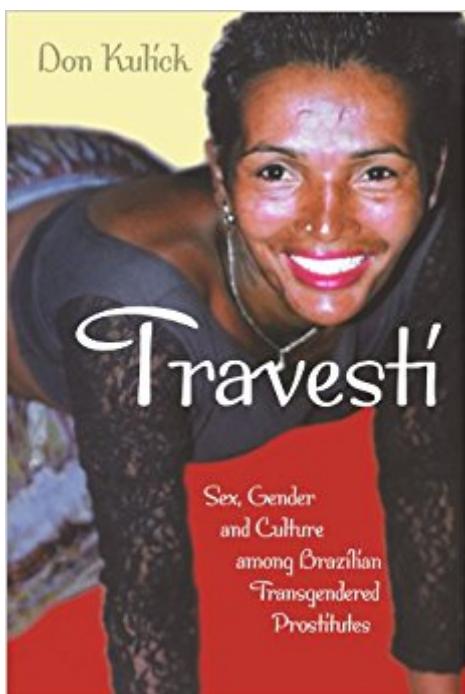


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Travesti: Sex, Gender, And Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes (Worlds Of Desire: The Chicago Series On Sexuality, Gender, And Culture)



Synopsis

In this dramatic and compelling narrative, anthropologist Don Kulick follows the lives of a group of transgendered prostitutes (called travestis in Portuguese) in the Brazilian city Salvador. Travestis are males who, often beginning at ages as young as ten, adopt female names, clothing styles, hairstyles, and linguistic pronouns. More dramatically, they ingest massive doses of female hormones and inject up to twenty liters of industrial silicone into their bodies to create breasts, wide hips, and large thighs and buttocks. Despite such irreversible physiological changes, virtually no travesti identifies herself as a woman. Moreover, travestis regard any male who does so as mentally disturbed. Kulick analyzes the various ways travestis modify their bodies, explores the motivations that lead them to choose this particular gendered identity, and examines the complex relationships that they maintain with one another, their boyfriends, and their families. Kulick also looks at how travestis earn their living through prostitution and discusses the reasons prostitution, for most travestis, is a positive and affirmative experience. Arguing that transgenderism never occurs in a "natural" or arbitrary form, Kulick shows how it is created in specific social contexts and assumes specific social forms. Furthermore, Kulick suggests that travestis "far from deviating from normative gendered expectations" "may in fact distill and perfect the messages that give meaning to gender throughout Brazilian society and possibly throughout much of Latin America. Through Kulick's engaging voice and sharp analysis, this elegantly rendered account is not only a landmark study in its discipline but also a fascinating read for anyone interested in sexuality and gender.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is wonderful and weirdly fitting that one of the jacket blurbs for this work of social anthropology is by sex educator and former porn star Annie Sprinkle. Just as there is nothing dry or remote about Annie Sprinkle's delivery, there is nothing dry or remote about Don Kulick's. In fact, this may be the most readable and engaging study of transgenderism to surface in years. For seven months in 1994, Kulick lived in a household of "travestis"--Brazilian male prostitutes who live as women. He constantly tape-recorded their casual conversations, whether on the street soliciting customers or in their small rooms in the ghettos of Salvador, and has been able to trace the motivations behind their behavior and body modifications with plausibility and compassion. So absorbing are the details of the travestis' lives, as recounted by Kulick, that the reader can easily miss the author's equally acute analysis of their often bizarre transformations and of what travestis, with their exaggerated performance of "femininity," suggest about the construction of gender in Brazil. --Regina Marler

I originally read this book for my Anthropology of Sex class in undergrad. While I do think that many people seem to be reading it for class, I would recommend this book to anyone interested in anthropology and/or trans culture, even if not of Brazil in particular. It's a short read and Kulick's writing style is easy to follow. It's a great ethnography that does a wonderful job giving a voice to "travestis" (a word used to describe the transgendered prostitutes in Brazil and many other parts of South America) and really gave good insight to the trans culture and LGBT rights and rights of sex workers in Brazil. Do keep in mind that this book was published in 1998, and that Kulick's academic background is primarily Linguistic Anthropology, though he has become highly influential in studies surrounding the queer community.

I read this ethnography for an anthropology class on sex and gender and it is definitely my favorite read from this class so far. Kulick does so a good job giving voices to this extremely marginalized group. The kindle version has constant typos that need to be fixed. Lots of "I"s were instead typed as 1s. This is the only flaw but besides that everything else about this book is great! Highly recommended!

I loved this book. It takes an in depth description and analysis of the lives of travesti in Salvador (Brazil) and uses it to illuminate many of our taken-for-granted assumptions about gender in Europe, North America, and Latin America. Is great material for thought and classroom discussion, and it truly takes seriously the task of presenting perspectives of the research subjects.

Unbiased, factual, written from a journalistic perspective. Shocking to say the least. Brazil is a vacation hotspot, and a lot of men travel to Brazil for sex. It's always good to know something about where you're going and what possible things you may see/encounter while you're there. Some of these transgendered men look 100% like women, and you can't tell the difference. Before you pack your bags and head off to Brazil with a suitcase full of condoms & viagra, it probably wouldn't hurt to survey the landscape and case the bank before you raid the vault. FYI: The level of dedication and commitment these individuals give to transforming themselves into objects of attraction for men is unreal. Yet, they DON'T consider themselves, call or see themselves as women. They straight up see themselves as gay men, who simply fashion and adorn themselves as objects of attraction for other men. Yet they do everything like women. Interesting. This book opened my eyes - and where I may have once judged transgendered people, I now withhold such judgments. If you're comfortable judging transgendered people, don't read this book.

Although information is from the 1990's it was very interesting to compare with my experience with trans sex workers in Hawaii during the same time period. Very good research approach.

This was a required book for my cultural anthropology course and I thoroughly enjoyed it. This was a topic I did not know too much about and it was very eye-opening to read about another country's cultural habits.

I needed this book for a class and it opened my eyes to a community I had otherwise unknown.

A+

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