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Day, C. & Nicholls, K.

Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University’s Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Day, C & Nicholls, K 2019, “They Don’t Think Like Us”: Exploring Attitudes of Non-Transgender Students Toward Transgender People Using Discourse Analysis', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. (In-press), pp. (In-press).

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1667161>

DOI 10.1080/00918369.2019.1667161

ISSN 0091-8369

ESSN 1540-3602

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Homosexuality on 25/10/2019, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/00918369.2019.1667161>

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***“They don’t think like us”*; Exploring attitudes of non-transgender students towards transgender people using discourse analysis.**

Chris Robson Day^{1a}, BSc, and Kate Nicholls^b, PhD

a. Coventry University, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry, UK

b Aston University, Life and Health Sciences, Birmingham, UK

Abstract

Literature concerned with attitudes towards transgender (TG) individuals has been found to be lacking. Predominant research is quantitative and the few qualitative studies either investigated TG experience or attitudes of those with personal experience of TG people.

This study investigated this topic using a qualitative approach employing semi-structured interviews exploring beliefs, understanding and experience of TG people. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis was used to analyse the language used to construct a ‘transgender’ discourse. Participants were cisgender, heterosexual, female participants from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds (n=6).

Prevalent discourses were; *‘Heteronormativity as a Benchmark’*, *‘The Ease of Disclosure’* and *‘Actualising the Other’*. Participants consistently drew on discourse that constructed TG as ‘other’. Findings indicate a need to attend to context, as well as content, when exploring attitudes and that covert forms of prejudice need to be addressed and could inform anti-prejudice interventions and the creation of future transphobia measurements.

¹ Contact: Chris Day, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, IV5, Innovation Village, Cheetah Road, Coventry, CV1 2TL. Email: dayc8@coventry.ac.uk

Keywords: othering; transgender; LGBT+; prejudice; attitudes; heteronormativity; transphobia

1. Introduction

The 'Gender Recognition Act', introduced in the UK, accorded diagnosed gender dysphoric individuals the rights of the gender that they identify with (UK Government, 2004) suggesting social acceptance of transgender (TG) people. Contrary to this, however, research found 59% of TG individuals (n=402) experienced harassment and/or violence (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing Esq, & Malouf, 2008) therefore improved legal rights may not reflect attitudes held by the general population. The following literature review aims to discuss how attitude research will inform this study; starting with 'transphobia' scales and moving onto other research contributions.

1.1 The Genderism and Transphobia Scale (GTS)

Hill and Willoughby's (2005) GTS is the most commonly utilised scale in research to assess levels of 'transphobia' (Billard, 2018); self-reported behaviours and attitudes demonstrating negativity towards people not conforming to accepted gender behaviour and/or TG people. Their scale, the first of its' kind, was the result of 227 students rating 150 statements based on literature of TG experience. Genderism, transphobia and gender-bashing had been identified as subscales. During development, items were retained to assess each aspect, whilst removing items with floor/ceiling effects and low correlations, as well as reducing items to the smallest, most appropriate amount (n=32). High correlations between sub-scales demonstrated reliability and, as part of development, convergent validity was verified in two further populations where moderate to high correlations were found with measures of homophobia and gender role beliefs (Hill & Willoughby, 2005)

In support of this measure, other studies found positive correlations with homophobia (Costa & Davies, 2012; Grigoropoulos & Kordoutis, 2014; Tebbe, Moradi, & Ege, 2014), biphobia (Tebbe et al., 2014), political conservatism and religiosity (Ali, Fleisher, & Erickson, 2016;

Grigoropoulos & Kordoutis, 2014) and decreased empathy (Walters & Rehman, 2012). The GTS was also used to evaluate an anti-TG prejudice intervention and track attitude change over time; researchers found contact with TG people, in the form of a speaker panel, led to greater decreases in transphobia scores and these scores remained lower at follow up (Walch, et al., 2012). This supports the GTS, beyond convergent validity, as a standalone measurement of attitudes towards TG people, in conjunction with other stimuli and demonstrates its' sensitivity to temporal changes.

