

Review: The Palgrave Handbook of Psychosocial Studies

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[Why] should queer and trans people want the field of psychosocial studies to grow and flourish?

As a new researcher in the field of psychosocial studies, I had several questions in mind as I browsed *The Palgrave Handbook of Psychosocial Studies*. I wondered, what can psychosocial studies do to make queer and trans lives – especially those affected by multiple intersecting precarities in a neo-colonial capitalist society – more liveable? How can the field support critique of the psychoanalytic clinic which, although full of potential for the unsettling of normative sexual, gender, racial, and class structures, is sometimes used as a tool to reinforce them? Can it help us to understand the psychic and social structures of homophobia and transphobia, and perhaps even loosen their grip on the collective psyche, at a time when hard-won LGBTQ+ rights are under attack in many countries? These questions are influenced by my doctoral research, which focuses on queer and racialised erotic transference in the clinic, as well as my individual subjectivity as a white, queer-identified person, both of which have led me on a somewhat haphazard path towards psychosocial studies as a productive field within which to develop critique of the clinic and to use psychoanalytic theory when thinking about the social world.

I am juxtaposing my approach to the landmark publication of the *Handbook* with another recent event in the field: the welcome re-emergence, following the disruption of the Covid pandemic, of the annual conference of the Association for Psychosocial Studies (APS).

The conference plenaries in 2024 and 2025 took place in the Waldegrave Suite of St Mary's University, London, UK, a mid-nineteenth century addition to Horace Walpole's eighteenth century gothic villa, Strawberry Hill. The high wooden ceilings, damask pink walls and large gold-framed portraits gesture to Britain's colonial history.¹ Drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2015) analysis of institutional power in universities, it felt as if the walls were speaking even before the conferences began. The formal opening remarks of the 2025 conference have remained strongly in my mind, and I reproduce my memory of them here in the hope of making something within the field (and in my subjective response to the *Handbook*) visible.

The 2025 conference convenors highlighted the risk of rising authoritarianism to 'beneficent institutions' and anxiety about the potential for 'strong leaders' to manipulate the pervasive anxiety of the young by offering objects to project this anxiety onto.² A statement expressing concern about evolving hybrids of authoritarian and libertarian structures was immediately followed by the description of 'a man whose gender identity does not fit with the gender binary and, as such, is today likely to demand to become a woman', and then the assertion that 'I'm just saying these things to see what happens'. My heart began to race at this sudden emergence of the transphobic trope that trans people – especially trans women – are powerful and authoritarian propagators of a 'gender ideology' that is a risk to young children, and the proposal to start an academic debate about this 'to see what happens'. I had

¹ Like many British gentry, the Walpole family were legal owners of enslaved people in the Caribbean (Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, n.d.), although they later supported the abolition of slavery (National Gallery, n.d.). It is also interesting to note that Horace Walpole never married and had friends who were rumoured to be lesbians (Norton, 1999), suggesting a sexually subversive history at the heart of what is now a Catholic educational institution. The word "damask" also conjures ideas of the Orient, given its derivation from the fabric trade with Damascus. Flo Toch, who was sitting next to me at the conference, sparked off this chain of associations about the colonality of the room.

² All quotations are based on my contemporaneous notes of the opening remarks at the conference, which took place on 9 June 2025.

an impulse to run out of the room. When I spoke about this in the open plenary, pointing out that trans scholars have been examining tropes about ‘demands’ for transition and their depiction as more powerful than they really are for decades (see, for example, Serano, 2021; Stone, 1998), two of the conference conveners thanked me for ‘staying in the room’ without addressing my critique.

Judith Butler writes that, in today’s collective imaginary, ‘[gender] has become a phantasm with destructive powers, one way of collecting and escalating multitudes of modern panics ... a displacement from what remains unseen or unnamed’ (2024, pp. 5–6). Reflecting afterwards, it seems that Butler’s ‘phantasm of gender’ was summoned during the opening remarks of the 2025 APS conference. Instead of focusing on the very real fascism being enacted around the world, including in supposedly liberal democracies such as the UK and the US, and on the lingering effects of the colonial histories conjured by the damask pink wallpaper and gold-framed portraits of the Waldegrave Suite, the conference was momentarily distracted by suggestion that a ‘debate’ about trans identities might take place.

