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Book Review: Laura Erickson-Schroth (ed.) (2014), *Trans bodies, Trans selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*. Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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**Trans bodies, Trans selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community, Edited by Laura Erickson-Schroth, 10 June 2014, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 672 pp., £25.99, pbk.**

Since the mid 1990s there has been a proliferation of books by academics and practitioners about transgender lives (see, for example, Bornstein, 1994; Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Teich, 2012). *Trans Bodies, Trans selves* breaks new ground, however, by offering an accessible, comprehensive and also practical resource guide for trans people themselves. The book is modeled on the feminist health manual, 'Our Bodies, Ourselves', first published by the Boston Women's Health Collective in the 1970s. This book was written by and for women and aimed to counter mainstream knowledge about women's health and empower women by sharing information and experience. *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* has a similar aim. Written by and for trans people, it seeks to counter pathologising knowledge and understandings of trans people, make visible the diversity of trans experience and communities, and empower trans people to take charge of their own lives. The book is useful, not only for trans people themselves, but also families, friends, partners and allies, as well as medical practitioners, health providers, policy makers, academics and all those who work with trans people or alongside them. Although the book is primarily North American in focus it is nonetheless relevant and useful for readers outside of the United States due to the broad range of topics and resources included.

A particular strength of the book is that the chapters are written in a highly accessible style and are informed by a range of disciplines, including biology, psychology, sociology, medicine, history and politics. They are also well designed

in terms of packing in a variety of perspectives on the topic under discussion. For example, each chapter features additional material such as personal narratives, opinion pieces, photographs and art, short quotations from survey respondents, spotlight discussions, references for further reading, Internet and other relevant resources. Key concepts and terms are highlighted and a comprehensive glossary is also provided. The chapters themselves are organised logically across six general sections and cover a range of topics including trans identities, coming out and living as a trans person, legal issues, work, medical and surgical options, families, sexuality and relationships, trans experience at different life stages, and trans activism and politics.

Section One has six chapters and begins by introducing the reader to 'who we are', and to relevant concepts and terms used within trans communities and throughout the book. This provides an excellent overview of the diverse ways in which trans people in both western and non-western cultures may choose to identify and describe themselves, and significantly includes people with non-binary gender identities (those who identify as neither male or female, or as both), who are increasingly gaining visibility in trans communities. Issues such as intersectionality, discrimination, sexuality and debates about preferred gender pronouns are also introduced and explained. This is followed by chapters on ethnicity, immigration, disability, religion and understandings of sex and gender, each drawing out how these are relevant to trans communities and significant in understanding trans people's lives. The chapters on ethnicity, immigration and disability highlight links between trans and other communities and are particularly strong in showing how intersectionality works in practice.

Demonstrated here are the various ways in which trans people negotiate complex and multiple spaces in terms of gender, cultural identities, politics, and also discrimination and privilege.

The chapters in section two and three of the book are primarily oriented to practical issues in relation to living as a trans person and transitioning. While some of this information is specific to the United States, such as legal issues and accessing medical treatment and services, the overall content of the chapters are relevant everywhere. For example, information, tips and guidance are provided on all aspects of social transitioning (coming out, choosing new names, changing or adapting physical appearance, and using public bathrooms etc.) as well as detailed overviews of hormone treatments and surgical techniques and procedures. Two notable topics included in the health section are sexual health and also fertility options. These topics are not usually found within mainstream help and advice resources for trans people and so highlight a changing landscape (or certainly the need for one) in the context of transgender health. Largely absent in these chapters, however, is some discussion of the particular challenges faced by people who have non-binary genders. This would have been helpful in view of the emphasis placed on diversity of experience within the book, and especially as non-binary gender is gaining most visibility within the United States (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Section four and five in the book address relationships, families and life stages. Useful discussions are provided on dating, intimate relationships and being a trans parent, and the chapter on sexuality is particularly helpful in outlining

issues concerning the body, sexual practices and the effects of hormones on sexual response. The chapter on children is an excellent resource for parents and/or carers seeking information on how they can support children expressing trans or other gender non-conforming identities. For example, the chapter discusses the range of difficulties that these children face and deal with, but also addresses the emotional and practical challenges involved in parenting and caring for children in this context. The chapters on youth and ageing identify and discuss the specificity of being a trans person at these particular stages in the life-course and cover a number of topics such as puberty, coming out, medical care, sexuality, relationships, retirement and preparing for old age.

The last section of the book, section six, covers the history of trans identities and communities in the United States, the growth of trans culture and trans presence in the arts, and trans activism and politics. These chapters offer both interesting and informative discussions on how trans communities as we know them today have developed and changed over time. The chapters outline the various social, cultural and political influences that have shaped trans experience, and introduce readers to many of the issues currently discussed by trans activists and academics in transgender studies, including trans rights, the political links and tensions with feminist and LGBT communities, and the role/significance of trans visibility and involvement in popular culture. The chapter on activism and politics is particularly helpful in raising awareness of the political issues for trans communities. A number of areas informing current trans activism are clearly outlined including, among others, hate violence, homelessness, incarceration, poverty and immigration. Tips on organising trans workshops, activist groups

and effective strategies to make a difference and change things for trans communities are also provided, and the political value of various forms of community involvement is highlighted.

Overall, this book is an excellent resource. The scope and depth of the content is impressive and the book is very successful in revealing the nature and significance of trans diversity. The various disciplinary perspectives employed in the book and the inclusion of trans peoples voices, also succeed in countering pathological understandings of trans people's lives and offer fresh perspectives and insights. Any reader interested in trans identities and communities would, therefore, find this book both informative and useful.

## **References**

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