

What makes a man? Thomas Beatie, embodiment, and ‘mundane transphobia’

Damien W. Riggs

Flinders University, Australia

Abstract

Critical scholars have long examined the ways in which identity categories are forcibly written upon bodies through the functioning of social norms. For many marginalized groups, such critiques have been central to challenging pathologising understandings of identity categories, often by uncoupling bodies from identities. Yet despite this, normative accounts of embodiment are still forcibly written upon the bodies of many groups of people, albeit often in mundane ways. Nowhere is this perhaps more evident than in the lives of trans people. This paper explores one instance of this by examining in close detail some of the key discursive strategies deployed by Oprah Winfrey in her first interview with Thomas Beatie. It is argued that Beatie is constantly drawn into a logic of ‘bodily evidence’ that demands of him an aetiological account of himself as a man, and from which, Winfrey concludes, he is always left lacking.

Keywords

transphobia, rhetorical analysis, discrimination, gender normativity, masculinity

This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of an article published in *Feminism and Psychology*, Copyright Sage, DOI: 10.1177/0959353514526221

There now exists a considerable body of attitudinal research examining beliefs about lesbians and gay men held amongst the general population (see chapters in Pardie and Luchetta, 1999, for a summary). There also exists a considerable body of discursive research that has mapped the ways in which discrimination against lesbians and gay men occurs in everyday interactions, and the particular rhetorical devices that are deployed to this end (see, for example, Land and Kitzinger, 2005; Speer and Potter, 2000). An excellent example of such discursive research appears in the work of Elizabeth Peel (2001), who coined the term ‘mundane heterosexism’ to refer to the commonplace (though no less violent) ways in which discrimination against lesbians and gay men often passes by under the guise of humour or claims to liberalism. A second important example of research in the discursive tradition is provided by Virginia Braun (2000), who suggests that heterosexism can occur either by commission (the explicit voicing of heterosexist comments) or by omission (the failure to challenge heterosexism).

Yet whilst these bodies of research (attitudinal and discursive) have contributed much to our knowledge of discrimination against lesbians and gay men, they have not yet contributed as much to our understanding of the general population’s attitudes towards trans people, or the everyday ways in which discrimination against trans people occurs in conversation. Whilst of course there is a growing body of research on the explicit discrimination that trans people face (e.g., Couch et al., 2008; Whittle et al., 2007), there has to date been less published on how and why such discrimination occurs. Exceptions to this are the development and limited application of a scale designed to measure attitudes toward trans people amongst the general population (Hill and Willoughby, 2005), a UK study of attitudes towards trans people (Tee and Hegarty, 2006) and some discursive research on the gatekeeping of medical support in transitioning amongst psychiatrists (Speer, 2006). This

paper seeks to contribute to this burgeoning latter body of research by analysing one particular instance of discrimination against one trans person: an interview with trans man Thomas Beatie conducted by Oprah Winfrey. In so doing, this paper documents how such discrimination occurs in mundane (though again no less violent) ways.

As many readers may be aware, Beatie came under the gaze of the international media when, in 2008, he and his wife announced that he was pregnant and carrying their baby. As the media sensationalism slowly turned to a calmer presentation of the ‘facts’, and as Beatie gave interviews telling his own story, debates arose over whether Beatie was indeed a pregnant man, or whether his status as a man was questioned by the very fact of his pregnancy. The Oprah Winfrey interview marked the beginning of the uptake of the story within the ‘respectable’ (as opposed to tabloid) media, and as such is an important site to examine for the ways in which a broad spectrum of the viewing public was presented with a very specific version of Beatie and his story. More specifically, and as is the focus here, the interview evidences a number of instances where what is termed here ‘mundane transphobia’ was enacted by Winfrey in the interview. As such, the analysis presented here focuses on the rhetorical effects of Winfrey’s statements, with an emphasis upon what is implied by many of her claims about Beatie’s embodiment and identity. In this sense, and whilst not a full discourse analysis of the interview (in that the analysis doesn’t attend in any depth to the broader social representation of trans men, nor does it focus very closely on the interactional nature of the interview as data but rather primarily on Winfrey’s comments), the analysis presented below nonetheless highlights how Winfrey’s engagement with Beatie enacts a range of marginalising tropes about trans men that must be clearly identified in order to be challenged.