Sociologist Michael Rustin, in his contribution to the *Handbook*, ‘The Purpose of Psychosocial Studies’, asks ‘Why should we want to see this field grow and develop?’ (p. 186). Rustin argues that other academic fields have flourished when they have ‘fulfilled social purposes beyond those of the academy itself’ (p. 185). To me, this suggests that psychosocial studies might succeed as a field if (amongst other things) it has something to contribute to the political project to make queer and trans lives more liveable. With my recent experiences at the APS conference in mind, and with a debt to Adrienne Rich’s important feminist question ‘Who is *we*?’ (1987, p. 231), I paused when reading the word ‘we’ in Rustin’s important question. What happens if, instead, we ask: ‘Why should *queer and trans people* want to see this field grow and develop?’ Or even, ‘*Should* queer and trans people want to see the field of psychosocial studies grow and develop?’ In this essay, I critically

consider this question through a close reading of the most relevant contributions to the *Handbook*, pointing towards gaps and tensions in the volume; I further consider the ethics of psychosocial engagement with queer and trans subjectivities, and outline important emerging sites of psychosocial critique.

The *Handbook* in relation to queer and trans lives

I found the *Handbook* to be both impressive and daunting to approach as a new scholar; its 50 chapters and more than 1,000 pages speak to the breadth of the field. In their generous introduction, the editors explain that it is intended as a “‘state of the art’ account’ of a still-developing field ‘without a fully agreed genealogy or settled shape’; their intention is to ‘consolidate psychosocial studies without ossifying it’ (p. 5) in this online publication which has space to expand beyond this already significant body of work. As UK-based scholars, they acknowledge the challenge of embedding critical diversity in the *Handbook*, given that psychosocial scholarship has not yet fully engaged with antiracist and decolonial thinking developed in what they call the Southern Cone, and invite future contributions from early readers who ‘spot[] a gap or identif[y] a new tension’ (p. 7).

The APS website, quoted in the *Handbook’s* introduction, explains that psychosocial studies interrogates ‘the ways in which subjective experience is interwoven with social life’ (Association for Psychosocial Studies, 2013). This interweaving of psyche and social is a key concern for queer and trans people, whose subjectivities and identities are unavoidably entangled with societal projections. Queer theory is referenced in the introduction (and the APS website’s characterisation of psychosocial studies) alongside feminist, post-colonial, and affect theory as part of psychosocial studies’ commitment to inter- and trans-disciplinarity.

Transgender studies is not mentioned.³ However, the editors identify ‘gender identity to sexual difference’ as one of several ‘sites of contestation’ that the handbook intends to take on as part of the ‘lively development of psychosocial studies’ (p. 11). Possible critiques of queer and trans activism that place identity at the heart of political action are suggested with the editorial statement that ‘psychosocial studies seeks to remain vigilant to the seductiveness of self-contained narratives which, in foreclosing their own limitations, effectively conceal the inherent fragmentation and ambivalence in us all’ (p. 10). Nevertheless, the field’s ethical and political aims are potentially resonant with the disruptive forces that are often foregrounded in queer and trans theory: psychosocial theory is proposed as ‘uniquely capable of “doing” something both to the author and the reader’ (p. 10). Writing in 2021, the editors could not have foreseen how swiftly and how violently political regime change in the US and the continued resurgence of far-right influence elsewhere would bring new urgency to these political questions, especially for the lives of queer, trans, neurodiverse, disabled, and racially minoritised people.

Psychosocial perspectives on queer sexualities and trans identities in the psychoanalytic clinic

³ The signifier ‘trans’ has been made legible in many ways in different discourses and at different times: transgender, transsexual, trans, trans*, trans-, etc. In this article, I use the shortened signifier ‘trans’ ‘to describe the myriad of people who either question their gender, make changes to their body and/or behaviour in a gendered manner or who identify across the gender spectrum’ (Langer, 2019) because, solipsistically, it is the term that I hear and use most commonly in my daily life to refer to trans people. Depending on context and on the speaker, ‘trans’ might be taken to include (or not include) non-binary people. In this article, I intend the term as an expansive one, to include non-binary, gender queer, and gender diverse people who might identify with this signifier; to include both trans people who have, or plan to, go through a medical transition, and those who have not, do not plan to, or cannot, for structural or economic reasons. I use the term ‘transgender studies’ to designate the academic field of study.

One of the stumbling blocks for the non-normative sexual subject in approaching the psychoanalytic clinic is the central role that the normative structuring of the Oedipus complex plays in Freudian and post-Freudian theory. As Joanna Kellond explains in her chapter ‘The Politics of Reproduction’: ‘The Oedipus complex is Freud’s account of how the psychically androgynous child comes to terms with the social implications of anatomical difference’ (p. 634). Situating Freud’s Oedipal myth squarely within a patriarchal, capitalist society, Kellond sets out the history of encounters between Marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis, from second wave feminism, through queer and black critical interventions, to a consideration of contemporary post-Oedipal, maternal, and postmaternal subjectivities. Kellond argues that the different configurations of family, parenting, and parental subjectivities developed through this critique can also bring about symbolic change in the individual psyche, unseating the Oedipus complex from its seat of authority.

