



Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Research Report

Transgender Sexuality: Porn, Legislation, and Embodiment

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Introduction: *Trans Embodiment*

“So, like, does this make me bi?”. Thus spoke the man in my bed at 2 in the morning, though we both had a lecture at 9. Amazing. I thought. I cannot wait to have this conversation again.

“Nope.”

“Oh...”

“Hey, I’ve got class in the morning, you should probably go.”

Getting him to leave was weird, but it was the sort of weird I’d grown used to. In fairness, the entire event was a bit weird, though I imagine more so for him. He hadn’t really known what to do with a vagina and I hadn’t expected him to—men don’t usually have them. Of course, he knew I was trans beforehand, I’m not stupid or looking to get killed. Still, there had been a small wave of shock and trepidation when I’d taken my pants off. I’d let him have a moment to steady himself, like I was some Trial of Will. Having had neither time nor energy to deal with that, I’d let the moment pass uninterrupted.

In quick succession was his orgasm, a condom in the garbage, clothes quickly back on, and an awkward ushering out the door. By no means did I finish but still was satisfied by his confusion. My body didn't compute and that wasn't my problem, it makes perfect sense to me. Instead, I sent the poor shmuck home to handle his crisis on his own time, I don't owe him a dissertation.

I know how his next few days will unfold: he'll start out telling his friends about me, showing my profile pic—shirtless in a hotel mirror, no breasts. He'll ask them one-on-one, it's more controlled that way. Once he's built a council's consensus, he'll update his Grindr profile to say "bi-curious"—maybe he does like women after all. A friend will talk some sense into him, tell him it's a one-off and that I'm just a good-looking guy, nothing to worry about. In three days or so, he'll move on after some appropriately self-affirming liberal epiphany on the fluid, multifaceted nature of gender and sexuality...a clever sidestep of any guilt inspired by his slightly offensive Grindr rebrand.

It was a mediocre 15 minutes of my life, but I'd bet it kept him up at night.

I am transgender because I was born with a woman's body and am a man. My identity as trans is contingent upon my body. If trans identity functions this way, would not then the identity of a sexual partner be thusly contingent? No. The man referred to above is gay – in sleeping with me, he slept with a man; therefore, his identity was not defined by my body. I argue this is because of the categorical uniqueness of trans bodies. It is this uniqueness that generates confusion and shame for many cis people when viewing trans individuals in a sexual manner (Billard). However, such an exploration is too often centered around the implications of trans bodies upon cisgender people. This is problematic, for it perpetuates the belief that trans bodies, therefore people, exist as a means to an end, not the ends in and of themselves. That our bodies are a shameful, somewhat dangerous playground for cis people to explore themselves—our bodies do not belong to us, they are pushed into public domain.

This issue is especially prevalent in pornography, where much of the time, trans bodies are utilized as the means to ends which benefit cisgender sexual voyeurs or partners—not as individual themselves. Over the last 9 years, trans and trans associated categories of pornography have been skyrocketing in popularity on Pornhub. This phenomenon first garnered public

attention in 2017, when transgender was the eleventh most viewed category on the site, as opposed to previous years where it was not popular enough to be included in rankings. This rise seemed unprecedented, and when made publicly visible in Pornhub's annually published statistical review, *Glamour Magazine* reached out to the company for comment. In response, Pornhub published their first statistical review specific to the site's trans content. The graph pictured under the headline showed a sharp climb beginning around August of 2016, and continuing at a quickening rate through August 2017, until the line catapults itself off the top right corner of the image. Following 2017, transgender continued to climb to the top-twenty most viewed categories, reaching the number-two spot in 2025. These statistics show the hyper-representation adult content consumed in the United States of an often underrepresented, oppressed group.

Interestingly, this is occurring in almost alarming tandem with the meteoric rise in anti-trans legislation in America. As such lawmaking has been rising in popularity from 2016 through to 2025, so has trans porn. This supposed coincidence has been noted by a handful of reporting outlets such as *Huffington Post*, *Them.com*, and recently, *Playboy*¹. However, most articles center on communicating this observation, not interrogating why the phenomenon seems to exist.

I will not seek to explain this relationship, but to *contextualize* it, arguing that bourgeois domination proliferates partly through the taxonomic classification of persons. The bodily incongruence of trans people not only deviates from this structure but circumvents it entirely; therefore, bourgeois powers are exercised to regulate trans bodies. This paper examines two spheres of such regulation in the United States: porn and legislation. Throughout this paper, I use Autotheory to situate the inquiry within my experiences of trans embodiment. This approach opens space for trans centrality which may be (however unintentionally) otherwise precluded by the privileging of cis bodies.