1.2 Beyond the GTS

Other scales that have been developed, and used in studies beyond their development, have taken different approaches to the GTS. The 'Transphobia Scale' (Nagoshi, et al., 2008) focusses on attitudes and feelings towards gender non-conformity, rather than potential behaviour or actions that may be taken, and convergent validity mirrored the GTS; homophobia, political conservatism, gender role beliefs and religiosity correlated positively with transphobia. Also, once homophobia was accounted for, correlations between conservatism/religious fundamentalism and transphobia, in males, was removed. Authors concluded that transphobia and homophobia arise from similar prejudices in men but not women (Nagoshi, et al., 2008). Negative correlations between social desirability and anti-TG prejudice have also been found using this scale (Tebbe & Moradi, 2012; Tebbe, et al., 2014). Transphobia has been investigated using the 'Attitudes Towards Transgender Individuals Scale' combining two widely used standardised scales for measuring attitudes towards homosexuals and modifying them to address TG people. They found it correlated well with the GTS, without the inherent issues mentioned earlier, and basing it on well established attitude scales supported validity and reliability (Walch, Ngamake, et al., 2012). Most recently, the 'Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale' was developed (Kanamori, Cornelius-White, Pegors,

Daniel, & Hulgus, 2017), however, the authors and subsequent reviewers have questioned the generalisability of the findings due to an over-reliance on Christian influences at various stages of scale development (Billard, 2018).

1.3 Qualitative Contributions

Eight qualitative studies were located in the search of the literature; three were about TG experiences of healthcare professionals (Applegarth & Nuttall, 2016; von Vogelsang, Milton, Ericsson, & Stromberg, 2016; Vrouenraets, Fredriks, Hannema, Cohen-Kettenis, & de Vries, 2016), three examined aspects of TG experience including others' attitudes towards them (Brown, Maragos, Lee, Davidson, & Dashjian, 2016; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Winter, 2006) while only two were concerned with how non-TG people used language to position themselves when discussing TG related topics. Rosqvist and colleagues (2014) interviewed 9 Swedish healthcare practitioners and found TG was constructed as comprising of 'developmental stages'; progression through these was determine someone's TG status as 'real' (Rosqvist, Nordlund, & Kaiser, 2014). Other research analysed interactions between a TG woman and non-TG, or cisgender, people on a British game show. Authors found covert TG marginalisation by inclusive cisgender people, or 'mundane transphobia', often went unchallenged in the media and TG experiences were both homogenised and minimised (Riggs, Colton, Due, & Bartholomaeus, 2016). These findings underline the complexity of human attitudes that has been hinted at. In these studies, participants may view themselves as TG-inclusive, however, less inclusive beliefs were demonstrated in their use of language; something that would be overlooked by attitude measurements using Likert-style scales and explicit language. It is only right to mention Billard's (2018) recent research, validating a new transphobia scale; a component of this was the thematic analysis of public attitudes towards

TG people (Billard, 2018), however, as this qualitative component was not the focus of that study, only the main quantitative findings have been published.

1.4 Closing Remarks

Recent reviews of transphobia scales, including those mentioned, conclude that there are various issues that need to be addressed to ensure that such measures are fit for purpose. These range from issues around content validity and scale score reliability (Morrison, et al., 2017) to item clarity and a grounding in attitudes held by the populations to be measured rather than theoretical literature (Billard, 2018). For example, critique of the GTS has come from healthcare practitioner participants for the use of ‘inflammatory’ language, such as ‘sissies’, and highlighted that prejudice is not only expressed through violence or aggressive behaviour (Ali et al., 2016) which some items detail, such as ‘would use physical force’. The exploration of self-reported behaviour, where contact with TG people is unlikely, has also been queried (Walch, Ngamake, et al., 2012). Finally, GTS critics claim it shows more about out-group and gender-specific attitudes rather than anti-trans prejudice (Tebbe et al., 2014; Billard, 2018).

More generally, quantitative research has been criticised for not accurately reflecting participant variability and, in attitude measurement, for assuming that ‘attitudes’ are conceivable, stable entities which can be measured; potentially missing intricate meanings usually found in everyday discourse (Potter, 1998). Equally, there is an assumption that measuring ‘hidden mental processes’ as a variable is possible without empirical evidence of the existence of such an entity and a presumption of direct correlations between mental processes and behaviour despite many factors that could work together, or against each other, to produce a certain behaviour (Toomela, 2008). This study aims to explore some of the issues raised here, that is, how lay people construct a transgender discourse. Investigation of the nuance and

variability of language use should allow for a richer, more indepth, analysis to be undertaken that reflects the 'reality' of each participant.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Ethical approval was gained from the University Ethics Committee before commencing the study. This study took an inductive exploratory approach which facilitated investigation into how people use language, during face-to-face semi-structured interviews, to talk about TG people. Questions followed similar themes as the GTS, such as personal experience of gender non-conformity or thoughts, feelings and behaviour towards TG individuals, however the responses were of the interviewees creation rather than a prescribed list created by the researcher. This allowed respondents to explore their own understanding of the topics and reflect on how they would feel and react.