In ‘Social Psychoanalysis: From Theory to Practice’, Lynne Layton brings this quintessentially psychosocial approach to the psychoanalytic clinic. Her contribution to the *Handbook* is a useful introduction to her decades of important clinical and scholarly work to build a psychosocial psychoanalysis which addresses how socially shaped unconscious processes emerge and are worked with in the clinic. Attentive to lines of power, Layton proposes that ‘a properly psychosocial psychoanalysis must account for the ways that patients’ and therapists’ intersectional social locations (e.g., class, race, gender, sexuality), as they are lived and enacted within particular power relations and histories, unconsciously and consciously emerge in the clinic’ (p. 515-6). Layton asks psychoanalysts to follow a ‘psychoanalytic ethic of dis-illusionment’ (p. 525) in which clinicians see themselves as implicated subjects who can tolerate racist (and, by extension, homophobic and transphobic) projections from their patients, to acknowledge harm when it inevitably takes place in socially-charged enactments in the clinic, and to let go of neutrality. She gives examples of

contemporary clinics in Palestine and the UK that are explicitly political and refers to psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's clinical work in France and Algeria. In "Black Skin, White Masks" by Frantz Fanon', Colin Wright's positioning of Fanon's first book as a proto-psychosocial text examining the 'racialised psychosocial economy' (p. 59) also does important work in pointing out Fanon's connection of 'clinical practice to political change' (p. 53), as well as his eventual abandonment of clinical practice to fight for Algerian independence.

Queer theory's insistence on destabilizing normative sexual structures finds considerable resonance in Margarita Palacio's 'The Scene of Love', which performs a useful new-materialist reading of Freudian and late Lacanian writing about erotic transference in psychoanalysis. Palacio argues that 'meaning and desire always inform each other' (p. 367) and suggests that transference, or the psychoanalytic 'scene of love', can help us to move towards a 'multiplicity and heterogeneity of always converting bodies' (p. 367). She considers Lacan's statement that 'when a man loves, it is insofar as he is a woman' (p. 386) and considers whether 'the work of analysis ultimately consists of becoming a woman' (p. 387), suggesting that sexual identity might be particularly unmoored by experiences in the clinic as either patient or analyst.

Ana Carolina Minozzo's introduction to *Nomadic Subjects*, a key text from new-materialist Rosi Braidotti (1994), carefully positions Braidotti in relation to the field of psychosocial studies and as a significant influence on her clinical practice. Minozzo delicately highlights how Braidotti's concept of 'nomadic subjects' puts 'the promises of identity ... to question' (p. 141). Quoting Braidotti's assertion that sexual difference 'far from being an essentialist notion, is the site of intersection between the biological, the social, and the linguistic' (1994, p. 238), Minozzo suggests that we read Braidotti's consciously selected language of sexual difference and embodiment – instead of gender and queering – with care

and generosity, transporting her work to our time ‘with elegance’ (p. 146). She argues that Braidotti’s nomadic subjects can be seen as ‘necessarily trans, queer, multiple, and also decolonial’ (p. 146) and goes on to describe how she thinks with the idea of a nomadic couch in her own practice with psychosis, racial trauma, and queer and trans migrants. She draws on Patricia Gherovici’s writing about trans subjectivity to suggest that we ‘not trust in “castration” as a solution to excesses such as “anxiety”’ (p. 146), and brings out the subtle tensions between identity and dissonance, binarism and multiplicity in sexual difference in Braidotti’s *Nomadic Subjects*.

Claudia Lapping, also a clinician, similarly draws on Patricia Gherovici’s transpsychoanalytics in her scholarly and auto-ethnographic reading of Joan Rivière’s *Womanliness as a Masquerade* (1929). In multi-gendered renderings of a memory that was sparked when she read this well-known text for the first time, Lapping both theorises and demonstrates how the sexed body is continually coming into being in relation to the Other, as well as the necessity of understanding ‘overlooked racial dynamics in the constitution of sexed subjects’ (p. 40). Lapping mobilises transness as a useful concept in psychosocial thinking: it clarifies the ‘more general disjuncture between the subject’s experience in their body and symbolic codes of gender; and the way this opens up onto the painful excess of the Real’ (p. 44). Her novel psychosocial methodology, which takes unfinished associations and snippets of dialogue with her analyst as material, vividly demonstrates the ‘loosening and re-knotting’ (p. 49) of subjectivity that she argues for. Her contribution is a useful example of how trans psychoanalysis can be mobilised beyond thinking about trans subjects as a way back to the body, as a coming into being. It is also a powerful example of clinical writing that takes the analyst, including their experience as a patient, as the primary subject of investigation, echoing Paul B. Preciado’s recent call for ‘epistemological insubordination’

(2021, p. 74) of psychoanalysis in which the former subject (the analyst) becomes the object of study.