¹ Playboy. "Trans Porn Is Booming. Trans Rights Are Fading.." *Playboy*, 5 Mar. 2026
Nast, Condé. "Trans Porn Rose 75% In Popularity This Year on Pornhub." *Them*, 20 Dec. 2022,
Kumamoto, Ian. "Let's Talk About Pornhub's Massive Uptick in Searches for Trans Porn." *HuffPost*, 22 Dec. 2022,

To fulfill these objectives, I will examine the available data on trans content on Pornhub, to outline how trans bodies are socially constituted in a way that is sexualized. Following this I will utilize theories of how bourgeois control is proliferated through sex. This illuminates how the interests of dominating powers are served by subjecting trans bodies to such controls, which has become apparent through patterns of American legislation.

A Note on the Autotheory:

Spliced between sections of more traditional academic theory, there are narrative pieces throughout this paper. These are not intended to be read as “evidence” to my argument, or the illustration of a point, but to provide an interlocutor which complicates, questions, and contextualizes the rest of the paper². Each piece details a classifying experience which I have faced as a trans man; the totality of which is intended to show the complex multiplicity of this reality. I invite the audience to sit with these pieces of my life without trying to unravel them—I invite discomfort and encourage readers to interrogate where any discomfort may be coming from. Above all else, the intention of the Autotheory is to dysregulate the norms of trans classification, and that is an uncomfortable process.

Literature Review:

Though trans porn studies is an emerging field with, both trans studies and pornography studies have robust archives to draw from. To begin, I will map general theories of porn studies and their intersection with aspects of feminist thought. It has been generally established that watching heterosexual porn leads to the objectification of its female performers. Many researchers draw from Bandura’s theory of social learning to illustrate how misogynistic behaviours are learned through porn. Notably, Niki Fritz and Bryant Paul conducted a seminal study in 2017 which examined this effect across different types of porn, ranging from queer feminist, to mainstream. Results showed an increase in objectification in all types of porn, though they were most pronounced in mainstream content (Fritz and Paul)³.

² Prominent autotheorist Arianne Zwartjes defined the practice as “work that engages in thinking about the self, the body, and the particularities and parcularities of one’s lived experiences, as processed through or juxtaposed against theory—or as the basis for critical thinking” (Zwartjes).

³ The lowest objectification rate was found in queer feminist content.

This scholarship taps into a long-standing tension within feminist thought between porn as objectifying or empowering for women. There has been work done on both sides of this issue, though as Amanda Cawston pointed out, anti-porn arguments have not moved the needle of the mainstream industry itself. She therefore argues for shifting into a feminist approach to porn by prioritizing the critical consumption of content and understanding the sexism it may represent, rather than boycotting it altogether (Cawston). Similarly, Linda Williams highlights the subversive power of feminist pornography by detailing the work of Annie Sprinkle, a well-known performance artist and pornographer/porn actor known for her work exploring sexual fringes (Williams). RL Goldberg examined one such piece in an article for *Transgender Studies Quarterly: Transgender Pornography* (a particularly topical volume). A 1989 movie starred Annie Sprinkle and Les Nichols—a trans man. Though technically pornographic, the thirty-two-minute film comes off much more as a documentary wherein Annie Sprinkle learns about transness and the particular incoherences of Les’s body. Throughout, she is gentle, curious, and aroused, describing trans men near the end as “men with cunts⁴... a new political force.” (Goldberg).

Lastly, the legislation and US population statistics referenced herein are drawn from a number of databases. A significant source of information on anti-trans bills is *Trans Legislation Tracker*, an independent research organization which is factchecked by leading academics and reporters, whose data is used by institutions such as the *New York Times* and Cambridge University Press (Reed). All legislative information is also publicly accessible through federal or state websites. Statistics on porn viewership are drawn from Pornhub’s annual review, which is also available online. Interestingly, Pornhub did not publish any category breakdowns in 2020 (perhaps this is for the best, since I’m sure porn habits during lockdown were not pretty), but save for that omission, the data is available through searching “Pornhub Year in Review ____”.

I was so nervous the first time I had sex because I didn't look like the diagrams anymore. He hadn't ever slept with a woman—a perfect, gold star gay, the kind I wished that I could be —and I knew I would pollute his search history. “Vagina” on a private tab to temper

⁴ Less than 5% of trans men in America have undergone surgical construction of a penis/testes, or “bottom surgery”. So, whereas not all trans men are “men with cunts”, most are (Nolan, Ian T. et al.).

expectation and prepare the mind to imagine something else between my legs. His surprise was my greatest fear; I woke up in a sweat thinking about a perfectly polite “oh!” when my pants hit the floor. Maybe the alternative is even worse; the thought of him googling “trans man vagina” made my stomach flip, and I was so, so scared. I like to tell myself that I am not ashamed. That this body is mine, and powerful, and a privilege, and it is. In many moments, I am in love with my skin and its form, but in that moment right before my belt came off, I just wanted to scream “I know!”. I know this body is not what you’re expecting, and I’m sorry if it’s not enough. I just hoped he would see me as I am and not reduce me to an orifice I had no say in. I had been naked many times, but never had I felt so exposed. It felt like confessing some great crime and holding your breath, hoping beyond hope that your secret is safe. That you can go on as things were and not be treated like a criminal.

