

Gender identity through objects, sexuality, and genitals

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Funding: Harry Crossley Research Foundation &

The University of Cape Town University Research Scholarship.

Word count: 5459

ABSTRACT

The current study is a discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with a sample ($N = 10$) of transsexual-identified participants at various stages of transitioning. Gendered objects served to support cross-sex gender identities in talk about early childhood. Personal accounts of sexuality served to construct sample members as the sex that they identified with. In turn, gendered objects and sexuality both served to support the biological aetiology of transsexualism through positioning sex hormones as active objects in both accounts. Constructions of genital significance showed diversity. While some constructed genitals as possessing an essential meaning, others attempted to divest these traditional signifiers of masculinity and femininity of their shared cultural meanings, serving to de-reify gender essentialism.

Keywords: transsexualism, transgender, gender identity disorder, GID, gender, discourse.

“[T]here are as many truthful experiences of gender as there are people who think they have a gender,” (Bornstein, 1995, p. 8).

Using a discourse analytic method (Parker, 1992; Parker 2005), this research examines some of the ways in which a sample of self-identified transsexuals construct their gender identities through their talk about gendered objects and sexuality. Participant’s diverse constructions of the meaning of genitals are explored. It is hoped that the current research will add to the relative lack of South African and African literature on transsexualism.

Transsexualism falls under the umbrella term of transgender, which refers to a multitude of ways in which gender boundaries are crossed by various groups of people (Gagné, Tewksbury & McGaughey, 1997; Namaste, 1994). The term transsexualism refers to individuals who feel that their physical sex conflicts with their gender identity. A number of medical interventions including hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery are used to bring about an alignment between transsexuals’ sex and gender (Gagné et al., 1997).

Much of the qualitative social scientific research on transsexualism has been conducted from a sociological rather than a psychological perspective. The effect of this has been to explore transsexualism as a product of socially shared meanings which constrain diversity of sex/gender expressions, rather than a manifestation of individual psychopathology. Transsexualism has been written about as a product of capitalism (Billings & Urban, 1982), patriarchy (Raymond, 1980), current Western medicalized discourses of sex/gender (Roen, 2001), and institutionalized disciplining of gender diversity in the Western family (Feder, 1997). Not only does this type of work lend itself to a social psychological approach but that of social constructionist perspective (Burr, 1995).

Unfortunately, key texts on queer sexualities in South Africa, from a historical-political (Hoad, Martin, & Reid, 2005) and multidisciplinary perspective (Van Zyl & Steyn, 2006)) have only dealt with transsexualism in cursory fashion. This is mirrored in an arguable absence of psychological work conducted on transsexualism in the South African context (Foster, personal communication, 2007).

Dozier (2005) writes that although academic research on transsexualism has increased, it is not often that the concepts of sex, gender and sexuality are investigated. And while gender theorists have used gender to interpret transsexualism (Kessler & McKenna, 2000), transsexualism has seldom been used to destabilise and critique gender. This critical work has been carried out in non-academic writing (Bornstein, 1995) (as cited in Dozier, 2005).

Psychiatrist Robert Stoller (1968) (as cited in Schrock, Reid & Boyd, 2005) differentiated physical sex from gender. According to him, physical sex has an immutable biological basis while gender is described as a cultural or psychological construct. The sex/gender distinction, which the definition of transsexuality relies on, has itself come under scrutiny from feminists who argue that physical sex is as much a social construction as gender (Hird, 2000; Lorber, 1996). Fausto-Sterling (1993) has argued that there are in fact five sexes, rather than the simplistic binary of male and female. In cases of sexual ambiguity (such as intersex individuals) there are no ultimate biological markers of physical sex (Don Foster, personal communication, 2007). The fact that ambiguous genitalia are often corrected in newborns suggests that sexual dimorphism is in itself a social construction induced by the medical establishment (Smit, 2006).