Entanglements of gender, sexuality and race

Annette-Carina van der Zaag, in ‘Fleeing the Scene of Sex and Race’, suggests that ‘[o]ne of the current troubles in the field of psychosocial studies is the neglect of black studies and queer of colour critique for how the psychosocial is understood and engaged’ (p. 351). Van der Zaag explores how the concepts of plasticity, afro-fabulation and the undercommons might provide ‘door to a different world’ in which human beings ‘might not pivot on the violence of racialisation and sexualisation’ (p. 350). What is at stake in van der Zaag’s argument is the extent to which subjectivity must necessarily be ruled by the bar of sexuation as entangled with race, and the relation of sexuation – if any – to the body. These are fundamental issues for queer and trans lives, both in and outside the clinic, in what Christina Sharpe (2016) has called the ‘wake’ of transatlantic slavery which established Black subjectivity as non-human. Van der Zaag’s contribution to the *Handbook* poses important challenges for psychosocial studies as a discipline, especially in its relation to academic institutions. Exploring Halberstam’s reading of Harney and Moten’s *The Undercommons* (2013) as a refusal of what has been refused to those excluded from structures of power, van der Zaag suggests that ‘the refusal of the refusal would edge psychosocial studies away from the university as institution and the desire to develop psychosocial studies as an acknowledged discipline. What if psychosocial studies would inhabit an anarchist relation to discipline instead of an ambivalent one?’ (p. 365).

The editors of the *Handbook* observe that psychosocial studies needs to engage more with scholarship from the Global South, and that they hope that more Southern Cone voices will be included as the *Handbook* develops. In Tomas Ojeda’s ‘The Multiple Lives of

Diversity in Post-dictatorship’, Ojeda applies a psychosocial lens to the way that the ‘turn to diversity’ (p. 712) has been understood and deployed by “psy professionals” – psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists – in post-dictatorship Chile. He argues, following Sara Ahmed, that the recent turn towards ‘diversity’ in Chile replaces a more uncomfortable terminology of race, racism and sexual dissidence. In doing so, the turn to diversity covers over the violence against sexual, gender and racial minorities that continued after the fall of the dictatorship and during the transition to democracy both in society and in the psy professions. Making use of Avery Gordon’s analytic of haunting, extensively mobilised within the psychosocial field (and in the *Handbook* itself) by Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Khyati Tripathi, Ojeda suggests that ‘it is the lived experience of racism, LGBTIQ+-phobia, and state violence that survives despite efforts to erase and expel those histories from Chile’s collective memory. And this is how the framing of the turn to diversity also works: by rendering those histories invisible given their alleged conflictual and discomforting nature’ (p. 717). He uses examples from his fieldwork to illustrate how racism and racialisation invisibly haunted his interviews with psy professionals and initial data analysis. Given his status as an ‘insider-outsider’ in his research field, he argues that this invisibility and haunting return of race provides psychosocial data for the phantasmatic presence of race in the turn to diversity in the psy professionals in Chile.

Ojeda’s work is a notable appearance in the *Handbook* for several reasons: he uses the language of sexual and gender dissidence instead of the terminology of queer and trans or sexual difference, pointing to the way that large parts of the *Handbook* – and my review – use terms that have been inscribed by queer and trans theory developed in the Global North. His analysis of post-dictatorship Chile demonstrates how precise scholarship needs to be about the distinct post-colonial logics of race, class, sex and gender in different countries, highlighting the flattening that often takes place in decolonial work that is dominated by the

consideration of the particular variants of settler colonialism and transatlantic slavery that were and are enacted in the United States and the United Kingdom. Ojeda also usefully brings into the psychosocial field scholarship that is not available in English language addressing the violence against trans people during and after the Chilean dictatorship.

Psychosocial perspectives on homophobia and transphobia

Poul Rohleder's 'Homophobia and the Psychic Life of LGBTQ People' demonstrates the usefulness of psychosocial studies in combining psychoanalytic theory with sociology. He uses Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's Freudian analysis of the psychic structures of prejudice to consider hysterical, obsessional and narcissistic aspects of homophobia, and critically examines the concept of internalised homophobia which has often been mobilised clinically in ways that problematise the individual experiencing it. This analysis is brought to life by vignettes from Rohleder's psychosocial research on homophobia in gay men living with HIV in South Africa and everyday LGBTQIA experiences of holding hands with a partner in public in the UK. Rohleder's article exemplifies many aspects of psychosocial engagement with gender and sexuality: a methodical, historically informed approach to key terms; the treatment of psychic and social forces in relation to gender and sexuality as inseparable and mutually entangled; and the use of empirical methods that stimulate free associative responses from research participants. Rohleder recognises that some trans people (for example, trans lesbians) also experience homophobia, and suggests that transphobia deserves 'separate, detailed consideration' (p. 613). However, although his examination of homophobia leans extensively on anxiety about gender identities and gender roles – in Gayle Salamon's words, 'gay bashing and other forms of homophobic violence are used precisely to police *gender* boundaries' (Salamon, 2010, p. 127) – he does not engage with the

psychoanalytic literature about transphobia (for example, Elliot & Lyons, 2017; Hansbury, 2017; Saketopoulou, 2022a; Wiggins, 2024).