This was wrong, of course. I had nothing to be ashamed of—my body is my body. But there is a moment that rings in my head every once in a while:

It was 2021, and I was in my third month of gender counselling, getting close to being approved for a testosterone prescription. In order to write me a referral, my gender psychiatrist had to ensure I was fully aware of effects, risks, side-effects, and all imaginable possibilities of the medication. The doctor called my parents and I into the room for the Bottom Growth Conversation. Bottom growth is one of the most spoken about effects of T⁵ within trans communities, but not one I was yet familiar with: when trans masculine person takes testosterone, the clitoris grows. This can be anywhere from barely noticeable to a few centimeters, but it is essentially the development of a mini-penis. This is what my doctor explained to my parents and me, telling us she wanted to show images of this so that I had complete understanding of what I was consenting to. I said that was fine, and was a bit nervous, but more excited to see a body that mine would look like someday. She pulled out photos of a trans man, probably in his early twenties, tattooed, white, short-ish, and naked. The images weren’t pornographic by any stretch, but his nakedness felt vulgar, for between his labia was an engorged clitoris, about the size of my thumb from second knuckle to the top. My parents tensed and the doctor was stone-faced. They seemed to be repulsed at this body, seeing disfigurement where I saw progress.

⁵ Testosterone, in trans masculine colloquial contexts.

In the car ride home, they asked me if I was sure I wanted to do that to myself. I said some version of yes, and meant it, but was ashamed to.

Years later, naked and exposed, I prayed the man in front of me wouldn't recoil.

The Rise of Trans Porn: *The Incoherent Object*

Over the last ten years, trans porn has gone from existing on the fringes of pornography to being one of its most popular categories. At the same time, the visibility of trans people has been brought into mainstream cultural conversations for the first time in (colonial) American history (Harlow and Shiffner).

According to a study conducted by Kristina Robb-Dover, around 40% of women and 80% of men have watched pornography in the past year, and roughly 1/3 of American adults seek out pornography (Robb-Dover). In 2025, “trans” was the second most viewed category on Pornhub (Pornhub). It is reasonable that some of this visibility is a direct result of adult content. I argue that this has contributed to a dominant cultural narrative that sexualizes trans bodies.

As already noted, there is ample research to substantiate the claim that porn use leads to the objectification of the bodies represented in it, particularly those who are negatively affected by the patriarchy (Fritz and Paul). Many researchers cite Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory as a primary reason for this, which outlines observation as a central tenet to learned social behaviour. Sociologists Fritz and Paul co-authored a notable study which employed Bandura's theory to explain the yielded positive relationship between watching porn and objectifying female participants—this was compounded in aggressive porn, which similarly led to an increase in aggressive sexual behaviour (Fritz and Paul).

This objectification is proliferated within pornography not only by the content of the scene, but camera positioning. Fritz and Paul examined that positioning and concluded that the focus of the camera was a leading contributor to the likelihood of objectification: when the shot was focused on genitalia, that performer is reduced to genitals. Furthermore, this objectification was more likely to occur to women, given the outsized focus on female genitalia, submission, and penetration (Fritz and Paul). This conversation shifts slightly when the actor is trans; for attention directed towards a trans person's genitals, is attention at the primary site of bodily incoherence.

The binarily sexed system of North America⁶ (inaccurately) insists upon the existence of two sexes: male and female—trans people muddy these waters: It is established that there can be a difference between the hormonal composition and chromo-anatomy of an individual (Whelehan et al.). Whereas these things align for most of the population, trans bodies are unique in their incongruous nature—these aspects standing antithetical to one another yet contained within the same form, creating an incoherent flesh. It is this which transcends traditional cisgender categories of body. Furthermore, the development (or redevelopment) of a body saturated in hormones it is not expecting alters many visual expectations of a “female” or “male” body. In addition to this, under patriarchy both types of binary trans people are subject to misogynistic objectification. For as MtF (male to female) trans women are subject to misogyny by virtue of being women, FtM (female to male) trans men are subject to the misogynist consequences of possessing (or having once possessed) a female reproductive system⁷ (Balsam). In this way, the effect of objectification exists for trans performers as well as cisgender performers but manifesting differently in certain respects.