It has also been argued that gender theorising has always depended on the bedrock of sex, and the idea that there is a natural distinction between two sexes (Hird, 2000, Parlee, 1998). Judith Butler (1990), drawing on poststructuralist theory, argues that gender is performative rather than an individual essence (as cited in Schrock et al., 2005). Here the body merely functions as a material signifier to achieve this performance. Butler's (1990) argument serves to collapse the distinction between sex and gender. In the case of transsexuals, there is no biological test which can determine a patient's eligibility for a Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis – the psycho-medical term for transsexualism (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994; Bower, 2001).

Schrock and Reid (2006) employed an "identity work perspective" which posits that subjects construct narratives that legitimate current identity positionings. These narratives function to eliminate the possibility of being read as belonging to

alternative categories (such as cross-dressers, homosexuals and transvestites). Schrock and Reid (2006) analysed three culturally available discourses used to recount transsexual sexual histories.

Similarly, transsexuals' narrative construction of the "true self" has been explained as an interactive process between members of this social category; all informed by the dominant discourses of transsexualism (Mason-Schrock, 1996).

Schrock et al.'s (2005) research with transsexuals suggests that gender should be construed as embodied. A gendered embodiment perspective "understands the body as socially constructed, subjectively experienced and physically material" (Schrock et al., 2005, p. 330). Practices of bodily transformation were shown to intimately effect participants' feelings (of authenticity, pride, empowerment and confidence), gendered role-taking and self-monitoring of gendered behaviour (Schrock et al., 2005).

Similarly, Dozier's (2005) work with F2Ms argues that sex characteristics and gender expression function relationally to accomplish believable masculinities.

While these theorists argue that less focus should be directed to language in gender construction, I argue that discursive and gendered embodiment approaches can be synthesised by broadening the definition of texts to include bodies. After all, the meaning of bodies are shaped and read through culturally shared discourses.

METHOD

Participants

I am indebted to Liesl Theron, the head of GenderDynamix, for helping me recruit my sample. GenderDynamix is the only non-governmental organization dedicated to the advancement of transgender and transsexual rights in Africa.

I recruited my sample of ten trans-identified participants (see Table 1) by establishing contact with transsexual people whose details were provided by GenderDynamix. I

also placed an online advertisement regarding my research on the organization's website.

Method

All interviews were transcribed with attention to both content of speech and non-verbal elements (such as pauses, emphases and changes in pace). I used Parker's (1992; 2005) discourse analytic method to analyse my transcription data during successive readings of these texts, and drew my conclusions there from.

Procedure

All participants signed a consent form (Appendix A) before interviews commenced. Each participant was given the opportunity to provide a pseudonym of their choice. I met just over half ($N = 6$) of my sample for a 4-hour long focus group conducted before I began my individual interviews. The details of two qualified psychologists were provided in the event that the interviews caused any personal distress. Individual interviews were between 2 and 4 hours in length, and were completed using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B). I made sure to allow participants to guide the interview and asked clarifying questions when they were unclear. I also allowed my intuition to guide some of the questions asked.

RESULTS

Objects: Authentic and Inauthentic

“---as early as I can remember I liked what my sister was wearing and all of her stuff more than what I liked what I was supposed to wear in clothing---“ (Carol, M2F, 45).

“---from about the age of thirteen, I used to start wishing I could do a body-swap with a woman so I could be in a woman's body, and I also started wearing women's underwear---“ (Val, M2F, 50).

“---in primary and secondary school I had to do hmm, domestic science and I wanted to do woodwork and I couldn't.---“ (Collin, F2M, 43).

“---I would as soon climb up a tree and lie underneath of a bonnet of a car, you know do that kind of thing [...] and every chance I got I would be wearing a pants, a shorts or a jeans. [...] the only times I wore female clothes was when I went to school or to church---” (Bart, F2M, 47).