In regards to the term ‘mundane transphobia’, whilst it is acknowledged that Peel’s (2001) analysis of mundane heterosexism focused on everyday interactions in which

heterosexism occurs, and whilst the Oprah Winfrey interview with Thomas Beatie might be seen as somewhat outside of the everyday, it is nonetheless suggested here that the point of similarity is that in both Peel's work and the present paper, it is the banal, indeed routine, ways in which normative assumptions are made that makes heterosexism and transphobia both speakable and difficult to challenge. Comment is also warranted here on the use of the word 'transphobia'. Feminist scholars writing from within and against psychology have long critiqued the individualising and minimising effects of the term 'homophobia' (e.g., Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993), suggesting that it fails to capture the systemic nature of anti-gay discrimination, and that this is because it locates such discrimination as a 'phobia' within the minds of individual people. A similar argument could of course be made for the term 'transphobia'. The term is retained in this paper, however, for the powerful rhetorical effect it has: when most people think of transphobia they are likely to think of the murders of trans people motivated by hate for people who do not conform to a normative model of gender. Whilst putting the speech of Oprah Winfrey in the same category may seem extreme, there is considerable utility in demonstrating how marginalising speech, hate speech, and murder sit on the same continuum; one that is shaped by normative gender binaries as they relate to embodiment.

Before moving on to analyse the transcript of the interview, it is important to first provide a few remarks about the broader context in which this paper sits. As Butler (2004) has suggested, there is a now longstanding tradition of academic writing which, in effect, uses the lives of trans people to demonstrate the constructed nature of gendered categories. Beginning with the work of Garfinkel (1967) in his now (in)famous work on Agnes (a trans woman), what is constructed as the 'choice' or 'ability' of trans people to 'change gender' has been treated as an ethnographic site useful for examining how gender norms are constructed and perpetuated. Importantly, almost all of this research has been conducted by

people who do not identify as trans, a fact that at least in part must render this research to some degree suspect for the way in which it takes the lives of a marginalised group of people as valid ‘evidence’ for claims made by dominant group members (i.e., non-trans people). It is only more recently that research (led in many instances by trans people) has shifted to examine the resistances that trans people make to transphobia (e.g., Couch et al., 2008; Sakamoto et al., 2009); the families that trans people create (e.g., Hines, 2006); and the sexual identities of trans people (e.g., Devor, 1993). This shift is important, and marks a move away from the treatment of trans people as objects of research, and towards one where trans people are seen as active subjects in the determination of what is considered to be valid research about their lives.

With these above points in mind, it is important to state here that I do not identify as trans. What I do identify as, however, and the place from which I speak, is as a white middle-class gay man with a research interest in discursive analyses of how discrimination occurs in very mundane ways. In this sense, my intent in writing this article is not to hold Beatie up as a tool in my own agenda to make a point about gender through examining the life of a trans person, nor is it to speak for trans people. Rather, my point is to examine how Winfrey makes use of a range of gender normative (and indeed offensive) arguments that position Beatie as ‘not quite’ – not quite a father, not quite a man, and thus not quite intelligible. Whilst it should be stated here that across the interview Winfrey’s talk may be viewed as broadly supportive of Beatie and his family, in the specific quite another picture emerges, one in which Winfrey appears unable to accept as legitimate Beatie’s identity as a man and his pregnancy. Importantly, it must also be stated here that Beatie himself is not entirely outside gender normativity, as can be seen in some of his own statements. Trans people’s own imbrication within gender normativity, however, must be the focus of a separate paper, with

the focus of the present paper being upon the enactment of mundane transphobia towards trans people by non-trans people.

Analytic Approach

Transcripts for the Oprah Winfrey Show are available to download for a fee from www.oprah.com. I downloaded the transcript of the interview between Winfrey and Beatie in August 2007, two months after the interview aired, in addition to having recorded the interview when it aired. I then viewed the video recording along with the transcript multiple times, in order to identify the dominant ways in which Winfrey engaged with and constructed Beatie. As such I adopted an inductive approach to examining the transcripts, given there was little previous discursive research examining how non-trans people speak to transgender people, and also because I had no *a priori* assumption that Winfrey would make transphobic statements in the interview (rather my interest was in how Beatie was being represented). My viewing process was iterative, in that with each successive viewing I identified particular salient features in terms of the representation of Beatie by Winfrey, and then re-viewed these to assess whether or not they could legitimately be seen as part of a consistent narrative occurring across the interview. In this sense my analysis approximated Wetherell and Potter's (1992) approach to the analysis of interpretative repertoires. As they note, interpretative repertoires are "broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images" (90). As such, identifying and examining interpretative repertoires is "a way of understanding the *content* of discourse and how that content is organized" (original emphasis, 90). Thus in the context of the present paper, whilst the overall discourse to be examined is one of mundane transphobia – the everyday ways in which non-trans people enact marginalisation towards transgender people despite claims to

inclusivity – it is in the interpretative repertoires identified that we can see just how this discourse is deployed. From my iterative analysis of the transcript I identified two distinct interpretative repertoires. These were 1) a focus on the (contested) aetiology of Beatie’s identity as a man, and 2) the evocation of a highly gender normative account of masculinity.