Trans+⁸ people make up around 1% of the US population (Flores et al.), and proximately 1/3 of adults watch porn⁹. When porn became accessible to anyone with internet bandwidth, trans people became hyper-visible as online sex-objects, whereas we are far less visible offline. Furthermore, the wording used in top results of associated content on Pornhub only serves to further this reduction of trans *individuals* to eroticized incoherent anatomy, with many titles including harmful and derogatory language such as “tranny” and “shemale” (Pornhub). Applying Bandura’s theory to this situation suggests that viewers of this content learn to perceive trans people as sex objects through the combination of two factors of trans visibility: their overrepresentation in sexual spheres, and their underrepresentation in non-sexual spheres. In this

⁶ Though this binary is not accurate, given the historical and continued existence of intersex individuals, colonial North America functions as if it were the case (Mcnabb). This has resulted in the harmful erasure of intersex people that exist outside this chromosomal binary, and people on the non-binary spectrum who inhabit different places within (or outside) gender.

⁷ There are two important things to note with this statement. Firstly, my use of the term “female reproductive system” is not intended to denote that a person’s having of a particular set of organs/genitals begets their gender, but to use scientifically accurate terms for one’s sex. Secondly, I find it imperative to point out that stereotypes of trans people tend to invalidate identified gender in a way that reinforced patriarchal domination, with trans women being “scary” and “dangerous”—male qualifiers under patriarchy, and trans men being “meek” and “gentle”—female qualifiers under patriarchy.

⁸ Here, my use of the term “trans” includes all those under the transgender umbrella—non-binary, intersex, binary trans, etc.

⁹ Specified in a UCLA Williams School of Law report in August 2025 as 13+ (Williams Institute)

way, trans porn performers become an outsized—and accessible—representation of a much broader community.

This reality of sexualized representation contributes to a cultural environment in which trans bodies are socially constituted as inherently sexual. This representation¹⁰, however false impacts both external societal perceptions of trans people, and our understandings of ourselves.

The first time I saw a body like mine, he was laid out and open on a private-browser Pornhub tab. He looked like me, in that he looked nothing like me, but we could have been the same. Tattooed and burley, his vagina plastered across my screen, I stared with wide eyes at what may as well have been myself. I was about a hundred pounds of scrawny early-teenager, and he was a grown man. Still, I felt this immediate familiarity, some kinship with the stranger on my screen, what's fucked up, is that I still do. I remember the video, in bits and pieces, and think of it often: he was strangely proportioned, but not in a way that was immediately obvious; a compact torso and limbs that looked just a little off. I would grow into these same proportions in puberty. Now, don't get me wrong, he was attractive, but that's not what I noticed. I noticed how his voice was just a little too nasal and it rose just a touch too high when he moaned. Years later, I would note that mine does the same. I noticed how the man fucking him looked down with confusion as heavy as lust, also pity. I have since grown to know that look.

Every few seconds the camera zoomed to the point of penetration, and I would cringe, hating myself for doing so. If I was so repulsed by a body that may as well have been mine, how could I expect anyone to endure the obscenity of the one that was? The scene was grotesque, I hated it. It felt deeply personal, and somehow violent—like I was that body on the mattress. Even now, I think I could have been, and the other man may not have noticed.

I remember laying there, feeling the illness of impending self-pity and hating it. I found it a deeply useless act—to pity myself—but couldn't seem to stop it. Faced with this reflection of my body, I knew I should feel empowered, sexy, desirable. But I didn't. I just felt ugly. Was this all I am? Some genital-term clickbait on a sleazy website? "Pussy" against a black and

¹⁰ This view is resoundingly false, given that *no* bodies are inherently sexual: a body is just a body.

orange backdrop with the shocked face of a cis man taking up the thumbnail? It was just a porno, and I wish it didn't matter so much.

Trans Bodies as a Site of Bourgeois Normalizing Power: *Power Exercised Against Sex*

In chapter 4 of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* Michel Foucault argues that “sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power prescribes an “order” for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to law.” (Foucault 83). He spends the duration of the book outlining a system by which bourgeois power is proliferated through society by taxonomic classification, medicalization, and problematization of sex. In this section, I will use these (and similar) Foucauldian principals to illustrate how trans bodies are a site of bourgeois normalizing power, which is exercised through the construction of normative sexuality. Trans bodies exist entirely *outside* of normative sex(uality), not just exhibit deviance within it. Bourgeois classes then have incentive to exercise power against transness.

Firstly, it is important to understand Foucault’s definition of “bourgeois powers”. Beginning his treatise, Foucault juxtaposes his ideology with that of Freud, who stated that since the Victorian era, sexuality has been culturally repressed. Countering this, Foucault argues that the opposite has been the case—society has not *repressed* sex but *medicalized* it in such a way that also proliferates power¹¹ through a far more insidious process of normalization, or “normalizing power” (Foucault). In this way, Foucault begins shaping his theory of bourgeois power not as a directly oppressive, top-down force, but a pervasive dispersion of control throughout the public.