When I asked about their trans life story, all participants recounted early childhood memories of feeling compelled to dress up in the opposite sex's clothing, identifying strongly with the opposite sex and either did or longed to engage in activities deemed appropriate for the opposite sex. This pattern is repeated throughout the literature on transsexualism (APA, 1994; Benjamin, 1966; Bradley & Zucker, 1997; Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Garfinkel, 1967; Mason-Schrock, 1996). From an identity work perspective, this assemblage of cross-sex behaviours and clues serve to authenticate the speaker's current claim to transsexualism, compared to a mainstream (more literal approach) which assumes that these autobiographical elements are proof of their transsexualism (Gergen & Gergen, 1983; Schrock & Reid, 2006).

In my participants' talk, there was a differentiation made between what I will refer to as authentic and inauthentic objects. Authentic objects are constructed as eliciting positive feelings and a sense of comfort to the speaker. Conversely, inauthentic objects are constructed as inducing negative feelings and personal discomfort. Attendant feelings are interpreted as metres of personal authenticity when read through a discourse of therapeutic individualism. This discourse functions to construct feelings as barometers of authenticity (Schrock & Reid, 2006). The attendant constructions served to imbue all objects with inherently gendered meaning.

Authentic Objects

“---I was also cross dressing at home and taking mom's clothes and buying my own, you know like...loan from female friends and, you know, like I had this whole look thing going like when I was in primary school you know like, God I must have been about six or seven, I was really like doing the whole trip you know like every single

day you know, it wasn't just a once in a 6 months kind of little flirtation with it. This is what I was into, and.....but when I say 'help' I mean it's a matter of.....a lot of people don't know where they are or who they are what they are and they get scared by that and it's you know it's that whole unknown, but thanks to the Internet now; and in my days we never had the Internet so it was like kind of; you can imagine how scary that is where you can't just Google something.---“ (Layla, M2F, 43)

A pleasurable affiliation with cross-sex clothing functions as evidence that Layla is an M2F transsexual. Clothing in this construction is assumed to be *naturally* linked with gender, rather than seen as a culturally, historically and socially constructed artefact with no intrinsic association with the sex it was created for. From an identity work (Schrock & Reid, 2006) and dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), one might argue that clothing garments are part of the drama of being a sexed or gendered individual. Their meanings are socially shared and read. Outside of that shared understanding, the connotations of dimorphically distinct fabric assemblages fail to have any inherent meaning.

Kim's story of how she became transgendered describes how female clothing hailed her inner woman.

“---As long as I can remember I've been like this. [...] At the age of 15 my father bought me a pair of John Drake Shoes. And those shoes' heels when it wore off would make a 'klik klok' sound, and I was very fascinated with that 'klik klok' sound. I imagined myself with a pair of stiletto high heels I had on. Well like I mentioned earlier on, my parents were not too happy with me..umm..ummm.. wanting to wear high heels and wanting long hair and all that. But to me it felt natural.---”

(Kim, M2F, 32).

Kim's construction of these external feminine trappings assigns an essential gendered quality to these inanimate objects. The “klik klok sound” is constructed as naturally associated with femininity - a womanly sound if you will - and serves to unlock the speaker's desire for other signifiers of femaleness, such as stiletto high heels and long hair. The sound of the heels function as an authentic(ating) object which serves to

construct Kim as possessing an authentic feminine gender identity, which betrays her otherwise male body.

Inauthentic Objects

Inauthentic objects serve to construct speakers as transsexuals too. They work through the assumption that negative reactions signify that the objects are not congruent with the speaker's internal gender identity.

A female school uniform served as an inauthentic object in Sky's interview.

“when you looked at me when I was wearing my school uniform, for instance, I was wearing a skirt, a shirt and a blazer and socks and shoes, I really looked out of place, ummmm, if you had to look at me on a photo for instance, you'd say, “Who the hell's the boy in a dress?” [...] I was so uncomfortable with myself and when it came to winter time that we actually got to wear trousers, [...], which happened to be the same trousers as the male trousers, I was just in my element, you know, [...] just being able to walk down the road and not feel shy because somebody dressed me in funny clothes---” (Sky, F2M, 22).