Analysis

In the analysis that follows, I examine the two interpretative repertoires identified, and I pay close attention to the rhetorical logic employed to justify the statements made by Winfrey to Beatie, and hence to pass them off as not being transphobic. As my analysis demonstrates, regardless of the intent of Winfrey, the statements examined here are transphobic precisely because they accept as ‘normal’ forms of embodiment where natively-assigned sex accords with gender identity, and hence fail to truly apprehend Beatie as a man on his own terms.

Aetiology and Evidence

In his incisive re-analysis of Garfinkel’s (1967) reporting of his work with Agnes, Denzin (1991) suggests that Garfinkel’s work displays a “masculine preoccupation with theorizing the genesis, origins, causes and effects of various social situations, including social problems and the types of persons and groups who have or who are those problems” (198). Denzin outlines Garfinkel’s apparent obsession with legitimating his claims about gender through a focus on the aspects of Agnes’ embodiment that *he* constructs as mattering. As such, Agnes’ body is made to matter on terms that are highly prescribed by existing gender norms at the time (where, for example, women were – and potentially still are – expected to be feminine and well presented and demure). That Garfinkel went on to claim from the ‘facts’ of Agnes’

embodiment a theory of gender as a situational and conversational enactment thus demonstrates the circuitous logic he employed, whereby a normative performance of gender served to legitimate a normative gender order (even as Garfinkel claimed to show that gender can be changed). In other words, whilst Garfinkel argued for the contextual and changeable nature of gender, there were still only two options for gender expression, and these were clearly marked by a set of normative and limiting behaviours. Garfinkel's reliance upon an aetiological account of Agnes' life thus did little if anything to actually recognise Agnes' own experiences of embodiment, and instead forced them into a framework in which she was rendered intelligible via a very particular evidentiary pathway that upheld Garfinkel's theories about the world, a practice that unfortunately occurs far too often in the social sciences.

In very similar ways, Winfrey constructs an account within her interview with Beatie that proposes a aetiology for his life that upholds a normative account of gender wherein there are either men or women, and that even if some men have vaginas or some women have penises, they were always originally a 'matched pair' (within a logic where penises belong to males and vaginas belong to females). Winfrey's emphasis upon aetiology is evident from the beginning of the interview, such as in this first extract taken from the opening few minutes of the interview:

WINFREY: So, I know the first question, because we didn't tell our audience is how is this [a pregnant man] possible? And we're going to get into that in a minute, but first let's go back to the very beginning. Thomas was actually born Tracy.

AUDIENCE: Ah.

WINFREY: Okay. Because you all are going, "Okay."

WINFREY: So, tell us about that. Tell us about that.

BEATIE: Where do I start? I've --

WINFREY: Growing up you felt that you were--I know your mother died when you were --

BEATIE: When I was 12 years old.

WINFREY: Twelve years old and that's a great loss for anybody. So as a 12-year old little girl, your mom died and you were basically left with not a lot of feminine images, correct?

Here Winfrey constructs, with very little help from Beatie, an account of the 'causes' of Beatie now being a pregnant man. Her aetiological account is signalled in her use of the words 'the very beginning', which denote to the audience that the information she is providing references Beatie's 'natural' or natal state of being – that of being Tracy. Much like the logic employed by Garfinkel, the fact that Beatie was born with a vagina is taken as appropriately leading to him being given a girl's name (hence Thomas was *actually* born Tracy). When the audience affirms this as an acceptable explanation of how it is that Beatie is a pregnant man, Winfrey is affirmed in continuing with an aetiological 'explanation' of Beatie. Whilst Winfrey then invites Beatie to tell his story, she almost immediately cuts in and takes over the telling of the story, in which she emphasises a causal explanation for his current identification and embodiment, rather than allowing him to tell the story of his life. Having introduced the death of Beatie's mother when he was twelve, and again with very little input from Beatie, Winfrey is then able to create a link between the loss of a mother (who is presumed to be feminine) and Beatie's current gender identification. And again, in the final sentence Winfrey reiterates that Beatie was 'a 12-year old little girl', thus reinforcing the 'once was girl, now man' logic that maps out a trajectory of gender identification from one gender to 'the other'.