Over the course of his career, Foucault maintained the importance of sex and sexuality as a site of bourgeois control. He detailed this as important largely because of its ability to establish “normative sex”, arguing that from the eighteenth century onwards, four distinct “mechanisms of

¹¹ This analysis particularly in the section “*Scientia Sexualis*”, where Foucault details the historical shift from “*Ars Erotica*”. He notes that with this change, cultural focus shifted from the *act* of sex to the “*sexuality*” of the actor. This brought with it a personalization that allowed for the condemnation of individuals, not just actions, thereby setting the stage for systemic persecution of groups. Where historically, a person was said to *commit* sodomy, that person is now identifies as a homosexual (Foucault).

knowledge and power centering sex” (Foucault 103) have been developed: The Hysterical Woman, The Masturbating Child, The Malthusian Couple, and The Perverse Adult. These categories have served to assist in the deployment of sexuality which Foucault describes as “proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way.” (Foucault 107). Foucault argues that this categoric classification began with the dominant classes, stating that “The bourgeoisie began by considering that its own sex was something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs” (Foucault 121). It is this notion of the *discoverability* of sex which demanded a scientific discursive tradition. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this began not broadly within the dominant class, but with the medicalization of female sexuality and problematization of adolescent sexuality (Foucault 120). It appears that this system of sexual normalization was constructed to maintain the status quo of patriarchal systems, which soon after trickled down to influence practices of the subordinate classes¹². The effectiveness of these classifications of sexuality to disseminate power and notions of normative sexuality is clear, though they do not seem to account for the incoherence of trans bodies. This existence outside even damaging categories of regulated sex only further “others” transness and demands its regulation so as not to disturb the established system of classification. In a self-serving attempt to preserve the control generated through normative sexuality, bourgeois powers are exercised against trans bodies.

In September of 2025 I downloaded Grindr. Fresh off a breakup, looking for a distraction, I joined the infamous app. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as newly eighteen and passably attractive, I got a lot of messages. Fearing the danger of not being completely upfront, I had multiple disclosures of transness in my bio, along with a shirtless pic to not-so-subtly make one aware of my lack of breasts. As I expected, the trans element was what most messages focused on. What I did not expect (but maybe should have) was the creative language used.

¹² It is perhaps no wonder that this focus on female sexuality has persevered into an age of extreme capitalism. There is incentive to maintain the cultural normalization of female value being reduced to reproduction, for it allows the continuation of unpaid female labour in tandem with the formation of a future labour force.

I have never liked the word “vagina”. It feels a bit clinical and abrasive (an instinct, I am sure, bred into me by the patriarchy, for I have no issue with terms like “dick”) so I don’t use it for myself. Technically accurate as it may be, I don’t default to calling my genitals “my vagina” (save for this paper, apparently). As was made clear, gay men do not default to this language either when trying to sleep with another man. However, given the extremely explicit culture of Grindr, reference to my genitals was deemed almost ubiquitously necessary. This is nothing out of the ordinary. What was surprising was the boundless creativity expressed in reference to what is between my legs. The most common terms were: “boy pussy”, “man hole”, “bonus hole”, and “man cave” (my least favorite), though there was a vast array of variation on these themes. What struck me, was the air of salvation with which these words were delivered. I got the acute sense that these men thought they were affirming me, somehow enabling my gayness in a way that no one else possibly could and being terribly careful not to hurt my oh-so-sensitive feelings in the process.

With every notification of ridiculously phrased trying-to-be dirty-talk, I just laughed. How could I not? It was ridiculous to picture grown men anxiously trying to craft a “sexy”, manly, still-dominating term so as not to make me aware of my vagina. As if I didn’t know it was there. I got a little thrill each time—my body was making a fool of grown men. And yes, it was objectifying, and problematic, and a host of negative things, but deep down, I got a kick out of their discomfort: they just didn’t know what to call it.

A month later, I got back together with my boyfriend. At the time we were long-distance and trying to figure out how to keep a sex life alive from 4,000km away. Quickly into whispered phone calls and dirty texts, I realized I didn’t know what to call it either. I’ve already outlined my aversion to “vagina”, and I was raised feminist enough to not feel great about “cunt” or “pussy” as a man. In conversations about dysphoria and trans issues, we got used to saying “my anatomy”, and that worked but it’s not very sexy. I realized I don’t have language to refer to myself sexually. In this way, I am incoherent even to myself. Maybe one day I’ll figure it out but until then, it’s funny trying.

Christian Nationalist Censorship: *The Push Against Porn and the Rise of Anti-Trans Legislation*

An illuminating 2026 study conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute identified around a third of the American adult public as “adherents” or “sympathizers” of Christian nationalism¹³ (Public Religion Research Institute). As an ideology based in the (unconstitutional) fusion of Christianity with the State (Volle), this has had significant legislative consequences, particularly for vulnerable demographics. From abortion bans sweeping the nation, to dangerous xenophobia placing entire cities in harm’s way (Amnesty International), there seems to be strong national interest in the regulation of that which is “against” the prerogative of an increasingly right-wing America.