Jordan Osserman's 'Psychoanalysis and Trans', staged as an encounter between these two signifiers, suggests political and structural reasons why thinking about homophobia and transphobia together might be especially difficult in the UK in the current moment. He provides a useful account of the history of the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust in London, whose closure was announced in 2022 following a report by Dr Hilary Cass that has been criticised for scientific bias (Grijseels, 2024; Horton & Pearce, 2024; Noone et al., 2025). Given the psychoanalytic orientation of the Tavistock, psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic theory played important roles in both the development and the closure of the clinic. Domenico Di Ceglie's (2018) object relational framework allowed for a supportive attitude towards social gender transition and puberty blocker hormones for a small number of GIDS patients from the early 2000s, whereas the transphobic clinical approach advocated by David Bell, Marcus Evans and Susan Evans⁴ played a significant role in the closure of the service two decades later.⁵ Osserman goes on to consider why psychoanalysis might sometimes struggle with trans subjectivity, stressing the need to recognise the universality of struggles with gendered embodiment for all subjects, whether cis or trans, and the way that some bodily practices, for example, circumcision, are more culturally prescribed than gender affirming surgery. Lacanian analyst Patricia Gherovici suggests that transition narratives, as a literary genre, are a way of dealing with the universal impossibility of 'passing' perfectly as one gender; Osserman equally gives space to critique

⁴ Osserman references Saketopoulou's (2022a) very useful dissection of transphobia in clinical work with gender questioning children.

⁵ At the time of writing in 2025, the clinic has been closed for more than a year and the lack of an adequate replacement has further exacerbated waiting times for treatment.

from within trans studies of narratives that endow trans people with absolute self-knowledge. He also addresses apparent clinical tensions between the need to affirm trans people's identities in the face of a highly transphobic society and the need to grant trans people the same opacity as cis people, highlighting 'progressive psychoanalytic perspective[s that] would not treat the experience of trauma as somehow invalidating a person's claims about their sexuality or gender' (p. 605). These 'progressive' approaches – which I would argue simply grant non-normative sexual subjects the same rights to opacity and empathy that more normative subjects routinely receive – have been further developed by Avgi Saketopoulou and Ann Pellegrini in their groundbreaking clinical and scholarly work, *Gender Without Identity* (2023).

Gaps and tensions

So far, I have discussed the sections of the *Handbook* that are useful in thinking about gender and sexuality from a psychosocial perspective, in critiquing the clinic from a queer or trans perspective, and in deconstructing homophobia and transphobia. These contributions are valuable expositions of ongoing psychosocial work of relevance to the field of gender and sexuality studies, and form an especially useful collection of essays for a new scholar to engage with. I will now take up the editors' invitation to identify gaps and tensions in the *Handbook* in its current form.

The most obvious gap *and* tension in the *Handbook* is the relationship of psychosocial studies to transgender studies. It's important to point out that this is not because transgender studies is a new discipline in relation to psychosocial studies: its first field-forming publication, the *Transgender Studies Reader*, was published in 2006, followed by a second volume in 2013 and a 'Remix' in 2022 (Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Stryker & Aizura, 2013; Stryker & Blackston, 2022). Like the psychosocial *Handbook*, each volume of the *Reader*

contains 50 individual essays and a ‘state of the field’ editorial introduction. Transgender studies’ concerns overlap with many of the concerns of psychosocial studies, as is immediately evident from Susan Stryker’s introduction to the first *Transgender Studies Reader*:

... the field of transgender studies is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood. The field of transgender studies seeks not only to understand the contents and mechanisms of those linkages and assumptions about sex and gender, biology and culture; it also asks who ‘we’ are—we who make those assumptions and forge those links—and who “they” are, who seem to ‘us’ to break them. The field asks why it should matter, ethically and morally, that people experience and express their gender in fundamentally different ways. It concerns itself with what we—we who have a passionate stake in such things—are going to do, politically, about the injustices and violence that often attend the perception of gender nonnormativity and atypicality, whether in ourselves or in others. (Stryker, 2006, p. 3)

Like psychosocial studies, transgender studies refuses to take for granted normative linkages between the sexed body, the social world, and subjective experience. It has a similar –

perhaps even more passionate – commitment to theory that ‘does something’ in the world.

