Chapter Five

Gender and the Hybrid Identity: On Passing Through

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Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to develop discussions of “passing through,” particularly in terms of transgenderism and transsexuality. My argument here tends less to whether transsexual and transgender people “pass” or “do not pass” (and the related underpinnings of those arguments about passing as becoming normative), but focuses more on what takes place in the “in and through” of the movement between categories. I argue in this chapter that the passing through gender (more specifically, gender borders or lines) is what can illustrate gendered identities and hybridity – sometimes at its fullest. This is not necessarily a new argument, nor one new to sociology – indeed, oftentimes, sociologists explain a social norm by looking at the marginal aspects of the norm, or at the rule breakers of the norm, in order

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to illustrate it fully.\textsuperscript{2} In sex, gender, and sexuality scholarship, for instance, we see the use of intersex, transsexuality, and homosexuality as the outlier cases to explain the social norms of regulating two sexes, an equal number of genders (with an expected hierarchy between male and female), and a similar hierarchy of sexuality, with heterosexuality as the most privileged.\textsuperscript{3} What I aim to do in this chapter is to go beyond signaling transsexuality as rule-breaker of normative sex-gender expectations (a view from the outside), in order to theorize the passing-through categories and the meaning-making in that movement (or inside processes). But I am also arguing something else besides the outlier in discussions of gender (or sex, gender, and sexuality). I propose to look at the movement between categories of identities (not the categories themselves) or the passing through them, first, because such movement is heavily under-theorized but nonetheless an important aspect of gender and gender hybridity, but also because the movement itself can show us productive ways of thinking about the categories.

I came about the idea of “passing” as I was thinking and writing about the relationship of race and ethnicity for Puerto Ricans.\textsuperscript{4} I had a sense that there was something about the passing through of “racial” categories and how, perhaps, Puerto Ricanness was a way to interrogate US ethno-racial categories, so I began to write autoethnographically about complex everyday experience and interaction with others, and frustrations with theoretical frameworks that I felt were void of complexity.\textsuperscript{5} As with that previous work, my use of the term “passing” here is not about historical uses of it, as in passing for

\textsuperscript{2} For writings documenting how this has happened in the sociological study of gender (especially through interactionism), see Lorber (1994) and Ekins and King (2006).

\textsuperscript{3} See, for instance, Butler (1990), Corber and Valoochi (2003), and Fausto-Sterling (2000).

\textsuperscript{4} See Vidal-Ortiz (2004). I focused there on the flexible and movable social identifications for Puerto Ricans in the US. The productiveness between being/moving from Puerto Rican, Latino, and people of color in situational turns (that is, how one can be Puerto Rican in certain spaces, Latina/o in others, and an ethno-racial minority, or a person of color, in others) proved for me to be a way of opening up identities to their social contexts.

\textsuperscript{5} I see some similarities between the autobiographical work of transsexuals and my own in terms of racialization, and I draw this parallel in the literature review in order to explore this idea (although the comparison is drawn only to a limit, as the reader will notice). The autobiographical is intrinsic to the study of transsexuality and transgender studies (see Vidal-Ortiz 2008), but more research is needed in terms of understanding this knowledge production.