During his 2024 presidential campaign, Donald Trump put trans people in the crosshairs of his rhetoric. He ran on promises to ban gender affirming care for minors, as well as banning trans people in certain public spaces such as competing in athletics competitions or using bathrooms. In fact, approximately \$60 million USD were spent campaigning on several anti-trans ads (Yurcaba). Sure enough, during his first week in office he signed a number of executive orders restricting the rights, healthcare, and self-determination of trans Americans—particularly youth (United States, White House). In under a week, the regulation of trans bodies became the headline of multiple executive orders. Using language such as “mutilation” to refer to gender affirming procedure like mastectomies or hysterectomies (United States, White House) simultaneously othered trans bodies—measuring them against a cis “norm” and further regulated of reproductive systems. Each of these effects subtly works to regulate a sexuality that is perceived to inherently exist within trans bodies. In part, the interest in the regulation of sexuality has allowed for the legal regulation of trans individuals.

The history of the United States is replete with legislation against sex. Censorship and litigation regarding obscenity in literature, television, and public life have existed for almost as long as the American legal system (Stone). Thus have many standards come to be produced, such as the now obsolete Hicklin obscenity test, movie rating systems, and public decency laws.

¹³ Additionally, the study revealed that this support is “strongly correlated in all 50 states with favorable views of President Donald Trump and the proportion of Republican representation in state legislatures”, furthermore reporting that 56% of Republicans are either Christian nationalist adherents or sympathizers (PRRI). Taking into account the generally even bi-partisan division of the United States, these statistics current represent a large portion of the American voter base. (Nadeem).

Following in this tradition is a push to censor or outright ban pornography, which was shown by sociologists Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead to be “strongly predicted” by Christian Nationalism (Perry and Whitehead). The PRRI study showed that the majority of Republicans fit into this category (either as adherent or sympathetic), and seeing as the GOP holds majority control of each of the US Senate, House of Representatives, and Supreme Court¹⁴ as well as the White House, anti-porn and obscenity objectives have significant influence over national and state-wide legislation.

One example of this lawmaking has been the bans on public drag performances. As Suzanne Nossel, a prominent human right advocate and former American government official noted in a 2023 article for the Guardian, thirty-two bills had been filed that year targeting drag performances. One example, the “Adult Entertainment Act”, passed in Tennessee, heavily restricted “male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest...” (Nossel). One of the (many) issues with this bill lays in the word choice “impersonation”. Whereas drag is a practice of performative impersonation, transness is not. However, as a result of executive order 14168 (The White House), national terminology on gender must reflect sex assigned at birth. This creates a dangerous environment for expansion of these bans to regulate trans existence in public, for the national linguistic framework has erased transness, leaving room only for impersonation. Nossel notes this in her article, going on to argue that these restrictions are intended to intimidate trans people into gender compliance (Nossel).

Furthermore, thirteen of the introduced anti-trans bills center on “religious exemptions” that allow the religious beliefs of a caregiver to supersede the wellbeing of a trans individual. (Trans Bill Tracker). Some bills are explicitly religious—for example West Virginia HR6 sought the classification of “transgenderism” as a mental disorder on the grounds on the (inaccurate and reductive) biblical view of two sexes. This kind of legislation highlights a frighteningly unconstitutional practice of bible-based bioessentialism among US lawmakers.

Regulation of transness seems to be as rooted in sex and it is in religion. Idaho House Bill 752, introduced and passed in 2026, “Adds to existing law to prohibit a person from entering a restroom or changing room of the opposite sex, to provide a penalty, and to provide exceptions.” (Idaho.gov). It was filed under the category of *Indecency and Obscenity*. Is

¹⁴ Though U.S. Supreme Court Justices do not have party affiliation, there is a 6:3 majority of Republican-appointedees (Petrabilia).

there something inherently obscene or indecent about a body in a changeroom? In the eyes of Idaho law yes; when that body is trans. Interesting. There are no bans on penises in changing rooms, or vaginas in bathrooms. These laws only come into place to bar an incoherent body from existing in a space where it might be seen. This perpetuates the thinking that transness is fundamentally rooted in sexual perversion, when it quite simply is not. There have been a number of bills which use language that entrenches this thinking. Another Idaho Bill (S1448) sought to ban LGBTQ2+ education that appealed to a “prurient interest”, prohibiting trans topics could from being taught or discussed in schools. Federally, the “Stop the Sexualization of Children Act” has been introduced, which proposes the cessation of any federal funding for the promotion or education of “sexually oriented material”. The bill defines “transgenderism” and materials surrounding gender dysphoria as sexually oriented (Miller). By seeing trans bodies as inherently sexual, Christian nationalism seeks to regulate them on the basis of “decency”.

