

Building our own Homes:

Frustrated Stereotyping in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*

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*Strange to be exiled from your own
sex to borders that will never be home.*

Leslie Feinberg (*Stone Butch Blues* 11)

Abstract

Leslie Feinberg's ground-breaking 1993 novel *Stone Butch Blues* is one of the first American literary texts to tackle the subject of transgender subjectivity -- in fact, it is often credited with spawning the transgender-rights movement. The novel follows the childhood and early adulthood of its narrator, Jess Goldberg, as she negotiates the boundaries of sex, gender and sexuality that structure her world, and lives the often violent consequences. The novel is positioned at the site of all sorts of intersections -- not least, Jess exists at the intersection of transgender and androgyny in the overarching realm of a disruptive third gender position. Jess's body refuses categorization as either butch woman or transsexual man, thus disrupting various forms of stereotypical gender and sexual categorization, as well as the theoretical essentialist / constructivist binary.

While her body exists in a fictional text, it is a more realistic or possible body than many other literary characters occupying disruptive sex / gender positions (Jeanette Winterson's fantastic Villanelle in *The Passion*, for example), and therefore it offers a very potent transgressive gender model. Interestingly, Jess's body is contained in a highly conventional narrative structure -- (realist) fictional autobiography. The content

of *Stone Butch Blues*, though, does frustrate expectations by refusing to fulfill itself as the transsexual “coming home” story it appears to be (as critic Jay Prosser argues). The novel thus consciously evades stereotyping of any sort – gender, sexual, or even generic.