

APC Podcast 1.1: E. Patrick Johnson on What's Left of Queer Theory Now?

Key terms & concepts

Black Queer Studies Conference in 2000

"Black queer studies has come of age. Following on the heels of an explosion of conferences, articles, and books over the last decade, black sexuality studies has been codified as a legitimate scholarly enterprise. While the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2000 was a watershed moment, I do not believe anyone in attendance imagined that black queer studies would proliferate the way that it has since the turn of the twenty-first century. But as John D'Emilio has observed about the 1990s as regards gay liberation, the "world turned" in relation to the study of black sexuality between 2000 and 2005."

- from No tea, no shade : new writings in Black queer studies edited by E. Patrick Johnson

Racialization: The discriminatory practice of imposing a racial or ethnic identity on people directly or indirectly as a way of singling them out. Postcolonial theory has been significant in exposing the working of racialization in creating divisions and inequalities among people. Gendered racialization involves the attribution of a combination of ethnic/racial and gender traits, for instance in terms of viewing Asian women as submissive.¹

See also Racial Formation in the United States by Michael Omi and Howard Winant

Performativity: A term drawn from speech act theory which suggests that certain pronouncements such as 'I pronounce you man and wife' at a wedding ceremony have the capacity to materialize an action. This notion has been popularized in gender theory by Judith Butler in *Gender* to denote the ways in which gender is constituted through the stylized repetition or iteration of existing gender norms so that gender comes into being through its daily enactment. Conceptually this has been critiqued for seeming to suggest that there are no limits to what or how one can perform (though performance, the actual practice of doing gender, is a different notion from performativity). Butler countered that critique in *Bodies That Matter* (1993).²

trans theory: Transgender theory is an emerging theoretical orientation on the nature of gender and gender identity in understanding the lived experiences of transgender and transsexual individuals. It is distinct in emphasizing the importance of physical embodiment in gender and sexual identity. Transgender theory integrates this embodiment with the self and socially constructed aspects of identity through the lived experiences of those with intersecting identities. Thus, it provides a theoretical basis for reconciling feminist and queer theoretical scholarship with social work practice and advocacy, with regard not only to issues of working with transgenders but also to larger issues of group identity and social oppression³

trans studies: Transgender studies is an emerging interdisciplinary academic field that takes gender nonnormativity, broadly construed, as its object of study. Research and theory within transgender studies focus on the cultural representations, political movements, social organization, and lived experience of various forms of gender nonconformity. Identities of interest to transgender studies scholars include transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites, androgynes, drag kings, drag queens, sissy boys, tomboy girls, butch lesbians, nelly gay men, and so on. Works in transgender studies include theorizations of transgender subjectivity, ethnographic explorations of transgender lived realities, close readings and critiques of existing knowledge about

¹ Griffin, G. racialization. In (Ed.), *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. : Oxford University Press

² Griffin, G. performativity. In (Ed.), *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. : Oxford University Press

³ Nagoshi, Julie L., and Brzuzy, Stephan/ie. "Transgender theory: embodying research and practice." *Affilia Journal of Women and Social Work*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, pp. 431-443. *Health Reference Center Academic*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A257567079/HRCA?u=upenn_main&sid=HRCA&xid=5d83a6a0.

transgendered people, and the excavation and reconstruction of transgender histories. As an interdisciplinary field, transgender studies spans many disciplinary locations: history, anthropology, literature, policy studies, sociology, legal studies, cultural studies, and media studies, to name a few. While there has long been academic research studying gender-variant people and related social institutions and cultural forms, transgender studies differs from the bulk of previous work. Many would argue that the difference lies in the specific politics that transgender studies embraces as an academic field. It has shared epistemological stakes and a moral and political vision that value transgender bodies, identities, behaviors, social collectivities, and cultural representations. Therefore, transgender studies produces knowledge with the goal of benefiting transgender people and communities. However, many would also point out that transgender studies is a contested field. People who work in the field often disagree about what should count as transgender studies.⁴

Laverne Cox

Janet Mock

Important references

- Black Queer Studies: a Critical Anthology (2003)
- Reflections, Riffs and Remembrances: The Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference (2000) by Bryant Keith Alexander
- Theory in Motion: A Review of the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference by Jennifer DeVere Brody
- Just as Quare as They Want to Be: A Review of the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference by Vincent Woodard
- Put a Little Honey in My Sweet Tea: Oral History as Quare Performance by E. Patrick Johnson
- Gender Trouble by Judith Butler
- Bodies that Matter by Judith Butler
- Not Straight, Not White Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis By Kevin Mumford
- Between the (Gender) Lines: the Science of Transgender Identity from Harvard
- "Plum Nelly: New Essays in Queer Black Studies" by Dwight McBride Jennifer Devere Brody
- Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique by Roderick A. Ferguson
- Cathy J. Cohen; Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?
- Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South by E. Patrick Johnson
- Black Nations Queer Nations New York Conference in 1995
- Making Sweet Tea (the film project): <https://sweetteafilm.com/about/>
- on reclaiming or re-appropriating language: "Power grab: reclaiming words can be such a bitch" from the Guardian

⁴ Bryant, K. (2009). Transgender studies. In J. O'Brien (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of gender and society* (pp. 849-853). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications