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DOI 10.1215/23289252-2399488

## Asterisk

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The asterisk (\*), or star, is a symbol with multiple meanings and applications that can mark a bullet point in a list, highlight or draw attention to a particular word or phrase, indicate a footnote, or operate as a wildcard character in computing and telecommunications. In relation to transgender phenomena, the asterisk is used primarily in the latter sense, to open up *transgender* or *trans* to a greater range of meanings. As Sevan Bussell (2012), a blogger and advocate for using *trans\**, has explained, "The asterisk came from internet search structure. When you add an asterisk to the end of a search term, you're telling your computer to search for whatever you typed, plus any characters after." Though *trans\** has appeared sporadically in print and online for several years, discussions of this new nomenclature began appearing regularly in online gender-community spaces only around 2010.

Although *transgender* has been used since the early 1990s as an umbrella term to cover the widest possible range of gender variation, it is now understood in some circles to represent only binary notions of transness and to refer only to trans men and trans women rather than to those who contest the gender binary (Killermann 2012). Proponents of adding the asterisk to trans argue that it signals greater inclusivity of new gender identities and expressions and better represents a broader community of individuals. *Trans\** is thus meant to include not only identities such as transgender, transsexual, trans man, and trans woman that are prefixed by trans- but also identities such as genderqueer, neutrios, intersex, agender, two-spirit, cross-dresser, and genderfluid (ibid.).

Ironically, typing “trans\*” into a search engine yields only results that include the trans- prefix, thereby reinscribing the very conceptual limitations of trans being argued against by those who advocate using the asterisk. We therefore must consider how the asterisk may have a more multifaceted theoretical application. Recalling the variety of ways in which the asterisk can function, *trans\** blends the symbol’s wildcard function with its use as a figurative bullet point in a list of identities that are not predicated on the trans- prefix formulation. Similarly, starring *trans* draws attention to the word, indicating the possibility of a deeper meaning than the prefix itself might suggest. Finally, the asterisk may act as a footnote indicator, implying a complication or suggesting further investigation. In this sense, the asterisk actually pushes beyond the trans- prefix and opposes it as the only legitimate way to refer to *trans\** identities and communities.

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DOI 10.1215/23289252-2399497