Sky describes female clothing as ill-fitted to the contours of his adolescent body. The underlying assumption is that the garments function as a litmus test for gender identity because they are conceived as intrinsically linked to gender identity. The *out-of-placeness* of his body donned in female attire, and the resultant anxiety thus serve to construct Sky as a male. This is reinforced by the male winter uniform which serves as an authentic object in his talk.

Val's construction of donning women's clothing serves to disrupt the discursive link between gendered objects and (the existence) of an internal gender identity.

“--I think that there are times that I am dressed female or even thinking about being female but I actually walk differently, do things differently, act differently, think about things differently, say things differently. Hmm, but I'm pretty sure that those are all based on how I have observed women, so I'm trying to be you know it's not

necessarily....thinking right, I'm going to try this, I'm just trying to be a woman and doing things that sort of are; walking different and that.---“ (Val, M2F, 50).

Here wearing the symbols of culturally recognizable femininity and the thought of being a woman act as catalysts for a feminine gender performance. Her account of consciously “doing” femininity still serves to essentialize femininity in biological women. Elsewhere in the interview, Val describes doing masculinity as a non-operative M2F.

“---as a transgender person I am now being male, almost acting male, although I've had fifty years practice acting male---“ (Val, M2F, 50).

Val's construction serves to show that she has no innate gender (either male or female). There is an assumption however, that biological females do have a naturally occurring gender which resides in their body chemistry (as evidenced in the remainder of her interview).

One cannot help but think of the way in which gender is socially inscribed on female and male bodies in everyday life (Hird, 2000). This is salient in the stories told by the sample transsexuals ($N = 10$) about their childhood experiences of having their gender presentations policed. While these stories serve as evidence that the speakers have been transsexuals from an early age, they also hint at the narrow social definitions of gender to which all sexed bodies are subjected. In this sense, gender begins to function as a fiction to which society conforms and perpetuates (Butler, 2004). On one side of the coin, the transsexual person must *play* the inauthentic gender and learn how to convincingly *act* their authentic gender identity once they start to live as transgendered people.

Sexuality

Wendy Hollway (1989) delineates three competing discourses which define heterosexual sex. These were, namely: the male-sex drive, have/hold and permissive discourses of heterosexual sex (Hollway, 1989). Each discourse provides speakers

with different(ly gendered) subject positions and define (heterosex) sexual agency differently for each sex/gender.

Some of these discourses functioned to construct my sample as members of the physical sex they identified with. In other words, these ways of speaking about (hetero)sex served to position sample members' sexuality in ways that were congruent with their desired/acquired sex organs.

Dylan's posting on an on-line forum for transmales, links testosterone treatment with a *boyish* interest in sex.

“---Before I started T, I was told by a lot of guys that my sex drive would increase and I didn't believe them, I didn't think it was possible for it to get any higher. Until I actually started T and at first I was totally horrified at how it just shot up. I discovered the joys of porn and I got used to my new drive.---“ (Dylan, F2M, 21).

There are three objects in the above text which jointly function to construct Dylan as a normal (trans)male. The objects are, namely: “T” (or testosterone), “sex drive” and “porn” (or pornography). While testosterone is constructed as an active object, sex drive and sex drive are both constructed as passive objects.

In the above extract, testosterone acts on sex drive in the same way that this object acts on the sex drives of (nontrans)males in bio-medical discourses. In medical texts about males, gonadally produced testosterone is constructed as the cause of both puberty and male sex drive (along with a host of stereotypically masculine physical and behavioural characteristics). By repeating this causal sequence, Dylan's account serves to biologize male sex drive in the same way that (nontrans)male sex drive has been biologized by Western medicine. Dylan's account echoes a male pubescent construction of sexual awakening and positions him at the same developmental stage.

Dylan's engagement with pornography serves to frame his sex drive as stereotypically male. This is discursively accomplished by drawing on discourses which construct pornography as a heavily gendered object, catering to male sex drive.