2.2 Participants

Cisgender participants, whose names were changed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, were a self-selected opportunity student sample who received 'module credits' for participation. The six participants were female, heterosexual, aged 18 to 22 and from Black or minority ethnic groups.

2.3 Procedure

Questions¹ explored beliefs, understanding and experience of TG individuals and gender non-conformity. Vignettes², effective tools to explore topics unfamiliar to participants (Secker, Armstrong, & Hill, 1999), provided hypothetical characters for participants to focus on when answering remaining questions. Subsequent questions were posed to explore, first, how they felt people would respond in imaginary situations and, secondly, how they thought they may respond.

2.4 Data Analysis

As participants did not have personal experience with TG people, discourse analysis was useful to study their 'attitudes'. Scrutiny of language use and discourse construction highlighted variability in their speech (Potter, 1998). Foucauldian discourse analysis helped identify what, and how, discourses are employed, while paying attention to the 'position' a speaker takes, what this afforded them and what they can feel by doing this (Parker, 1992).

Following Willig's (2001) 6-stage process; explicit and implicit references, 'discursive constructions', to 'transgender' were highlighted (Stage 1) and individual discourses being used in these 'discursive constructions' were identified and coded (Stage 2) for each of the interviews. These were collated across interviews and subject, where appropriate, to the final four stages. What a text did and what it gained, the action orientation, was considered (Stage 3), position of the speaker was determined (Stage 4), what they could do from that position (Stage 5) and (Stage 6) what could be felt, thought and experienced from the subject positions employed (Willig, 2001).

2.5 Validity

Reflexivity was considered an important, ongoing, component of this research. Therefore, consideration was given to the impact the researcher may have on participants, shaping of responses and awareness of personal bias (Shaw, 2010). The use of 'bracketing', in the form of a 'personal diary', was an effort to minimise these effects by reflecting on various aspects of the research (Ahern, 1999).

3. Results

The following results section will explore the most prevalent discourses identified that relate to *Heteronormativity, Ease of Disclosure, and Actualising the 'Other'*, and the use of language to construct them in relation to a TG discourse.

3.1 “*Something’s different. Something’s wrong*”: *Heteronormative ‘Benchmarking’*

The assumption of heterosexuality as normality and the associated social functions, thinking and language is termed heteronormative (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Participants drew heavily on this and its constituent elements, such as a dichotomous gender binary. This is used to position other elements, such as disconnection from natal gender, as deviating from this. In essence, heteronormativity is used as a standard from which to construct that which is TG.

Extract H1

“OK. So I think (.) I think that clearly when the children feel uncomfortable they will like, you know, dress in a particular way. Dress as the opposite sex or like they might (.) tell their parents or parents might start to notice that something’s different. Something’s wrong (.)” (Arina, L320-L323)

Arina constructs TG children in such a way that “*Something’s wrong*” which will be demonstrated by their behaviour; wearing clothing of the opposite gender or vocalising a desire to “*dress as the opposite sex*”. This highlights that expected behaviour includes wearing gender appropriate clothing; presumably dresses for girls and trousers for boys. As this is only implied, Arina must presume the reader/listener’s understanding without further elaboration. Such use of language indicates there to be a common narrative that both parties are able to immediately grasp, namely heteronormativity, and inherent to this are unexpressed components such as binary gender and associated normative aspects. Aspects, such as transvestitism, are provided

as indicators that “*something's different. Something is wrong.*” in that they do not abide by specific gendered behaviours which are presented, albeit indirectly, as 'right'. Contrastingly, where cross-dressing was denoted a problem, Arina constructs gender non-conforming play as less so:

Extract H2

“Cos I know like some kids like if they're girls, if they're growing up around boys, they'll be interested in like, you know, like playing with like trucks and wrestling and stuff, cos boys do that, but I think (.) as you go older and like the hormones kick in like, you know, you'd change and like you would behave like as you're expected to behave.” (Arina, L326-L330)