However false this narrative of transness as perverse may be, it is having real-world consequences for trans communities. In this year alone, there have been a record breaking eight hundred thirteen anti-trans bills introduced in the United States. Sixty-two have passed (Anti-Trans Legislation Tracker). This harmful narrative of obscenity is being imposed upon trans bodies and restricting the freedoms of everyday Americans, and people. Our bodies are being treated as inherently sexual, though they are not—this legislation is not only harmful, it is fundamentally inaccurate.

*“We will bare our teeth and refuse shame,
and when met with death, cry:*

IT WAS WORTH IT

*And in defiance, fuck him on the steps of parliament.
And roll our sick and twisted bodies overtop a constitution.”*

I wrote this line in early 2025 for a poem about the righteous defiance of gay love. After about a together with my boyfriend, living in a very small town where holding hands was a safety concern, I lamented the secrecy. Furious at a place that would condemn me for love, I vowed a loud rebellion of sex. With these words I entirely rejected any closed category, choosing instead to flow between and outside them. This, I have found, is true salvation—to live as you want in the body that you are and apologize for none of it.

Some men have understood this, most have not. There was a man who touched me like a tomb—like something long dead, and it made me think that he would kill me. He asked me not to take off my shirt, as if my chest was some imposition, a line he would not cross. I'm sure he was afraid to be met with breasts and though I do not have any, he didn't care to ask. I was an experiment that shouldn't go too far. Instead, he pillaged my flesh so far as it was knowably uncomfortable, leaving the unwanted bits of carcass for vultures to pick at.

The sex I have now is an act of revolution—I fuck on the front lines, grinding my hips against the barricade. My body feels like a manifesto: some declaration which could change the world, so when I move it against another it is a rebellion of bodies, not intended to be intelligible, not expected to conform, just answer to a touch.

Conclusion

The incoherence of trans bodies threatens to disrupt normative sexuality through its existence outside it. For that reason, bourgeois powers seek the regulation of trans bodies—this has manifested itself in both pornographic and legislative spheres in the United States. As trans bodies are vastly underrepresented in the American populace, they are proportionally and *increasingly* overrepresented in pornography. This overrepresentation contributes to a country that sexualizes us, for the predominant cultural frame of reference for “trans body” is found in porn, which may already objectify its actors and does so doubly to a body that is incoherent to mainstream American culture. This narrative, which sexualizes trans bodies has been worked so deeply into the fabric of the United States that our bodies are legislated against on account of a vulgarity they do not have—but is being ascribed to them. This imposed obscenity is unpalatable to a dominant class which places sex within a controlled taxonomic tradition that trans people

defy. Where porn regulates trans incoherence by eroticizing it, legislation regulates it by limiting its ability to exist.

A solution, that falls far outside the scope of this project, however I will suggest a step forward: *listen*. To our stories, in our words. Throughout this paper, I have written the most vulnerable passages of my life, and I share them. Not because anyone is entitled to them, but to remind every reader that trans people are the center of our own stories, our own scholarship, not plot-points in a society that happens to default cis. My stories won't look like the next trans person's, whose won't look like the next, and that is exactly the point.

Here are vignettes of my life, which are complicated, as most things are. I do not simply find empowerment in classification, as I did with the man who thought he was bi. I do not simply wallow in the sexualization of a body I did not choose, as I did when seeing trans porn for the first time. I do not simply fear the vulnerability of my genitals and their implications as I did when I first had sex. I do not simply hate the word vagina and reject classifying terms, as I did when on Grindr. The truth is not simple at all—my transness does not make me so. My objective throughout the autotheory in this paper was to show this, and to do justice to the incredible, nuanced, contradictory, beautiful, ambivalent complexity of transness. This centering of trans embodiment will not restore the horrifying damage done by the Trump administration. It will not reverse the sexualization we live within, and it will not shift the system of patriarchy, but it will change the cultural narrative for the next person, and that is a step forward.

I would not trade my body for the world. Though there are some days where I wake up sick to my stomach with a twisty feeling between my legs I wish would go away, I would not give this up. It is the privilege of my life learning how to live in this skin. Each day I make love to myself anew, even when sometimes that looks like a battleground. With this body I write words that will survive me long after I am ash, and with this body I laugh in a room full of loved ones and hug my family. My hands are the ones lifting a pint of cheap beer to my lips while my sneakers stick to a grimy frat floor, and I dance until the room is spinning on my two legs. They are my arms which wrap around the man I love, and pull him to my chest, where my heartbeat echoes—defiant and loud. I cum to contact on my skin and feel pleasure roar under it.

I was not born in the wrong body—I was born in mine. It may have needed some renovations, and I bare the proof of them proudly, but this was always my flesh to embody.