This makes it all the more surprising that, although the introduction to *The Palgrave Handbook of Psychosocial Studies*, identifies ‘gender identity to sexual difference’ (p. 11) as a key site of contestation, and queer theory is named as a significant influence and interlocutor, transgender studies is not referenced. This immediate impression is borne out by reading the 50 individual contributions to the *Handbook*. Apart from Osserman’s detailed analysis of the tensions between trans and psychoanalysis, and Ojeda’s important marking of violence against trans and travesti communities in Chile, transgender studies appears in only two other contributions, and then as mediated by transpsychoanalytics, which is a very small part of the field of transgender studies. Judith Butler, whose work was foundational for queer theory, and whose theory of performativity is much discussed and argued with by transgender theorists, is extensively referenced but rarely critiqued in the *Handbook*. Other key figures in transgender studies – for example, Gayle Salamon, Susan Stryker, C. Riley Snorton, Jay Prosser, Paul B. Preciado, Marquis Bey, Talia Mae Bettcher – do not appear to be significant references in the psychosocial field. Homophobia is systematically dissected in a dedicated chapter; the *Handbook’s* approach to transphobia is less clearly delineated, despite significant psychoanalytic and trans theoretical work in this area.

Transgender studies is, of course, not a homogeneous field, and is full of its own tensions and disagreements; there are also many productive tensions between queer and transgender studies. Transgender studies is often preoccupied with material matters, especially related to the body. It is generally much less interested in psychoanalysis than queer studies, which has been saturated from the start with Freudian, Kleinian, Lacanian and

Laplanchean theory, although there are important exceptions to this.⁶ Nonetheless, I would like to imagine what the *Handbook* might look like if it were more deeply engaged with transgender studies and trans subjectivities. How might Ranjana Khanna's proposal of melancholia as a tool to analyse the social be enriched by engaging with trans critique of the prevalence of loss and lack in psychoanalytically inflected accounts of the formation of the sexual subject? Could Palacio's 'Scene of Love' explore the potential of Freud's early use of touch in psychoanalytic work and Lacan's concept of 'extimacy' for thinking about trans-inclusive embodiment? Could she, Lapping, and Minozzo engage more directly with the tensions between those trans theorists who focus on structural medical and social barriers to gendered 'becoming' and feminist new-materialism that focuses on universal fugitivity? Could van der Zaag have approached psychosocial studies' difficulties with Blackness through Marquis Bey's proposal that 'Black' and 'trans' are 'differently inflected names for an anoriginal lawlessness that marks an escape from confinement and a besidedness to ontology' (2017, p. 275)? And how might Poul Rohleder's examination of homophobia be enriched by a consideration of homophobia and transphobia as different but closely related forces (as exemplified by Gayle Salamon's *The Life and Death of Latisha King* (2018))?

⁶ See, for example, a special edition on psychoanalysis in the *Trans Studies Quarterly* (Stryker & Currah, 2017) and many of the contributions to a recent edited collection *The Queerness of Psychoanalysis* (Sinclair et al., 2024) which includes several readings of psychoanalytic texts from an explicitly trans subjectivity. Most of the engagement with psychoanalysis from within transgender studies leans on Lacanian and/or Laplanchean theory; this is also true of the contributions to the *Handbook*. It is beyond the scope of this review to consider the point fully, but this poses some important theoretical challenges for psychosocial studies in the UK and US, which since the mid 2000s has mostly worked with Kleinian and object-relational thinking. The painful historic split between Lacanian and Kleinian object-relational psychoanalysis, brilliantly dissected by Jean Laplanche in his essay 'Should we burn Melanie Klein' (2019), continues to haunt both psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies today (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). I suspect that the divisions today between the more 'conservative' post-Kleinians and the more 'progressive' Lacanians in respect of trans subjectivities represent yet another return of this ghost from the history of psychoanalysis.

More generally, I am moved to ask, why is there no writing from an explicitly trans perspective in the *Handbook*? And why is psychosocial studies so apparently reluctant to lean into questions such as this one posed by Dylan McCarthy Blackston: ‘How can we think and live in “trans” ways that enable us to ethically function amidst a collapsing ecology, amidst a sea of retrograde populist nationalisms threatening to engulf us all?’ (2022, p. 5). In short, what might trans subjectivities and analytics teach psychosocial studies about the relationship between the body, the social, and the psyche? If more psychosocial scholars start to engage with “trans” as a mode of analysis’ (Blackston, 2022, p. 5), not just as a way of understanding the subjectivities of a minority of the population, could something new – a ‘trans*psychosocial studies’? – emerge? Perhaps the two-sided Moebius strip of the psychosocial (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008) needs to morph into something even more topologically complex? I suggest that answering these questions – and more – is an urgent matter of social justice in the face of transphobic rhetoric and political action that has increased massively since the publication of the *Handbook*.⁷ The *Handbook* clearly states that the field has political aspirations; instead of approaching the field of gender identity and sexual difference as a site of academic debate, we need an ethical approach that looks for conditions of possibility for queer and trans life, whilst granting queer and trans subjects the same inner opacity as straight, cis subjects.