Behaviour is still described as retaining gender specificity but that this is negotiable where the child is surrounded by others of the opposite gender; “*if they're girls, if they're growing up around boys*”. This suggests behaviour is dependent on the examples of others, out of their control, or that they lack role models to inform their own behaviour. Earlier in the interview, Arina stated a biological basis of being TG or that people can only be male or female as it is genetically fixed. Instead, gender is constructed, here, as fluid because gendered behaviour is subject to upbringing and environment. Deviation from the heteronormative discourse are suggested to be rectified when “*hormones kick in*”, correcting the aberrant behaviour, and “*you would behave like you're expected to behave*”. Biological discourse is introduced to redress the balance, reasserting the gender dichotomy and inherent conduct but there could be a tension between behaviour being a social expectation or an inherent trait. Alternatively, scientific justification may be introduced to support the validity of a heteronormative standpoint (Jayaratne, et al., 2006).

Extract H3

“I think if it’s after, (.) so they have the exterior of like (.) the (.) gender they wanna be, then (.) there’s no really, real way of them knowing. But I think they should tell them. And then, erm, before yeah it might be a bit like ‘Oh, does that make me gay?’ and other stuff. So then, yeah, that might be an issue but it all depends on if the person’s open-minded.” (Celie, L277–L281)

Responding to a question regarding disclosure of TG status to a potential partner Celie employs a biological discourse in two ways to construct TG. First, physical characteristics after gender affirming surgery, or transition; Celie acknowledges that such aspects are not necessarily obvious, particularly post-transition, as a TG individual would *“have the exterior of like (.) the (.) gender they wanna be”*. Secondly, less obviously, she then says that disclosure, pre-surgery, may lead to the recipient questioning their sexuality. Celie is suggesting that others may consider natal gender is retained at a genetic, or essential, level, pre-transition, and that transition can correct this. When considering both statements together it could be inferred that this reveals Celie’s own construction of a gender identity. She only refers to external alteration, not the person as a whole, therefore she may hold the view that gender is a fixed biological reality.

Also, her reference to *“me”*, whilst using an active voice to express confusion over sexuality, could be read as her own personal dilemma in that situation. The questioning of sexuality is preceded by the surprise particle (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006) because it is an unexpected situation for a heterosexual. Similar language was used by other participants in this hypothetical situation. It is in this way that participants construct TG as an unknown which could lead to someone questioning their own feelings and therefore making their position within the ‘heteronormative hierarchy’ more precarious; this type of ‘queering’ of a dominant institution goes against those ‘taken for granted’ aspects to which people are used to (Coates, 2013) clarifying the surprise with which it is expressed.

Extract H4

N: I think there is a difference (.) There is because like (.) males are obviously (.) quite different to females ((laughs))... in terms of every, well, quite a lot of things, erm (.) I think in that sense it is like a, like really different. Erm (.) like you can dress up as a female, you can dress up as a male, but (.) biologically (.) you're the opposite. D'ya understand? (.) Erm (.) yeah, an' I think (.) surgery (.) they undergo surgery to obviously rectify that (.) So yeah, I think until then (.)like (.) psychologically you think you're, you're female but (.) biologically an' physically you aren't. Erm (.) I think there is a big difference, erm, like pre and post-surgery.

(Neera, L389-L402)

Individual discourses employed here resonate with those already discussed and are explicit examples of gender norms, the gender binary, and how all interviewees constructed TG discourse as a deviation from this. In Extract H5, Neera describes this as “*psychologically you think you're, you're female but (.) biologically an' physically you aren't*” establishing a disconnection discourse also utilised by participants. 'Becoming' the correct physical gender is posited as the way to remediate this disconnection and, in the context of single-sex facilities, allow bathroom access because the transitioned individual conforms to heteronormative ideals of gender “*biologically an' physically*”. This could signify essentialist beliefs being used to protect and defend the dominant social group (Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997) or construction of a discourse incorporating reconciliation of this disconnection where they become individuals aspiring to conform to heteronormativity. Gender affirming surgery is deemed necessary to attain this, however, it is not always the desired route or outcome for TG

individuals (Beek, Kreukels, Cohen-Ketteni, & Steensma, 2015; Brown et al., 2016; Vrouenraets et al., 2016).