His account of post-orgasm mirrors (nontrans)male talk about this same moment.

“---The problem is that once the 'explosion' happens I cant keep my eyes open, I gotta sleep!---“ (Dylan, F2M, 21).

This (traditionally male) narrative of ‘rolling over and going to sleep’ after orgasm functions to construct Dylan’s sex drive as *naturally* male.

In contrast, two other M2Fs in my sample used a discourse of sex associated with feminine sexuality to construct their gender identities as feminine.

“---the interesting thing about my attraction to women is that it never related to sex, hmm, I never saw an attractive woman or even a sexy woman and thought I want to have sex with that woman, which I understand happens to quite a lot of men, heterosexual men---“ (Val, M2F, 50).

“---I would like to be in a relationship from an emotion .. point of view, for that companionship the .. the closeness and what have you, but from a sexual point of view there’s there’s no need for me---“ (Carol, M2F, 45).

Two lesbian-oriented M2Fs at different stages in transition, mobilised a have/hold discourse of sex (Hollway, 1989). Sex in this discourse is constructed as a process rather than an act with a desired destination (i.e. orgasm). Intimacy and romantic love, featuring as objects in Carol’s talk, are also a defining feature of this discourse. Val’s construction of not being sexually driven (like other males) serves to distance her from the male sex-drive discourse which competes with the have/hold (Hollway, 1989).

Worth noting is that Carol’s construction of her sexuality before transitioning was very similar to her construction of her post-transitional sexuality. In each account, intimacy and romance were highlighted. This continuity serves to support her claimed gender identity which pre-dated her transition.

The have/hold discourse is a commonly available one, often found in self-help books and sexual advice columns (Wilbraham, 1997). Women's inability to orgasm is explained in terms of the discrepancy between the male sex drive and have-hold discourse.

Carol's causal explanation or construction of her diminished sex drive revolves around the absence of testosterone in her body. This construction of her diminished sex drive supports the male-sex drive discourse where biology is seen as the root of sexual desire, performance or need (Hollway, 1989), and serves to construct her as the polar opposite of this masculinity.

Carol also constructs herself as always having a female gender identity by positioning herself as a passive object in the predatory discourse (Wight, 1996).

“---I've never been a hunter. [...] So, if .. if I ended up in a relationship with somebody they would have to be like the hunter.---” (Carol, M2F, 45).

In this all too familiar discourse women are always constructed as the passive objects of the male hunt or chase (Wight, 1996). It serves to circumscribe the amount of agency female bodies may have in sexual relationships and dealings, but in this case works to position Carol as undeniably feminine in they eyes of broader culture.

“---I also don't make a secret that I [...] want to sleep with them all.---” (Queen B, M2F, 22).

Both Queen B and Layla (with her self-disclosed “hedonist[ic]” tendencies) draw on the permissive discourse when talking about their sexuality (Hollway, 1989). This discourse frames sex as a ‘free love’ activity. Unfortunately, it does not allow many positive subject positions for females because of the ‘slut’/’nice-girl’ binary which women are subject to (Hollway, 1989). Nevertheless, it functions here as a discursive resource on which these subjects can draw on to construct their femininity.

The majority of the sample ($N = 7$) draw on gendered discourses of sexuality when talking about their intimate lives, and take up subject positions within these discourses

that reinforce their posited gender identities. The remainder of the subjects ($N = 3$) did not offer any talk on the topic.

Genitals

This section will explore the various ways in which genitals and reproductive organs were spoken about by my sample of transsexual people. This talk is tremendously diverse, often contradictory and offers competing versions of genital signification.

The whole sample ($N = 10$) did not allow their genitals the power to define their claimed internal gender identity. Two participants defined themselves as men because of their male organs but live as women and define their gender identity as such. These people are best described as transgenderists, who mix and match signifiers of gender (both bodily and materially) in a way which transsexuals do not (Ekins & King, 1997).

The competing constructions served variously to reify the essentialist meanings of genitals, while others questioned their definitional power.

