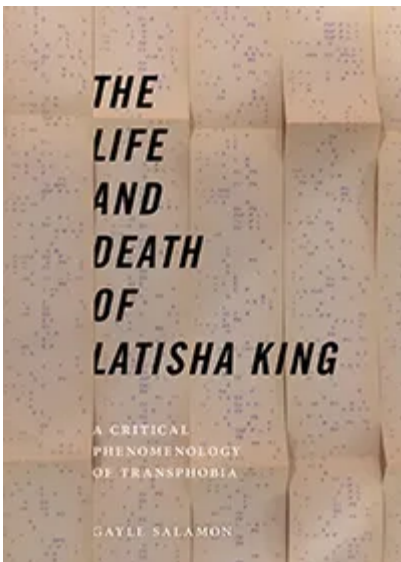


Not so long ago, I presented a workshop for first and second year medical students about gender affirming care for transgender young people. I expected to receive questions about clinical protocols or about the health needs of transgender youth. So I was surprised when one student asked me, why is there so much hate and transphobic violence in the world? This is a challenging question, especially in the context of health care that understands such violence to be tragic and taken-for-granted.



Gayle Salamon's new book *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia* is a powerful response to this question. In this work, Salamon, a Professor of English at Princeton, draws from critical and feminist phenomenology to examine the trial of Brandon McInerney, a 15 year-old boy who shot Latisha King, a 14 year-old fellow student at E. O. Green Junior High School in 2008. The shooting was widely reported in the media as a homophobic hate crime: McInerney killed King after King made a romantic advance toward him. Yet, as Salamon

shows, this telling collapses the distinction between gender expression and sexuality; McInerney described his rage not at any advance made by King, but by the feminine clothing that King had worn, and finally, King's decision to be called by the name Latisha. The question that Salamon asks in this short, challenging, and powerful work is about the gender in the social context of this community: "I will analyze how gender is read as a provocation, how the legal proceedings justified the act of murderous violence directed at Latisha King as defensive based on a reading of her gender as itself constituting an act, and an aggressive one."

The book carefully analyzes the trial proceedings that she witnessed in the courtroom. Phenomenology allows Salamon to dissect the way that gender is perceived by the various actors in the trial. She shows how what was often labeled sexuality was actually gender expression. To wear an article of clothing can thus be seen as a sexually aggressive act, justifying the violence against those who express their gender. She also explores the way in which attitudes about Latisha were manifest how her walk was perceived and described. These detailed examinations bring us closer to making these forms of violence and disregard thinkable, rather than casting them as an omnipresent environment.

There is much more in this case and in the book. Race is a crucial aspect of the trial, and Salamon discusses it, as well as the questions of age, childhood, and adulthood that complicated accounts

of both Brandon and Latisha. Yet perhaps the most fascinating part of this work comes in chapter 4, on objects. Salamon introduces the idea of the ultra-chose, or ultra-thing, from Merleau-Ponty. The ultra-thing, according to Salamon, an object that forms an undeniable part of a child's reality, yet cannot be directly manipulated and therefore cannot be fully understood. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of the moon. Salamon here suggests that gender norms might function as a kind of ultra-thing: undeniably real, yet essentially out of our grasp to manipulate and therefore always escaping full comprehension. In this way, this book points towards the difficult task of thinking about forms of difference and the violence that often attends them, and suggests that examining how gender is differently perceived is a crucial step beyond acknowledging that transphobic violence exists.