With this as the framework, then, the audience is provided with an introduction to Beatie and his life that is not only very narrow and focused upon aetiology, but is also

transphobic for the particularly limited account of Beatie's experiences as masculine that it allows (something he reports as a lifelong experience throughout the interview). Indeed, as we can see in the following extract, at the same time as Beatie attempts to account for masculinity as the norm for him as a person, rather than as a sudden change, Winfrey remains wedded to an aetiological account whereby first there was Tracy, and then there was Thomas:

BEATIE: Up until puberty, I didn't see anything wrong at all. When I turned, I think it was about 14, I started to grow breasts and I thought –

WINFREY: We all do, some earlier than others. It was 11 for me, but anyway, go ahead.

BEATIE: Well, it was kind of a shock to me, because I didn't have my mother around and, you know, I was just used to catching footballs and, you know, balls and so it hurt and I just kind of thought, you know, "What's my body going through?" You know, "Is it betraying me?" And my father, he pushed me into modeling...

WINFREY: Yeah.

BEATIE: ...at the time.

WINFREY: Weren't you Miss Teen Hawaii? Or in a pageant?

BEATIE: Well, I was in a pageant. I was Miss Teen Hawaii USA finalist.

AUDIENCE: Wow.

WINFREY: Yeah. And what do you think when you see those pictures now?

BEATIE: Well, I think that's an attractive woman.

WINFREY: Mm-hmm.

BEATIE: Yeah, definitely. I just--I wish I felt comfortable looking like that. I don't feel like I was born in the wrong body. I felt like I was meant to be exactly who I am today.

WINFREY: Mm-hmm.

BEATIE: And, yeah, it's kind of hard to explain. I mean, you want to ask me?

WINFREY: Did you have boyfriends?

BEATIE: I did have boyfriends. I had a couple of boyfriends.

WINFREY: Looking like that I would say you probably did.

In this extract Beatie is invited to account for when he came to recognise that his body didn't match with his sense of self. Having introduced the topic of breasts, Winfrey is able to locate both herself and Beatie on a shared ground – as females – in her statement that 'we all do'. In this statement Oprah, as a woman, positions herself on a common ground with Beatie who thus, by default, is also positioned as being a woman, even if this is in reference to the teenage version of Beatie. This type of statement is mundane transphobia at its most obvious, where Beatie not only identifies himself as a man in the interview, but also suggests that despite what his 'body was going through', he still saw himself as engaged in what he depicts as (albeit normative) masculine pursuits (i.e., catching footballs). Yet despite this, Winfrey persists in providing an account of Beatie not simply as being once a female, but implicitly as always and ongoingly a female. Thus rather than acknowledging Beatie's own identification as always being a person with a vagina and an 'attractive' body who regardless had a masculine sense of self, Winfrey appears invested in emphasising a normative account of gender identity and embodiment whereby being an attractive woman (who enters beauty pageants and who 'looking like that I would say probably did' have boyfriends) becomes the central focus of Winfrey's narration of Beatie's life. This is all despite the fact that Beatie clearly invites Winfrey to talk with him about his statement that 'I was meant to be exactly who I am today', to which Winfrey responds by asking about boyfriends, rather than about Beatie's experiences of embodiment as a man. Again, this reduces Beatie's account to a teleological understanding of his identification whereby Tracy always already precedes

Thomas, and furthermore whereby Tracy is as much a part of Thomas' present as she is his past.

Following Butler (2004), then, we might suggest that Beatie is subjected to a regulatory apparatus (i.e., gender) in order to be recognised, and yet the apparatus (constructed as it is through a set of binary oppositions that function within a normative framework) fails to actually apprehend him as the person he is. In other words, whilst Winfrey attempts to render Beatie intelligible within a gendered system as a man with a womb who was once a beauty queen, her enactments of mundane transphobia only serve to position Beatie as unintelligible precisely because of an aetiological account that locates him as a failure in terms of orienting to a gender that corresponds with his body. By Winfrey's logic, it would potentially be acceptable for him to be a man without a penis (and without a womb and thus not pregnant), or to be a woman with a womb, but not to be a pregnant man. This logic is further evidenced when Beatie's wife states, "It wasn't a difficult decision [for Beatie to carry the child], because I can't have children. I had endometriosis and so they removed my womb. So, I have no womb. Therefore, he does, and we, this is the way we're going to do it". So here we have a woman without a womb, but who is treated as a woman as her history tells that she was always a woman. Yet Beatie, as a man with a womb able to bear a child (but who has a 'history' of being in a teen beauty pageant and having boyfriends) cannot be a pregnant man, but must be something else altogether that Winfrey cannot comprehend.