The penis as meaningful

“---To be honest with you, I think I’ll settle for ‘boobs’---” (Kim, M2F, 32).

“---if I didn’t experience what it is to actually use my penis ... sexually, then at this point in time I still would have said I refused to be called a male---“

(Miss Neo, M2F, 29).

At the same time Miss Neo calls herself a woman because her “mentality” (or her way of thinking) tells her that she is female. She separates “mentality” from her physical sex (which she is comfortable with). This supports the transgenderist notion of not aligning sex and gender (Ekins & King, 1997). This construction serves to disrupt the heteronormative sex/gender alignment advanced by the dominant discourse of transsexualism (Bolin, 1996). At the same time, the penis (or vagina by extension) is still given definitional power and the ability to hail Miss Neo as a male. The external

genitalia are read as possessing an essential sex differential quality (Beasley, 2005; Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Hird, 2000).

The penis as meaningless

“---I’ve been a hedonist.....meaning I would try and grab as much pleasure out of things as I can, and I’ve done that through my entire life, where I know trans people that does not even have a relationship because they hate their bodies too much. Now I hated my penis, and to be honest with you I absolutely hated my penis all the time but it never stopped me using my penis, if you know what I’m trying to say?---“

(Layla, M2F, 43).

Layla frames the use of her penis as a manifestation of her erotic “hedonistic[ic]” personality. Her strategic framing of using her penis serves to neutralise the assumption that gaining pleasure from this signifier of masculinity connotes her acceptance of being a biological and psychological male. This construction works within the assumption that gender is biologically based, and thus attempts to account for the use of the one body part which negates the subject’s claimed gender.

Earlier on in the interview, Layla expresses her beliefs that transmen without penises cannot be considered men because of the social primacy of the penis and penis size. In her words, being male is a:

“---pissing contest, you know it’s like whose got the biggest and whose going to do this with it---”

(Layla, M2F, 43).

The contradiction is that while not having a penis excludes transmen from being considered men, Layla’s use of her penis does not betray the existence of her inner woman – merely because she constructs herself as a hedonist and having hated her penis all her life. This suggests that discourse is merely a tool used to shape and explain physical phenomena by framing it in a way that irons out blatant contradictions.

In contrast, Queen B's *conscious* ambivalence towards her penis, in day-to-day life and during sex, serves to dismantle the biological essentialism that informs and is upheld by the previous utterances.

“---I'm healthy ... aannnd I like to be active and even if that means using my penis, yes. I use my penis. What's the big deal? Does that make me less trans than whatever trans person out there?---“ (Queen B, M2F, 22).

While Layla denies the symbolism of using her penis, Queen B questions the existence of any real underlying symbolism. Queen B's construction serves to resist discursive determination and to chip away at the biological essentialist account of gender.

At the time of interviewing, Val positioned herself as “*transgender in a male body,*” presenting as a male to “*preserve the family relationship and the marriage relationship*” (Val, M2F, 50). She describes her dilemma with her wife:

“---I sort of hoped that like some of the other transgender families that we would be able to live together as two women. [...] it would be described from outside as a lesbian relationship, but it wouldn't necessarily be a lesbian relationship, it would be just two people who love each other---“ (Val, M2F, 50).

This construction of same-sex desire attempts to divest the category for female same-sex orientation of its social connotations within a religious discourse. Val tries to accomplish this through hollowing out the meaning of dimorphically defined genitals. Unfortunately, her “*fundamental Christian*” wife reads Val as a woman trapped in a man's body.

“---when we make love, the question, and it has been asked before, who is she making love to? George or Val?” (Val, M2F, 50).

Val's hopeful construction of a relationship between “*two people who love each other*” serves to momentarily destabilize the essentialist meaning of female genitalia

and gender identity. This echoes the bisexual transsexuals' construction of falling in love with "people ... not genitals" (Queen B, M2F, 22).