There is implicit use of language, throughout these extracts, promoting or strengthening heterosexuality which has been identified, in everyday speech, as a method for speakers to demonstrate membership of the dominant social group and denigrate those that are not (Coates, 2013; Kitzinger, 2005). For each participant, positioning herself as one of the dominant heterosexual group, affords them the authority to ascribe what is acceptable. As a member of this group, she can feel confident in determining that wanting to “dress as the opposite sex” is abnormal, that questioning ones’ heterosexuality is novel and that gender is embodied. Further, building a TG discourse, using a heteronormative framework incorporating gender-specific attributes, could reveal either an inability to consider the possibility of gender fluidity or a ‘reality’ outside the gender binary due to a focus on gender specific behaviours (Wiseman & Davidson, 2011). Clearly there are differences between participant constructions of TG and the reality for TG people.

3.2 “OK, this is who I am”: The Ease of Disclosure

‘Coming out’ is commonly associated with disclosure of homosexuality and has been found to have beneficial health effects whilst also leading to increased victimisation (Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015). In this study participants employed discourses, such as ‘Taking Charge’, ‘Transparency’, among others, that together comprised a similar discourse. In the first extract, when asked how she had seen TG portrayed in the media Arina responds by focussing on reactions of others. She paints a picture of an inclusive society which she is positioning herself as part of.

Extract ED1

A: Erm, I don't think there is (.) there's probably still a little bit of stigma around it but I don't think it's as much as it used to be? (.) And I think like, cos people are encouraging you to be like confident in who you are and stuff. Encouraging people to like come out. Their true selves. (.) So, yeah.

(Arina, L33-L38)

Her phrasing indicates that this is a recent development, where society is “*encouraging people to come out*” and be “*Their true selves*”. While it suggests a change in attitude, there seems to be the suggestion that TG people are hiding and ashamed. Other than pride, an individual trait, there is no acknowledgement of what social factors could prevent someone from divulging that they are TG. This narrative is also taken up by Celie;

Extract ED2

“if they were like hiding away and they didn't want anyone to know and stuff like that. Like, yeah. So, it would depend on that and it would depend on, erm, (.) if they see it as a like a bad thing? Or if they just like owning it kinda thing.

INT: So, confidence comes into it?

Celie: Yeah (3) ‘Cause that will, that will [?] on how other people treat you I think.”

(Celie, L172-L178)

As with extract ED1, there is a focus on confidence, “*just like owning it kinda thing.*”, in regard to imagined challenges that TG individuals may face. Celie contrasts someone “*hiding away*” with someone “*owning it*”, and surmises that this will be mirrored in how you will be treated

by others. While logical, hiding implying shame, it ignores the reality of ‘coming out’ and the genuine fear of rejection or violence.

Extract ED3

*“So, if you were dating someone, you just need to be (.) upfront with them.
‘OK, this is who I am, if you don’t like it then (.) I’ll leave’. Like you don’t
trick someone. That’s not right.” (Olivia, L398-L401)*

Olivia takes a more uncompromising view of coming out, *“Like you don’t trick someone. That’s not right.”*, which engenders an issue of deceit and unacceptable behaviour. She verbalises a *“need to be (.) upfront”* which removes choice and the word *“just”* construes this as a straightforward process; she also provides an example of how simply this could be done. All three participants, Extracts ED1-ED3, belittle TG experience and situates this as an individual problem by revising distress and fear as shame and a lack of confidence. This is clear in the statements by Celie and Arina; they both speak of personal confidence, how disclosure is embraced within such a supportive society and of how failure to do so results in lack of acceptance. It prevents 'blame' being placed on society for the obstacles faced in ‘coming out’ and ignores the harsh and violent reality of disclosing ones’ TG status. This is partially acknowledged by some participants;

Extract ED4

*“there’s so many ways that they’ve probably come across that people have
reacted before (.) that (.) they, they’re just not sure that you’re gonna react
in a positive way (.) and they’re scared of that happening.” (Mati, L262-
L263)*

Mati shows an empathy for TG people and, although violence is not mentioned, the fear and uncertainty they probably experience. Lily also describes a negative reaction to disclosure;

Extract ED5

“Depends on the man because some mans are like really aggressive and be like ‘why did you not tell me earlier? (.) Why’d you lie?’” (Lily, L205-L206)

Despite conceding some men are “*really aggressive*”, she refers to a confrontational, rather than violent, reaction. Attributing such traits to men manages to distance herself, and other women, from such behavioural responses and divert attention from the fact that she has not indicated what her own position in such a scenario would be. This is vindicated, as with extracts ED1-ED3, as a reaction to someone being disingenuous with the justification that it could have been avoided if the TG person had been truthful.