One potentially dangerous knock on effect of the transphobia inherent to Winfrey's talk is the implications for Beatie (and his wife) as parent-to-be. If, as Butler (2004) argues, approval for breast removal for trans men is contingent upon 'proof' of longstanding unhappiness with the fact of having breasts, then Beatie's reports not only of being 'not being born in the wrong body' but also of being comfortable with who he is (i.e., a man with a

womb) potentially jeopardise his situation as a trans man dependent upon a very tenuous position within a medicalised hierarchy whereby it is the role of ‘professionals’ to determine who qualifies as a ‘real’ trans person, professionals who can revoke that approval at any time (Armitage 2001). As a parent, and as one subject to the medicalising gaze both as a pregnant person and as a trans person, Beatie is thus vulnerable to the societal reliance upon medicine and the psy disciplines as appropriate arbiters for what counts as acceptable parenting. We can see this in the following extract, in which Winfrey invited Beatie’s ob/gyn to comment on his pregnancy:

WINFREY: Well, Dr. James, are there risks with Thomas's pregnancy? I mean, among other things, this is the first man I've heard about and I think "People Magazine's" heard about. All that testosterone he was taking before that got him the beard and allows him to look in the mirror and shave every morning, and whatever else testosterone does for you, could that hurt the baby?

OB/GYN: Thomas has obviously done a lot of research on this, too, as well, and is very intelligent about it. He's been off testosterone for two years, before even trying to conceive. And so at this time his testosterone levels are normal. Obviously, there's changes that have been made physically that are permanent changes for him, but as far as hormone levels, his hormone levels are normal. This is a normal pregnancy. You know, people say "Oh, is this baby going to be abnormal or anything like that?" This baby's totally healthy. This I consider, you know, an average pregnancy.

The first point to be noted about this extract is the very existence of it in terms of who is being interviewed. That Winfrey is speaking to a medical professional about what is for all intents and purposes a ‘normal pregnancy’ implicitly suggests that in fact the pregnancy is

not normal, and thus it requires comment from a professional. This is signalled most clearly in the language of risk that is introduced by Winfrey's question of whether testosterone could 'hurt the baby'. This question shifts the focus away from Beatie, and towards the baby, about whom Winfrey appears primarily concerned. Whilst the ob/gyn responds by providing an affirming depiction of Beatie as 'very intelligent' in regards to his decision to carry a child, her recourse to notions of 'normal' subtly work to reiterate the idea that Beatie is not *per se* a pregnant man, but rather a pregnant woman. To elaborate: If Beatie is, in Winfrey's words, the 'first [pregnant] man I've heard about and I think 'People Magazine's heard about', then it is highly unlikely that there would be an established norm for what 'normal' hormone levels would look like for a pregnant man, or what an 'average pregnancy' would be for a pregnant man. The only way in which these words make sense is if they reference an average pregnancy *for a woman*.

The only other way in which the words can be treated, and in the context of the statement 'this baby's totally healthy', is that it is an average pregnancy for *a baby*, and the hormone levels are average for a baby. This account, whilst potentially less transphobic in its account of the pregnancy, is nonetheless still negative in the way it ignores Beatie as a human being, thus sidelining what might be best for him *as a man* in relation to hormone levels, or the challenges to him experiencing pregnancy as a man. This type of treatment of pregnant people is, of course, nothing new, with pregnant women typically expected to sacrifice their own needs or potentially even wellbeing to the needs of the growing foetus. Yet whilst this is true, what again makes the statements of the ob/gyn transphobic (in addition to being marginalising of Beatie as a pregnant person more generally) is the fact of the implicit comparison of Beatie's pregnancy to the pregnancies of women.

In this section I have argued that transphobia plays out in the interview via a series of normative assumptions about gender that are reliant upon an aetiological account of Beatie's

life, and which render him only intelligible via a teleological account where he is positioned as ‘once a female, now sort of a male’. Yet, as I will argue further in the following section, this tentative apportioning of maleness to Beatie is also repeatedly undermined throughout the interview, thus rendering his identity as a pregnant man potentially unintelligible to the viewing audience

‘Real men’, ‘real fathers’

In her analysis of the experiences of trans men who undertake pregnancy, Ryan (2009) suggests that “pregnant men are culturally unrecognizable” (145). This is not only the case because of the aforementioned normative status of a gender binary in which only women are presumed to have wombs, and only men are presumed to have penises, but also because the attributes associated with pregnancy and childbirth (i.e., a ‘maternal instinct’) are presumed to co-exist only within a body that is not only physically marked as female, but also psychologically marked as female. In this sense, and through the reliance upon an aetiological account and via an emphasis upon Beatie’s supposedly limited markers of masculinity (and his accompanying clear markers of what is presumed to be femininity – i.e., his pregnancy), Beatie is constructed in the interview not simply as a ‘wannabe’ man, but moreover as a *failed* wannabe man. This can be seen in the following extract, where Winfrey challenges Beatie for his non-gender normative account of gender:

BEATIE: And I realized that I wanted to be free again like I was when I was younger, when I didn't see the world as male or female. I just wanted to be myself and so I --

WINFREY: But the world is male and female.