Competing meanings of reproduction

"---I know most of my female friends tell me that I'm absolutely crazy because I say to them I don't know what it's like to have a period. And they say, 'But she doesn't want to know. It's terrible.' And I said, 'But you don't know how I feel having not had that experience...I don't know what it's like, to be fully female.'---" (Carol, M2F, 45).

Later on Carol adds that despite some genetic women not being able to bare children, at least they have the "potential" to do so, and that the potential is something she wishes she had. Here the female anatomy and all the biological processes that it makes possible are framed as circuitry that enable a genetic woman to feel the way that she does.

This biological essentialist account of womanhood also informs some hormone replacement therapy for M2Fs. One may argue that the practice of inducing hormonal fluctuations (similar to female monthly cycles) in the transsexual body, is based on and reifies the construction of womanhood as a biologically based experience. (Bornstein, 1995).

In contrast, Queen B's assertion that transsexual people should have their own children challenges Carol's biological essentialist account of womanhood.

"---a lot of trans-folk that actually wants children [...] should actually consider [...] having children before they [...] go on testosterone [...] Buuut ... if you can't come out as trans .. your whole .. mindset is just on ...wow now I can actually align my body and my mind [...] You don't think outside that box. It's just about like being female, being male---" (Queen B, M2F, 22).

Sex reassignment surgery and hormonal intervention render both born males and females infertile. Fertility and the ability to produce children involves the acknowledgement (through utilisation) of the symbolically loaded genitalia.

Queen B's construction of the pregnant or impregnating transsexual body serves to disrupt the transsexual *norm/probability* of infertility (symbolic of either being or transitioning towards a chosen sex).

Her construction creates a discursive space in society for a visible transsexual identity position (Whittle, 1996). This identity position, similar to the transgenderists' pastiche of sex/gender signifiers (Ekins & King, 1997), may serve to normalize bodies that do not possess sex/gender alignment and to de-reify biological essentialist constructions of sex/gender.

CONCLUSION

My research has explored how transsexual subjects used talk about gendered objects and practices to substantiate and support claims of an early cross-sex gender identity. This was accomplished through talk about what I have termed authentic and inauthentic objects. Authentic objects (constructed as imbued with an essence equal to the claimed gender identity) are spoken about as eliciting positive emotions. Inauthentic objects (constructed as belonging to the sex/gender to which participants did not want to belong) were linked with talk about negative emotions. When filtered through a discourse of therapeutic individualism (Schrock & Reid, 2006) the emotions expressed came to validate an assumed natural connection between participants and the culturally gendered objects.

This is congruent with previous narrative research conducted in this area (Gagné et al., 1997; Mason-Schrock, 1996). Mason-Schrock (1996) argued that an emphasis on childhood cross-dressing served to reinforce the dominant biological theory of transsexualism. Similarly, the majority ($N = 9$) of the current sample mobilised a bio-medical discourse when sharing their personal theory of transsexual aetiology. This revolved around theories of in utero hormone washes which served to feminise or masculinize participants' brains, respectively. This serves to make gender an essence rather than a cultural construct.

My research also found that the transsexual participants' talk about sexuality reinforced their claimed gender identities, as previous research has shown (Schrock &

Reid, 2006). This gender construction was accomplished by taking up gendered subject positions within Hollway (1989) and Wight's (1996) discourses describing heterosexual sex. While these discourses were drawn on to construct participants (claimed and respective) gender identities, they in turn served to support the biological aetiology of transsexualism. This was accomplished by the presence of hormones as active objects within this talk.

Finally, my participants' constructions of their genitals showed enormous diversity. The full sample did not allow their genitalia to negate their claimed gender identities. However, the majority ($N = 8$) expressed a desire to have genitals that (heteronormatively) matched their claimed gender identities.

While some constructed genitals as possessing an essential meaning, others attempted to divest these traditional signifiers of masculinity and femininity of their shared cultural meaning; as have queer theorists (Bornstein 2005) and transgenderists (Bolin, 1996; Ekins & King, 1997; Whittle, 1996). By challenging the culturally shared meaning of genitals, speakers allow for a true distinction between sex and gender.