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Appendix

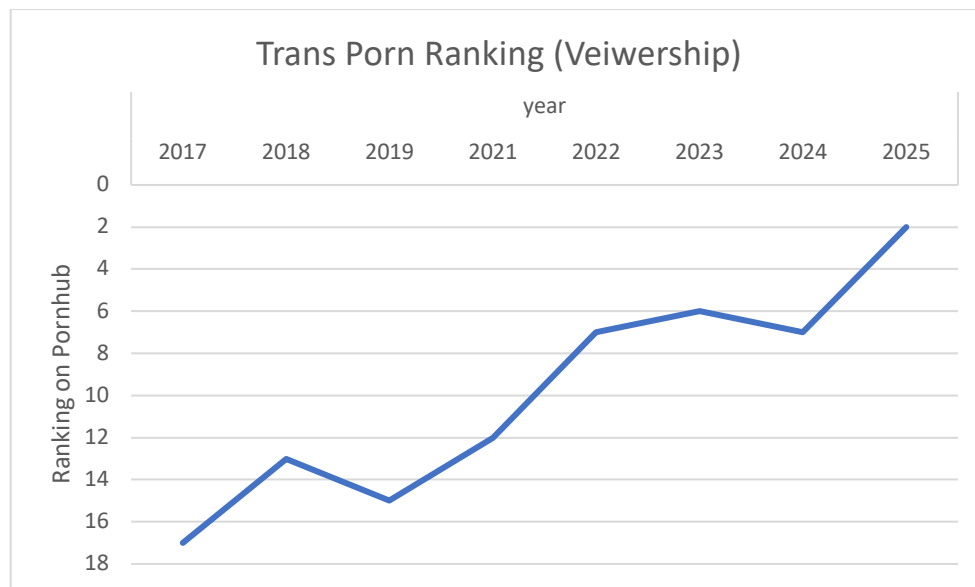


Fig I

(Transgender pornography rankings from 2021-2026, as released annually by Pornhub)

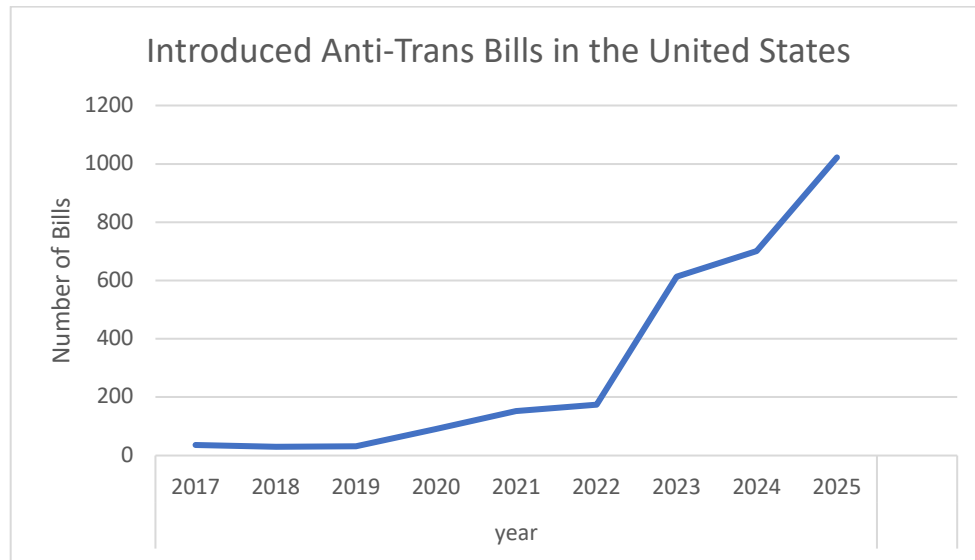


Fig II

(Approximate number of anti-transgender bills in the United States from 2021-2026 as released annually by Trans Legislation Tracker)

A Final Fourth Wall Break:

This paper is the closest to true authenticity I have ever come. Still, I feel some block. Some intangible thing holding me back. I have spent the past year of my life learning of and reveling in (more) adult transhood, weaving its unending complexity into the braid of my life. And still, I am fearful. Afraid to write my truth that even I do not fully understand. Has this truth been kept from me? Hidden away by the dominating forces I refute so vehemently here? I am banging my head against a wall, outraged that though I may name the oppression I cannot seem to escape it. Even as I painstakingly sketch the branches of its consequences, I am subject to them, unable to achieve the utter transcendence I so desperately want. I censor myself while speaking of self-censorship. I cringe at the words I boldly lay claim to. I second guess the validity of my experience while fighting for its place in scholarship.

Perhaps this is poetry, with no place in a research paper. To be honest, this project has skewed my perspective on what belongs where. Regardless, I leave this at the very end, to be

the final words of this endeavour, so that I may be as honest as I can be. Honest about my own confusion, frustration, and imperfect tellings. Sometimes I think that is true trans liberation—to be able to be as flawed and complex as cis people.

In the end, I hope this makes some kind of difference. If only as a reference for just how confusing, and fucked up, and amazing, and complicated trans experience can be. If only as a reference for how much that matters.

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