BEATIE: It is.

WINFREY: Okay.

BEATIE: But for me, I'm a masculine person

Here Winfrey calls Beatie to account for his 'gender free' version of the world, where she not only treats his statement as idealistic and out of touch with 'reality' ('but the world is male and female'), but she also treats Beatie's response ('okay' to 'it is') as mandatory. In other words, Winfrey appears to imply that whilst it is one thing to claim to be a man who is pregnant (even if, as the previous section suggested, that is treated as questionable), it is another thing entirely to claim as a trans man that gender categories don't really matter. The implicit statement in this type of logic, then, is that for men whose masculinity is positioned as being under threat (i.e., due to being born without a penis), issues of masculinity should be at the centre of their world, not choosing to become pregnant and question gender binaries. Thus as Butler (2004) suggests in relation to trans people in general, trans people are constructed as failures when they do not "conform to a certain dominant fantasy of what existing norms actually are" (77). Indeed, it may be suggested, the construction of trans men such as Beatie as failures may be seen as integral to upholding this dominant fantasy whereby it is Beatie who is seen as a failure, not existing norms themselves (Riggs, 2005).

Despite the implicit construction of Beatie as a failed man, Winfrey still devotes a considerable proportion of the interview to constructing an image of Beatie as at least a somewhat successful representation of a man. On two separate occasions she raises the topic of Beatie's penis, as can be seen in the following two extracts in this paper:

WINFREY: Okay. Now let's get to the penis part.

BEATIE: Okay. Okay. What would you like to know?

WINFREY: Everything.

WINFREY: No, really. So did you have like implant surgery or?

BEATIE: I actually opted not to do anything to my reproductive organs, because I wanted to have a child one day. I didn't know how. It was just a dream. You know, there was no plan laid out but, you know, we had a lot of different options and I wasn't going to go there.

OPRAH: Now, so that's so interesting to me, because you wanted to have a child one day and yet you also felt like you were a man. In feeling like you're a man, men don't have, you know, don't reproduce through their bodies, children, obviously.

THOMAS: Correct, typically.

WINFREY: Typically. I mean typically, yeah. Until now. So was that a conflict in your mind?

BEATIE: You know, I have a very stable male gender identity.

WINFREY: Mm-hmm.

BEATIE: I see pregnancy as a process and it doesn't define who I am.

In response to Beatie's claim that he chose to retain his (nominally female) reproductive organs with the dream of "hav[ing] a child one day", Winfrey appears to struggle with this idea that Beatie could be a man who desired to "reproduce through [his] body". It is important to note here Beatie's implicit correction of Winfrey in his clarification of 'typically' – that whilst most men do not reproduce through pregnancy in their own bodies, some can and do. Yet despite this clarification by Beatie, Winfrey still uses the suggestion of 'conflict' through which to frame her response, and thus to some degree to contradict Beatie's claims to a 'very stable male gender identity' (as can be seen in her noncommittal response of 'Mm-hmm'). Beatie and Winfrey then go on to talk about other topics related to his transition, and Winfrey then again returns to the topic of penises:

WINFREY: Yes, you do have that right. So I was asking the question about your genitals. Did you have like a penis implant or you did something else?

BEATIE: No. Amazingly, hormones are an incredible thing.

Testosterone, you know in the womb up until I think two months we all look the same. Our genitals look the same.

WINFREY: Yeah, that's true.

BEATIE: And when testosterone is introduced --

WINFREY: You all know that, right? [to audience] You've seen the --yeah. You didn't know that? Yeah, we do. Okay. Go look at a little ultra-sound picture. Yeah.

BEATIE: So when testosterone is introduced, that's when male genitalia starts to form and reproductive organs and I just, you know --

WINFREY: Meaning, does it grow testicles? I don't mean to --

BEATIE: Well, in the womb.

WINFREY: I don't mean to be ignorant but does--do you, like, grow testicles too?

BEATIE: No. I mean, I just introduced testosterone to my body a little later.