Repair or refusal?

⁷ For example, a record 1,022 anti-trans bills were considered and 126 passed in the US in 2025 (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2025), trans people’s access to toilets aligned with their lived gender in public spaces and workplaces is now in question in the UK (Good Law Project, 2025), and trans children’s access to puberty blockers has been significantly restricted in both countries (Dawson & Kates, 2026; Department of Health and Social Care, 2024).

However, the trans-ing of psychosocial studies and the possible emergence of a ‘trans*psychosocial studies’ would require more than just an engagement with a different literature. It would also require a re-evaluation of political and ethical dimensions of the field as represented in the *Handbook* and, especially, the ‘ethics of endurance’ as set out in Simone Drichel’s contribution: ‘Ethical Relationality, Precarity, and Vulnerability: “a way of facing things without fear”’. Drichel draws on Emmanuel Levinas, Judith Butler, Jessica Benjamin and Stephen Frosh to examine the psychic reasons for the refusal of responsibility for violence against precarious populations, and positions these psychic structures as resulting in an ethical failure to endure in the face of the other’s suffering, and our own. As Drichel notes, Butler’s concepts of precarity and grievability are useful in explaining why, for example, in an increasingly neoliberal economy in the United States, the ‘precarity of those who are unable to secure health insurance [does] not trigger ethical responsiveness’ (p. 421), or the murder of certain citizens (usually Black and/or otherwise precariously situated) is not seen as an ethical problem. Drichel suggests, following Frosh and Benjamin, that denial of the other’s vulnerability is really a denial of our own vulnerability, a ‘rigid investment in an all-good self’ (p. 432) that results in a diminished ability to endure psychic pain.

It would be productive to bring this ethics of endurance – which resonated in the calls by APS conference organisers for my queer body to ‘stay in the room’ when the phantasm of gender was summoned – into direct tension with ongoing work on the ethics of refusal that is touched on in van der Zaag’s contribution to the *Handbook*. The ethics of endurance focuses on relationality and the need to repair ruptures in relations. An ethics of refusal takes into account that, whilst the objective of increasing recognition of harm caused to precarious populations is admirable, the ethics of endurance is often deployed from within institutions as a way of asking these same precarious populations to participate in structures that continue to do harm. For example, a Black person is invited to discuss the murder of George Floyd on the

evening news for a predominantly white audience, a trans person is asked to participate in a roundtable discussion with cis people about whether trans people should be allowed to participate in sports, or a Palestinian is asked to participate in dialogues with Israelis that present a false equivalence between Palestinian trauma and Israeli trauma (Sheehi & Sheehi, 2021). Queer, trans and Black engagement with negativity and refusal has a long history of challenging and refusing these requests for participation, recognising that they often do further harm to precarious populations and do little to challenge underlying oppressive structures. Queer studies' 'negative turn' emphasises the power of negative affect to catalyse political action (Muñoz, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003) and challenges the call for relationality above all else (Bersani, 1987; Dean, 2000). Transgender studies, whilst working to develop 'trans' as a mode of analysis, also often insists on material change, including the right of all individuals to change their bodies through medical technologies, and 'reaches towards a world where access to life-sustaining resources does not depend upon one's institutional legibility' (Keenan, 2022, p. 311).

Avgi Saketopoulou's (2023) development of the concept of exigent sadism builds on queer and trans of colour critique of relationality and the psychoanalytic theory of Jean Laplanche to reject the assumption that repair is always desirable and to refuse the fantasy of ethical self-mastery. In her traumatophilic approach, endurance is embraced less as an ethical constraint, and more as libidinal contact with the unbearable that can bring about unexpected transformation. In exercising exigent sadism, all parties to a discussion must be ready to come into painful contact with their own opacity and – echoing Lynne Layton – to acknowledge that their individual subjectivity is always-already contaminated with racism, homophobia and transphobia. There is genuine risk to everyone, and a commitment to sticking around when it gets messy. In institutions, therefore, the key difference between exigent sadism exercised within an ethics of refusal, and the ethics of endurance, is that it

