Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age
by Eve Shapiro
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228 pages

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*Gender Circuits* is an accessible and concise sociological history of the relationship between gender, sexuality, and technology in Western culture. Shapiro constructs a historical narrative that commences with sexual classification in ancient and early modern science and medicine and transitions into discussions of technologies of gender representation ranging from clothing, undergarments and cosmetics to the increasing occurrence of surgical and hormonal interventions into sexuality in the twentieth century. Pertinent case studies on gender performance troupes, a history of masculinity and tattooing, the nineteenth century controversy over bloomers and the expanding role of women in society, transgender treatments, and online activism are interspersed throughout.

Shapiro assumes little or no prior knowledge of groundbreaking events, trends, or ongoing debates in information technologies, biotechnologies or gender studies. Definitions of a variety of important terms and concepts for the critical study of technology and gender are offset and used in context. Shapiro’s sociological analysis resists the celebratory or utopian technological progressivism found in a number of previous studies of technology and culture. While contemporary technologies frequently challenge unfounded binary social constructions of gender and insufficient either/or conceptions of biological sexuality, Shapiro insists that they are not innately liberating. Technologies allow for progressive possibilities (which are not unlimited), but they may also be used to reinforce oppression.

Shapiro commences with an introduction to the
emergence of individualism during the enlightenment and an overview of classificatory schemes of sexuality in ancient and early modern science and medicine. The social scripts for gender that structured male and female categories have been challenged and shifted since their formulation through non-normative performances of gender and the development of related medical procedures affecting the gender and sexual identification of intersex, transgender, transsexual, and cisgender persons. The term cisgender is vital to Shapiro's analysis, as it disrupts assumptions regarding the normalcy of matching gender behaviors and sexual identity. The cisgender/transgender framework demonstrates that gender and sexuality distinctions are unstable and blurry, as the scientific categories upon which these distinctions are founded are dominant ontologies and are not always valid. For Shapiro, the social, legal and medical histories of gender and sexuality are intimately related to colonialism, which established labels and sanctioned reactions to persons resisting categorization. Shapiro presents aberrant gender identification or intersexuality prior to the development of technologies for altering sex in the twentieth century as social identification issues related to dress and behavior. By the end of the twentieth century, however, Shapiro writes that transsexualism had been pathologized and added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1980 as Gender Identity Disorder (GID). In light of Shapiro's discussion of widespread resistance to medical gatekeeping among transsexuals, the persistence of GID diagnosis or its alteration to gender incongruence in the DSM-V as debated in a 2010 draft is indicative of the need for continued conversation between activists and the medical community.

Shapiro then focuses on how contemporary notions of gender and sexuality have carried over into social and information technologies including virtual worlds and online forums and resources. Shapiro's argument against overly optimistic technological progressivism emerges in full form as she insists that online interaction cannot be idealized as egalitarian or as being unmediated by the structural constraints and inequalities of the embodied world. Drawing on recent work by Robbie Cooper, Nick Yee and Jeremy Bailenson, and Marissa Ashkenaz on online personas and avatars, Shapiro points out that although online environments do provide a forum for identity work, identifications
aligning with hegemonic norms are often the most convenient options and the only choices rewarded with acceptance. Diversity of body size and race is woefully restricted in otherwise visually rich virtual worlds like Second Life and, when attempted (whether for the purposes of verisimilitude, desire, identity tourism or critical disruption) performances of diversity are often met with harassment or dismissal. Shapiro does highlight the vital function of supportive online communities in aiding individuals reconsidering gender and sexuality or altering their own identity as well as the opportunities for real world activism and organization presented by the development and growth of online communities.

The final chapters focus on the effects of somatechnics or biomedical technologies on embodied sexuality and gender performance. Shapiro begins with discussions of plastic surgery, gastric bypass, steroid use, hair growth aids and transplants, and sexual enhancements as well as disembodied image manipulation technologies. Shapiro expands her discussion of medical procedures for the alteration or exaggeration of meaningful traits by considering procedures like blepharoplasty or double eyelid surgery, which is being increasingly pursued by Asian women in North America in order to fit normative white beauty standards. Shapiro juxtaposes external interventions with internal hormonal treatments ranging from birth control to synthetic hormones and blockers before concluding with a discussion of how transsexual body work and intersexual acceptance have become more acceptable through efforts to re-write gender scripts in popular culture and work in sexuality and gender studies. Shapiro tempers these claims with a reminder of the persistence of physical violence and institutional resistance.

*Gender Circuits* is a far-reaching and yet readily accessible history focused on the present and oriented towards the future. Shapiro recaps a range of important scholarship in the sociology of gender and sexuality and cultural studies of technology over the last thirty years including the work of Donna Haraway, Bernice Hausman, Anne Balsamo, Leslie Feinberg, and Lisa Nakamura. Shapiro also references literature and historical moments that might be less familiar to readers new to gender and sexuality studies like *Self: A Study in Endocrinology and Ethics* (1946) by Michael Dillon, the first female-to-male person on record, who legally
changed his gender in 1944. *Gender Circuits* would be ideal for an introductory gender studies course focusing on contemporary issues or a course or unit on technology and culture. Shapiro’s openness to the possibilities of technological innovation to shape individual identity and culture is productive, as is her refusal to fall back upon an uncomplicatedly optimistic technological progressivism.

*Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*
by Karen Bouwer
262 pages
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In the 1960s the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) emerged as a political hot spot in Africa. As historical records reveal, the transition from decades of Belgian colonial brutality and paternalism to independence did not go smoothly. That being said, there is a tendency on the part of scholars, especially those who write about the process of decolonization in the DRC, to neglect the question of gender. Political scientists, for instance, are apt to focus on the rise of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviets and its impact on Congolese nationalism. Nationalist historians tend to focus on the activities of male nationalists who wrestled for political power without highlighting the contributions of female nationalists. Much scholarship on the DRC shows enthusiasm for resolving puzzles arising from a perennial question: who assassinated Patrice Lumumba?

*Gender and Decolonization in the Congo* departs markedly from the limited scope of most traditional accounts in that it utilizes a gendered analytical framework. It successfully delivers on its author’s stated goals: first, it transcends conventional wisdom by challenging androcentric (male-centered) interpretations of the process of decolonization in the DRC, and second, it brings awareness to Congolese women’s active agency in politics. The study goes