WINFREY: yeah

BEATIE: so the body had already formed to a certain point but certain changes do happen when you take testosterone.

WINFREY: And then does the clitoris get larger?

BEATIE It does.

WINFREY: Yeah.

BEATIE: And it looks like a penis, looks like a small penis.

WINFREY: Yeah.

BEATIE: Does size matter?

WINFREY: Yeah. Well, to some people, yes.

BEATIE: I don't know. You can ask my wife that question.

WINFREY: Okay. So it means that you just basically, your clitoris grows. It looks like a small penis and, therefore, you look like a man.

BEATIE: Yes. And I can have intercourse with my wife.

WINFREY: Intercourse.

BEATIE: Mm-hmm.

This extract opens up with Winfrey asking a question that she already had an answer to in the previous extract, namely whether or not Beatie had an 'implant'. As the extract continues, it becomes evident that Winfrey is using standard rhetorical interview techniques to elicit a response from an interviewee, the answer to which she already knows. So, for example, Winfrey leaps from "I don't mean to be ignorant" in one moment, to stating summarily that "basically your clitoris grows. It looks like a small penis". In so doing, Winfrey is able to assert herself as a capable holder of knowledge about the lives and bodies of trans men, which then allows her to question some of Beatie's claims. Most significantly in this extract, however, is Winfrey's extrapolation that it is only with his 'small penis' that Beatie 'looks like a man'. It is only by affirming the existence of something that Winfrey (and it could be argued, society more broadly) treats as evidence of maleness, that the final piece of the aetiology of Beatie's identity as a pregnant man falls into place. The fact that Beatie not only has a penis (however small), and can have intercourse with his wife, is the lynchpin of the interview, whereby what is required of Beatie throughout is proof for his claim that he is a man (albeit one with a womb), and that he should be treated as such, rather than as a woman playing dress-ups.

Of course Beatie's masculinity is not allowed to simply stand even with the establishment of a penis. Instead, Winfrey remarks that "to some people" size does matter,

hence indicating that for some people Beatie is less of a man, if he is recognised as one at all. As a result of this statement (and importantly this occurs at precisely the very moment when Beatie is established as a man), his masculinity is thrown into question, thus upholding the logic outlined earlier where he is depicted as ‘not quite’ a man, and thus not quite a father, and not really a pregnant man. As the interview draws to a close, then, Beatie is left as a person without breasts but with a womb, as able to penetrate his wife with his ‘small’ penis but as carrying their baby. In this way, mundane transphobia operates to render Beatie relatively unintelligible within normative gender categories, and thus to perpetuate the marginalisation that his family faces.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have argued that mundane transphobia operates not simply to perpetuate discrimination against trans people, but more significantly to render trans people unintelligible, or at best intelligible only in particular narrow ways. This argument echoes those made by Braun (2000) and Peel (2001) in their discussions of heterosexism, in that whilst implied or ‘unintended’ discrimination may be perceived by some as less injurious, in fact it draws upon the very same normative assumptions as do more explicit and intentional forms of harm to marginal group members. Whilst the intent here was not to demonise Winfrey or to locate transphobia within her as an individual, it is important nonetheless to recognise the serious consequences of any form of transphobia, no matter how mundane or inclusive the coverage is intended to be. This leads me to suggest that the hyper visibility of Beatie within the media both during and since the Oprah interview does not operate to provide a safe umbrella for all pregnant trans men (or even for Beatie himself). As Ryan (2009) suggests in her discussion of the interview, whilst on the one hand making

experiences such as those of Beatie and his family visible are an important part of challenging the norm of the gender-normative nuclear family, it is perhaps too much to expect that such visibility will not bring with it further challenges and discrimination. Certainly, as Gamson (1999) suggests in his analysis of talk show representations of LGBT people, such representations are fraught for their capacity to further marginalise LGBT people at the very moment they claim to positively represent our stories.

The analysis presented in this paper has also shown that whilst attitudinal measures of transphobia are important for determining beliefs amongst the general population toward trans people, it is also vitally important that we continue to develop our understanding of the everyday ways in which transphobia occurs, and perhaps most importantly those that are portrayed as inclusive. For as long as it is acceptable to talk about trans people as ‘really’ being their natal sex, or only being ‘poor approximations’ of natively-assigned men and women, transphobia will continue to occur in mundane ways that are no less violent in their outcomes (Riggs and Patterson, 2009). Examining transphobia from the perspective of a non-trans person must thus be about examining the routine ways in which those of us who are non-trans are implicated in the marginalisation of trans people, and how this can be challenged by better understanding the rhetorical devices that serve to prop up a normative gender order in which trans people are rendered unintelligible. I would suggest, then, that what is required is a move away from a research agenda that treats trans people as objects, and towards one that treats transphobia and gender normative practices as objects warranting attention (as per the early lesbian feminist examination of the construction of heterosexuality; see Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993). Taking on responsibility for examining the operations of transphobia and its role in propping up gender binaries (from which non-trans people stand to benefit, regardless of our politics) is an important task that must remain on the research agenda for the foreseeable future.