In contrast, previous research with F2Ms has suggested that gender expression shares a close relationship to physical sex characteristics (Dozier, 2005). Specifically, F2Ms which looked unambiguously male displayed more fluid or non-stereotypical masculine behavioural characteristics. Conversely, more ambiguously sexed F2Ms had to express themselves in a hyper-masculine fashion in order to be socially interpreted as men (Dozier, 2005). This suggests that a distinct gender is a privilege mediated by physical sex characteristics. This is worthy of future research.

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Appendix A: Document of informed consent

DOCUMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

By agreeing to participate in this research you understand the following:

- You **reserve the right to stop participating in this research at any point.**
- **Recounting certain life experiences may dredge up painful memories.** Please do not feel compelled to continue an interview if you start to feel emotionally overwhelmed or uncomfortable. We can take a break and continue the interview at a later stage.

Dr Marlene Wasserman (a clinical sexologist) and Ronald Addinall (a clinical social worker) have kindly made themselves available in the event that you would like to consult with a professional after the interview process. Their contact details will be provided.

- The final thesis will be read by the **UCT psychology department** and made available in the **UCT Library** & on the **Gender Dynamix website**. I would also like to have a reworked version published in the **South African Journal of Psychology**.

As requested by the UCT Psychology Department's ethics board, I will use a **pseudonym** of your choice in the final research project. Other **markers of identity** (including, place of work and specific geographical location) will be made indistinguishable to protect your identity.

- This **research is trans-positive (i.e. does not see transsexuality as pathological), but will be critical of the way that people speak about transsexuality.**
- You may direct any complaints or concerns to my thesis supervisor, Don Foster. His email address is: donald.foster@uct.ac.za.

I _____ (PRINT IN CAPITALS) give my informed consent to participate in Fred Walter's research project. Signed at

_____ (PLACE) on _____ (DATE).

Please refer to me as _____ (PSEUDONYM) in the final research project.

NAME (PRINTED)

SIGNATURE

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview schedule

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Please tell me more about yourself. Pretend I have never met you before.
2. I have been asking all my interviewees to tell me their life stories. Would you please tell me yours?
3. What are the biggest problems facing transsexual people in South Africa today?
4. How did you come to know about transsexuality (i.e. the term, its status in medicine and psychology, other transsexuals, and support groups)?
 - friends/family
 - media
 - medical textbook
 - therapy
 - other sources
5. Did your interaction with these “sources of knowledge” (i.e. the previous bulleted sources) help you understand yourself better?
6. Please tell me about your coming out experiences as a transsexual person or whatever term you feel comfortable with. (*If relevant:*) How did coming out as a transsexual person differ from your experiences coming out as any other category (e.g. gay, lesbian, cross-dresser etc.)? Tell me more.
7. Tell me about the relationship between the new generation TS and the older generation TS.
8. Could you please tell me about your experiences with psychologists and psychiatrists.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Self-Identification</i>	<i>Sexual Preference</i>	<i>Hormone Therapy</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>
Queen B	22	M2F, pre-operative	bisexual	yes	C
Miss Neo	29	Gay, cross-dresser, women in her mind	gay	no	C
Kim	32	M2F, pre-op / transvestite	gay	no	C
Layla	43	M2F, post-operative	bisexual	yes	W
Carol	45	M2F, post-operative	lesbian	yes	W
Val	50	M2F, non-operative / transgendered	female-to- female	no	W
Dylan	21	F2M, pre-operative	gay	yes	W
Sky	22	F2M, pre-operative	heterosexual	no	W
Collin	43	F2M, pre-operative	heterosexual	yes	W
Bart	47	F2M, pre-operative	heterosexual	yes	C

Note. M2F = male-to-female, F2M = female-to-male, W = White, C = Coloured.

Pseudonyms are used to represent participants.