

Feeling Fluid: On the Metaphoricity of Gender and its Attendant Queer Intergenerational Conflict.

Titled “Shop[ing] in each other’s closet,” Teen’s Vogue august became a topic of debate by positioning Gigi Hadid and Zayn Malik as gender fluid icons. Perceived as a cultural revolution in gender expression, a number of stars, including Ruby Rose, Jaden Smith, and Miley Cyrus, have been lauded for their gender variance. Whether through close-cropped haircuts or “androgynous” clothing, these stars have become emblems of progressive liberalism, lauded for their seeming transcendence of the rigid man/woman binary. Moving from popular culture, gender variance has also found expression in queer-themed Young Adult literature, most notably in The Symptoms of Being Human by Jeff Gavin (2016). However, despite this cultural trend towards gender fluid identification, leading gender and sexuality studies scholar Jack Halberstam asserts, “gender is not fluid... gender variance, like sexual variance, cannot be relied on to produce a radical and oppositional politics simply by virtue of representing difference” (173). Accordingly, what does the transitive metaphor of fluidity import into a contemporary politics of gender?

In line with this year’s theme of _____, this presentation looks to tease out the metaphor of fluidity, drawing particularly upon contemporary debates in gender theory to inform a theory of fluid reading. Concomitant with debates in gender variance, literary scholars have—in response to the so-called crisis in the humanities—began to theorizing novel modes of textual engagement out of traditional close reading methods. Notably, queer theorists have made rapid contributions to novel ways of reading: Eve Sedgwick, Rita Felski, and Heather Love have respectively theorized reparative reading, post-critical reading, and thin description as alternative methods of engaging with texts. Building upon these queer theorizations, this proposed presentation names itself experimental. Conducting a *fluid reading* of Gavin’s The Symptoms of Being Human, I will explore the rhetorical and political affordances of fluidity, both metaphor and method, in order to theorize the ontological and imaginative potential of contemporary models of gender variance as well as move one step forward towards addressing the crisis in the humanities through the realization of new methods of reading.