Acknowledgments

I begin by acknowledging the sovereignty of the Kaurna people, the First Nations people upon whose land I live in Adelaide, South Australia. Thanks must go to the two excellent reviewers for such insightful feedback. Thanks also to those who heard and commented on this paper when it was presented in earlier forms at both the Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association 2010 conference and the 2010 Health in Difference conference, and to Barbara Baird, Amy Patterson and Joanna McIntyre for engaging conversations about the topic. The publication of this paper was supported by an article fellowship from the Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender at the University of Adelaide.

References

- Armitage LK (2001) Truth, falsity, and schemas of presentation: A textual analysis of Harold Garfinkel's story of Agnes. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 4(1). Available at: <http://www.ejhs.org/volume4/agnes.htm>
- Baird B (2008) Child politics, feminist analyses. *Australian Feminist Studies* 23: 291-305.
- Braun V (2000) Heterosexism in focus group research: Collusion and challenge. *Feminism & Psychology* 10(1): 133-140.
- Butler J (2004) *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Couch M, Pitts M, Croy S, Mulcare H, and Mitchell A (2008) Transgender people and the amendment of formal documentation: Matters of recognition and citizenship. *Health Sociology Review* 17(3): 286-295.

Denzin N (1991) Back to Harold and Agnes. *Sociological Theory* 9(2): 280-285

Devor H (1993) Sexual orientation identities, attractions, and practices of female-to-male transsexuals. *Journal of Sex Research* 30(5): 303-315.

Garfinkel H (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Gamson, J (1999) *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hill DB, and Willoughby BLB (2005) The development and validation of the genderism and transphobia scale. *Sex Roles* 53(7-8): 531-544.

Hines S (2006) Intimate transitions: Transgender practices of partnering and parenting.

Sociology 40(2): 353-371.

Kitzinger C, and Perkins R (1993) *Changing our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*.

New York: New York University Press.

Land V, and Kitzinger C (2005) Speaking as a lesbian: Correcting the heterosexist presumption.

Research on Language and Social Interaction 38(4): 371-416.

Pardie PL, and Luchetta T (1999) *The Construction of Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men*. New York: Haworth Press.

Peel E (2001) Mundane heterosexism: Understanding incidents of the everyday. *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(1) 541-554.

Riggs DW (2005) Caught 'n 'e frame?: The gender illusionist within heteropatriarchy. *Philament: An Online Journal of the Arts and Culture* 7. Available from <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament>

Riggs DW, and Patterson A (2009) The smiling faces of contemporary homophobia and transphobia. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* 5(2): 165-170.

Ryan M (2009) Beyond Thomas Beatie: Trans men and the new parenthood. In: Epstein R (ed) *Who's Your Daddy? And Other Writings on Queer Parenting*. Toronto: Sumach Press, 55-71.

Sakamoto I, Chin M, Chapra A, and Ricciardi J (2009) A 'normative' homeless woman?: Marginalisation, emotional injury and social support of transwomen experiencing homelessness. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* 5(1): 2-19.

Speer SA, and Potter J (2000) The management of heterosexist talk: Conversational resources and prejudiced claims. *Discourse and Society* 11(4): 543-572.

Speer SA and Parsons C (2006) Gatekeeping gender: Some features of the use of hypothetical questions in the psychiatric assessment of transsexual patients. *Discourse and Society* 17(6): 785-812.

Tee N, and Hegarty P (2006) Predicting opposition to the civil rights of trans persons in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 16(1): 70-80.

Wetherell M, and Potter J (1992) *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Whittle S, Turner L, and Al-Alami M (2007) *Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination*. Available from <http://www.pfc.org.uk/files/EngenderedPenalties.pdf>

Wilkinson S, and Kitzinger C (1993). *Heterosexuality: A Reader*. London: Sage.

Biographical Note

Damien W. Riggs is a senior lecturer at Flinders University where he teaches in the areas of gender/sexuality, family and parenting, and mental health. He is the author of over 100 publications in these areas, including *What about the Children! Masculinities, sexualities and hegemony* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010). He was the founding Editor of the *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*.