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INTERSECTIONALITY AND GENDER FLUIDITY IN TORREY PETERS' DETransition, BABY

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ABSTRACT

Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby* (2021) is a groundbreaking novel that explores themes of gender identity, intersectionality, and the complexities of queer parenthood. The novel interrogates traditional and non-traditional gender roles through the lives of its three central characters—Reese, a trans woman; Ames, a detransitioned trans woman now living as a man; and Katrina, a cisgender woman. This paper examines the novel through the lens of intersectionality, as theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and gender fluidity, as discussed by scholars such as Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam. By analyzing the novel's depiction of gender as a social construct, the nuances of detransitioning, and the intersection of trans identity with race, class, and motherhood, this paper argues that *Detransition, Baby* expands contemporary discussions on gender and family structures in radical ways.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Gender Fluidity, Trans Identity, Detransition, Queer Parenthood, Feminist Theory

Introduction

Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby* offers a compelling interrogation of gender norms, queer kinship, and the fluidity of identity. As a novel written by a trans author and featuring trans protagonists, it provides an authentic and nuanced perspective on the lived experiences of transgender individuals. Central to the novel is the question of what it means to live within, outside, and in between gender categories. The novel presents gender not as a fixed state but as a dynamic and fluid experience influenced by social, cultural, and personal factors.

This paper engages with feminist and queer theoretical frameworks to analyze *Detransition, Baby* in relation to intersectionality and gender fluidity. By drawing on the works of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Judith Butler, and Jack Halberstam, this study highlights how the novel challenges binary understandings of gender and offers new possibilities for queer parenthood and familial relationships.

Intersectionality and Trans Identity

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, which explores how various social identities overlap to produce unique forms of discrimination and privilege, is crucial in understanding *Detransition, Baby* (Crenshaw, 1989). Reese, Ames, and Katrina navigate complex layers of identity shaped by their respective gender histories, sexual

orientations, and social expectations. Reese, as a trans woman, experiences both transphobia and the patriarchal constraints imposed on women, while Ames' detransition situates him in a liminal space, subject to both male privilege and lingering trans identity struggles.

Peters illustrates the ways in which gender identity intersects with economic class and racial privilege. While Reese struggles financially and works as a sex worker at certain points, Ames, as a white and male-presenting individual post-detransition, gains access to societal privileges that were previously denied to him as a trans woman. This disparity reflects Crenshaw's assertion that identity is multi-dimensional and that privilege operates along intersecting axes of oppression and access.

Gender as Performance and Fluidity

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, as articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990), is highly relevant to the novel's portrayal of gender transitions and detransitions. Butler argues that gender is not an innate identity but rather a performance reinforced through social norms. Ames' detransition challenges essentialist views of trans identity by demonstrating that gender identity is not necessarily linear or stable. His choice to live as a man after transitioning to a woman does not erase his trans experience but instead highlights the fluidity of gender identity.

Jack Halberstam, in *Female Masculinity* (1998), discusses how gender nonconformity destabilizes binary structures. Reese's and Ames' experiences align with Halberstam's arguments about the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities. Reese embodies femininity in a way that challenges both cisnormative and heteronormative expectations, while Ames' transition and detransition reveal the tensions between societal pressures and personal gender identity.

Queer Parenthood and Family Structures

One of the novel's most radical contributions is its exploration of queer parenthood. The arrangement between Reese, Ames, and Katrina subverts the traditional nuclear family model, offering an alternative vision of kinship that is neither solely biological nor strictly heteronormative. Reese's longing for motherhood is particularly significant in the context of trans womanhood, challenging assumptions that maternal desire is exclusively tied to cisgender women.

The novel critiques societal norms that define legitimate parenthood and reproductive roles. Katrina's initial hesitation toward co-parenting with Reese reflects broader cultural anxieties about queer and trans parenthood. However, as the novel progresses, Katrina, Reese, and Ames negotiate new family dynamics that are not defined by rigid gender roles but rather by care, commitment, and mutual understanding. This aligns with queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton's argument that queer kinship "reconfigures the meaning of family, decoupling it from biological determinism" (*The Queer Child*, 2009).

Conclusion

Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby* is a powerful meditation on gender, identity, and non-normative family structures. Through the lens of intersectionality and gender fluidity, the novel complicates traditional understandings of trans identity, detransition,



and queer parenthood. Drawing from feminist and queer theoretical frameworks, this paper has examined how Peters destabilizes binary gender norms and reimagines kinship beyond conventional frameworks. Ultimately, *Detransition, Baby* expands the discourse on trans identity and family in ways that are both urgent and transformative.

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