asks more of all parties, regardless of the power dynamic between them. It recognises that all parties to the discussion have a complex, nuanced internal world (Sheehi & Sheehi, 2021). The institution itself must also be at risk; van der Zaag's demand for anarchism in respect of institutions is very resonant. For example, inviting a trans person into an academic discussion about trans subjectivities likely requires significant structural and institutional change. The conversation would have to position trans people not as potentially dangerous 'others' at risk of corrupting innocent children, but as thinking, feeling, complex and imperfect subjects who have made significant contributions to scholarship in areas that psychosocial studies purports to care about. This means that the conversation might not take place at all: after all, what do trans scholars have to gain from talking to psychosocial scholars? Or it might take place in a very different place and format. I have a fantasy of inviting the APS organising committee to an LGBTQIA+ community comedy night that raises funds for trans folk to train as psychotherapists: what new possibilities for exchange might be sparked by such an encounter? Whose subjectivities and identities would be in question? The implications of this redistribution of personal and institutional risk for psychosocial studies will be crucial to the further evolution of the field.

Sites of psychosocial resistance from within and without the psychoanalytic clinic

This evolution might result in a pivot towards the emergence of new ways of thinking from the psychoanalytic clinic. Since the 1990s, psychoanalytic training in some places, including the UK and the US, has become more accessible to people from precarious backgrounds and with identities that are pathologised by normative psychoanalytic theory. This movement has been much slower than it should be, and some are still effectively excluded: although many queer-identified people are accepted into trainings, there is still significant resistance to non-monogamous relationship structures; the small number of trans analysts are almost all white

and trans-masculine (Wiggins, 2024); and the high cost of training and training analysis still excludes many without access to significant financial resources (Carter, 2025a). However, a critical mass of analysts who identify as queer, trans, and people of colour have now survived analytic trainings to emerge on the other side as analysts who are well positioned to challenge institutional structures. Anger about the continuing pathologisation of trans identities, racism, and Islamophobia in psychoanalytic institutions is giving birth to trenchant critique of the institutions (Carter, 2025b) and new structures. For example, the Psychoanalytic Hub for Online Liberatory Education (P-HOLE) was set up in July 2025 by clinical practitioners who identify as queer, trans, and/or people of colour who argue that ‘traditional models of psychoanalysis have too often failed minoritized people’ (see <https://p-hole.com>). P-HOLE plans to provide analytic formation (although not a formal training course) outside of traditional institutions. The Rendering Unconscious Center for Psychoanalysis (<https://rucenterforpsychoanalysis.substack.com/>) now offers a year-long introduction to psychoanalysis that is explicitly aligned to queer, trans, and Black subjectivities. And, although not initiated by psychoanalysts, the Psychosocial Foundation is a further key site of development of psychosocial studies outside of academic institutions. The Foundation is part of the ongoing ‘Freudian renaissance’ in New York (Zeavin, 2023); it hosts well-attended online seminars with analysts and critical psychosocial scholars, has launched its own zine-inspired journal, *Parapraxis*, and is planning to offer clinical supervision and tele-analysis (<https://www.thepsychosocialfoundation.org/>). In Brazil, Argentina and Chile, different infrastructures are evolving. Free psychoanalytic clinics, which often have loose or little relation to the institutes that the analysts involved trained with, are developing socially and politically aligned psychoanalytic infrastructures that will have significant implications for how social structures are thought about psychoanalytically (Soreanu & Minozzo, 2024).

These sites could be seen as part of the broader field of psychosocial studies, but they also demonstrate political and structural commitment to the ethics of refusal described above. They have emerged outside of the academic institutions – buildings, economic entities, and publications – that have produced the *Handbook*. If they succeed, it will be within the infrastructures of the neoliberal economies of Substack and Eventbrite, or in the collective organising spaces of the free clinics, and on terms that they have defined. P-HOLE, for example, has a strictly defined sliding scale that requires those with either generational wealth or a steady income to pay nearly ten times the fee than those with the most precarious finances, and does not offer any formal certification; free psychoanalytic clinics are experimenting with collective economic pools.

What do these critical, disruptive, even fugitive spaces mean for psychosocial studies as an academic field? How can institutionally-situated psychosocial scholars – including myself as a PhD researcher in the only UK university department currently to bear the name of ‘Psychosocial Studies’ – respond to this increasingly significant body of ex-institutional work without colonising it, without stifling its fugitivity? These are important questions for all psychosocial scholars, including the editors of the *Handbook*, to consider. Should queer and trans people want the field of psychosocial studies to grow and flourish? Based on my reading of the *Handbook*, and in the light of the structures of power that were revealed so tellingly at the 2025 APS conference, to arrive at an affirmative answer requires some theoretical and structural transformation of the psychosocial field. I hope that the field of psychosocial studies can work towards the transformation of the Moebius strip of the psyche and social into something more topologically complex, incorporating a different approach to materiality and the body; I hope that we can dream together of a trans*psychosocial studies to come.

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