

Lal Zimman

public lecture & graduate seminar

From flesh to self: On the transgender nexus of language, embodiment, and identity

public lecture: October 26 | 11-12:30p | 311 Denney

graduate seminar: October 26 | 12:30-2p | 311 Denney

Bodies are not inherently meaningful, but imbued with meaning through social practice. This talk highlights the discursive processes through which this attribution of meaning takes place by analyzing the complex connection between language, gender, and embodiment. Rather than treating “discourse” as an abstract force, the analysis presented here grounds theories of embodiment in the everyday language that transform human flesh into embodied selves. By examining everyday language use, the talk highlights concrete linguistic strategies and their potential to complicate dominant medicoscientific discourses about biological sex.

The analytic focus presented in this talk is the genital terminology used by transgender people and in reference to transgender bodies. I examine a corpus of data from an online community for trans men and other transmasculine individuals on a popular social network platform from approximately 2004-2010. The talk about trans bodies found in this community represents an emerging discourse of linguistic agency over the body that has shifted over time in parallel with changes in trans discourses about embodied self-identification. I contextualize these practices as part of a larger linguistic logic that prizes individual self-identification over externally-imposed gender categories.



Professor Lal Zimman is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Affiliated Faculty in the Department of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara.

His research pursuits are situated in the interdisciplinary field of sociocultural linguistics and deal broadly with the relationship between language, gender, and embodiment in transgender and queer communities.

