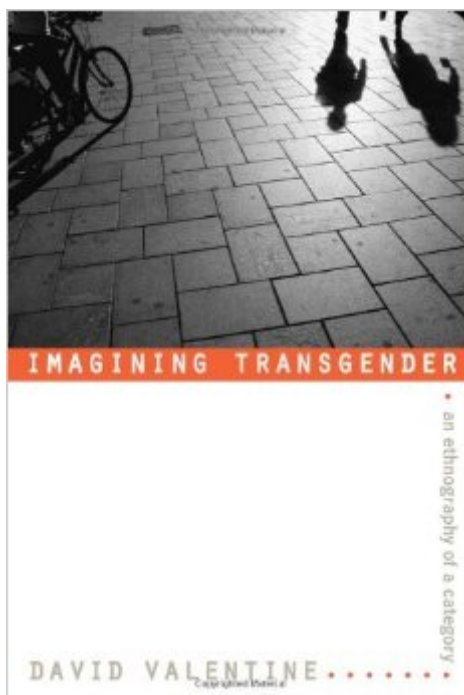


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Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography Of A Category



Synopsis

Imagining Transgender is an ethnography of the emergence and institutionalization of transgender as a category of collective identity and political activism. Embraced by activists in the early 1990s to advocate for gender-variant people, the category quickly gained momentum in public health, social service, scholarly, and legislative contexts. Working as a safer-sex activist in Manhattan during the late 1990s, David Valentine conducted ethnographic research among mostly male-to-female transgender-identified people at drag balls, support groups, cross-dresser organizations, clinics, bars, and clubs. However, he found that many of those labeled "transgender" by activists did not know the term or resisted its use. Instead, they self-identified as "gay," a category of sexual rather than gendered identity and one rejected in turn by the activists who claimed these subjects as transgender. Valentine analyzes the reasons for and potential consequences of this difference, and how social theory is implicated in it. Valentine argues that "transgender" has been adopted so rapidly in the contemporary United States because it clarifies a model of gender and sexuality that has been gaining traction within feminism, psychiatry, and mainstream gay and lesbian politics since the 1970s: a paradigm in which gender and sexuality are distinct arenas of human experience. This distinction and the identity categories based on it erase the experiences of some gender-variant people—particularly poor persons of color—who conceive of gender and sexuality in other terms. While recognizing the important advances transgender has facilitated, Valentine argues that a broad vision of social justice must include, simultaneously, an attentiveness to the politics of language and a recognition of how social theoretical models and broader political economies are embedded in the day-to-day politics of identity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Valentine has already won several prizes for this book, and no wonder. His book is an astonishing look at the idea of transgender--as a category. Smug Americans may think they know what transgender is, but as Professor Valentine unpacks this concept, the reader is treated to a myriad of meanings and nuances that show the amazing variety to be found in human gender. In looking at transgender, Valentine forces all readers to consider what normal gender definitions are. This healthy self-reflective exercise should help everyone to broaden their minds--and their categories. It is beautifully written, and hard to lay down once started. Though I am a colleague of the author, I am no less impressed by this work.

Although the book was written earlier on and centered on a community that was once more oppressed than it is now currently, the book does an astounding job of portraying the intermingling LGBTQ communities that developed, and the types of social bubbles within the larger structure. This book did its job in the end and educated me on the LGBTQ community and how it certainly came to be.

This book gives an interesting look into a world that few people are knowledgeable about. In it, Valentine simply shatters any preconceived notions about the transgender community. Instead, Valentine shows just how complex the transgender community is. Dealing with the issue of category and how it's defined, you get to witness the complexity of identity throughout the book. Valentine uses his notes from support groups, parties and many other functions he attended. I would recommend this book to any person interested in dealing with how identities or categories are formed.

David Valentine's book seeks to bring to light the margins of a marginalized community, that is those who may or may not identify with the already marginalized group of "transgendered." Valentine does a very well job of giving context to the category and why it has become a problematic thing. He seeks to shed light on what the category is, or possibly that it is a category that can never be definitely defined, and even further how the creation and inclusion of such a category has in many ways lead to further the discrimination of people who do not identify with the,

now defined category of transgender and its underpinnings based in gender variance.

Valentine puts the reader into his shoes as he wriggles his way into the topic of Transgender. He has an excellent body of people to work with and amazing insight into the everyday life of those society would deem trans. However, the way he uses this knowledge is not always morally correct or understandable to the reader. Good book overall though.

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