would create opportunities to materially support the kind of applied trans studies scholarship for which we argue.

In short, we must tear down the walls being built, whether intentionally or inadvertently, in the efforts to make trans studies a humanistic discipline. Instead, we must build a robust institutional architecture that can house a flourishing post-discipline of transgender studies.

## **TOWARD AN APPLIED TRANSGENDER STUDIES**

For transgender studies to establish itself as a post-discipline in the manner laid out in the preceding section, it must necessarily orient itself toward an *applied transgender*

the aim of fostering a post-discipline of transgender studies—counts current and former editorial board members from the *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *Transgender Health*, and *TSQ* among its members.

*studies*. Of course, this does not mean that *all* trans studies must become *applied* trans studies. Certainly not. As Anna Lauren Hoffmann (2022) so clearly articulated in her opening remarks at the Applied Trans Technology Studies Symposium, applied trans studies

is not some positivistic competitor to trans studies as it has emerged and unfolded in the humanities, but rather a complement—a space where further critical, technical, and social scientific methods can find recognition as we work to address the material and political exigencies of trans life.

What we mean to suggest, then, is that the broader postdisciplinary field of transgender studies must be held together by the same animating impulse that motivates applied trans studies, which is to mobilize the wealth of theoretical and methodological tools available to us to produce scholarship that aims to improve the material realities of transgender existence. In the words of Austin Johnson (2022a, 2022b), we must aspire to “do” trans studies in a way that “builds structural competency” within and for transgender movements for justice. We must find ways to take transgender research out of the tower and into the public, where we can intervene in the dismal state of affairs facing our communities.

This inaugural double issue of the *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies* kicks off what we hope to be an enduring effort to foster and facilitate a post-discipline of transgender studies. The journal aims to serve as a venue for the kinds of work we have advocated for in this article. And the scholarship contained within the pages of this issue speaks to the breadth of transgender studies that exists within the academy beyond that which is published in *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *Transgender Health*, and *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*—scholarship that belongs in and is vital to our post-discipline. The areas of inquiry represented in this scholarship can and should be brought in conversation with each other and coordinated in their aims and mission.

The articles in this issue each represent the possibilities of applied transgender studies in different ways. Aniruddha Dutta’s (2022) article, “Surviving COVID-19 in India: Transgender Activism in a Neoliberal–Developmentalist Assemblage,” draws on critical theoretical frameworks and ethnographic observation in hijra and kothi communities in eastern India to analyze how trans activists navigate the ambivalences of contemporary governance to sustain their communities throughout crisis. In doing so, Dutta offers an incisive accounting of the institutional and policy landscapes that have created the conditions that make this activism necessary, which will be instructive for activists and policymakers alike.

Next, Cal Horton’s (2022) article, “‘Of Course, I’m Intimidated By Them. They Could Take My Human Rights Away’: Trans Children’s Experiences With UK Gender Clinics,” offers an important, but underrepresented perspective on transgender health scholarship. Drawing on ten interviews with trans children and 30 interviews with the parents of trans children, Horton details the fraught experiences these children have in gender clinics in the United Kingdom and uses these illustrative data to make clear recommendations for healthcare workers in the UK serving trans youth populations.

Continuing a focus on transgender health, Gayle Brewer, Laura Hanson, and Noreen Caswell’s (2022) article, “Body Image and Eating Behavior in Transgender Men and Women: The Importance of Stage of Gender Affirmation,” draws on interviews



with 22 transgender men and women in Britain to investigate the causes of disordered eating behaviors in trans populations. Importantly, they find that the roots of disordered eating among trans people differ from those among cisgender people, as trans people employ disordered eating behaviors to pursue a variety of transition-related goals. Highlighting the role that medical providers themselves play in encouraging disordered eating among trans people, Brewer and colleagues provide a clear vision of what must change to promote the health and well-being of trans communities across transition stages.

In the final health-focused study in this issue, Alischer Cottrill and colleagues' (2022) article, "I Have to Decide How Attached to that Future I Feel': Fertility Intentions and Desires Among Transmasculine Young Adults," draws on 21 interviews with transmasculine people in the United States to better understand the barriers they face to acquiring fertility care. Identifying these various barriers, Cottrill and colleagues lay out the multilevel interventions needed to facilitate access to the full spectrum of fertility-related services transmasculine people need.

Next, Kai Jacobsen and Aaron Devor's (2022) article, "Moving from Gender Dysphoria to Gender Euphoria: Trans Experiences of Positive Gender-Related Emotions," sets aside the culturally dominant emphasis on gender dysphoria and the other negative emotional experiences of trans people to more deeply explore the concept of gender *euphoria*. Drawing on a small, but rich set of interviews with trans young adults in Canada, Jacobsen and Devor illustrate the limitations of purely medicalized models of trans identity and reveal the harms that can come from deficit- and distress-based narratives of transgender experience.

In the penultimate article, "Autistics Never Arrive: A Mixed Methods Textual Analysis of Transgender and Autistic Autobiography," Noah Adams (2022) analyzes 71 English-language autobiographical narratives from autistic-trans individuals since 2003. His analysis reveals the central significance of autistic-specific narratives of gender identity that differ from those dominant among non-autistic trans people, as well as the uncomfortable position autistic-trans people are placed in vis-à-vis the wider trans community. This work will be particularly illuminating for scholars working on issues of identity formation, community building, and group politics as we work to build a more inclusive and accessible transgender movement.

In the closing article of this inaugural issue, "Tipping Points and Shifting Expectations: The Promise of Applied Trans Studies for Building Structural Competency," Austin Johnson (2022b) reflects on his experiences of using research to build up grassroots networks of collective care in trans communities in the American South. Analyzing these experiences in the context of recent political attacks on the trans community in the US, Johnson argues that transformative change requires an increase in *structural competency* in our mainstream social institutions and makes the case for applied transgender studies as a path forward to that end.

Taken together, these articles offer an early glimpse into what applied transgender studies is and what a post-discipline of transgender studies can do. This work is international in its focus. It addresses important social problems through rigorous scholarship, mobilizing diverse theories and methods to better understand these problems and identify potential remedies. When this work addresses health contexts, it places trans voices at the center, building out visions of trans care based on trans



people's needs, rather than cis providers' expectations. Moreover, it deeply considers the non-medical (i.e., social, cultural, and political) factors that shape transgender health in important ways. Finally, this work cuts across disciplinary boundaries to get to the very heart of matters and, in doing so, it aims to inspire change in the laws, policies, and practices that determine the life chances of transgender people.

The *Bulletin of Applied Transgender Studies* will continue to publish such work as we work to build a robust post-discipline of transgender studies. It is our sincere hope that you join us in that endeavor in your own research and institutional service.

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