Throughout these extracts participants place responsibility with those who are TG to be “*their true selves*”, to not be “*hiding away*”, to be “*upfront*”, and to not “*trick someone*” or “*lie*”. They do so by drawing on language that positions TG individuals as deceptive and dishonest, which allows them to position society in the role of aggrieved party. It further supports, and may be drawing on, the “trans panic” defence, an evolution of “gay panic”, where perpetrators aim to justify the murder of transwomen by “claim[ing] he was provoked into a heat of passion upon discovering that the person with whom he had sexual relations was biologically male rather than female.” (Lee, 2008, p.513). This is not to claim that the participants in this study are in agreement with murder however they are unaccepting of dishonest interactions and each suggest the negative reaction is warranted because of it. In doing so, in line with their expressed discomfort about questioning their own sexuality, this could allude to “mundane homophobia”. Alternatively, it may suggest an empathy with the recipient of such information; the deceit, the imposed sexuality question and/or the challenge to their gendered identity (Lee, 2014). The belief that such reactions are acceptable, or to be expected, for transgressing heteronormative standards is apparent and such discourses of deception serve to delegitimise TG identities and

legitimise anti-TG violence (Billard, 2019). This highlights an issue with measures of prejudice that can measure the explicit but not the implicit. In the GTS, for example, statements specifically ask about being physically violent and aggressive. Others ask about teasing and bullying TG people. The wording of such questions asks that a respondent attribute negative, extreme, qualities to themselves, however, as found in these interviews such statements are unlikely to resonate with how people view themselves or talk about such issues. Violence and aggression do not seem to be considerations for participants in this study; rather they frame negativity towards those who are TG as expected if they are less than forthcoming.

Another aspect that does not seem to be considered, or was not evident, was understanding the need for self-acceptance prior to being able to publicly acknowledge one's TG-self. As per Devor (2004), there are various stages in the journey of a TG person with the ability to disclose being one of the later stages. The variability of human nature also means that it is impossible to put a timescale on this process (Devor, 2004). Participants talk of such an act as being straightforward almost like telling someone what job you do or where you come from. It may be that, from their perspective, it would be this simple and this is possibly because it is not something they are required to do; rather their sexuality and gender are congruent with the expectations of society and they can be unconcerned about how others' may react. Other research would support this, findings were that heterosexuals construct coming out as a simple process, without repercussions, uncomprehending the deliberation behind each disclosure (Kitzinger, 2005). Their nonchalant attitude could be the result of conflating pride and joy with coming out, a commonly maintained narrative, which means those who do not do so are constructed as being ashamed and unhappy. 'Coming Out' has been described as a form of confession, for TG people, which acts to confirm others' beliefs of polarised gender and remove any uncertainty (Wiseman & Davidson, 2011) which may mean that there is a requirement to do so because it is this ambiguity that the majority are uncomfortable being

subjected to. This ‘confession’ is acknowledged as a double standard by one participant “‘cause I wouldn’t have to say that to somebody.” (Celie L310-L311), but is still deemed a necessary interaction.

3.3 “[T]hey don’t think like us”: Actualising the ‘Other’

Participants in this study used various discursive tools that managed to construct being TG as separate, distinct, ‘other’. Unlike conclusions in quantitative research, the variability, within and across interviews, means attributions cannot be made solely to the endorsement of political, religious or cultural ideologies. This led to the question; could these interviews offer insights into why this happens to those who are TG?

Two of the participants, born outside the UK, talked about the progressive nature of Western culture compared to their own; lack of acceptance of TG people was explained as not conforming to religious or traditional beliefs. However, the next extract provides a different perspective on the enlightened West;

Extract AO1

“we’re not like (.) back in whatever time (.) we’re 2016 and, yeah, it’s just something that you see, you see quite regularly to be honest and you just learn to accept it. Erm (.) keep your opinions to yourself. ((laughs)).” (Neera, L156-L158)

Neera talks about change as progressive, initially, but implies that this is not one founded in choice. Acceptance is described as enforced, a social obligation, that “*you just learn to accept*” and speaks of tolerance, in the true sense of the word, whereby Neera permits the existence of TG people despite disagreeing with it. While tolerance is often touted as a positive attribute and used as a synonym for, or in conjunction with, acceptance this demonstrates that these concepts are not the same thing. This ‘hidden’ prejudice is further supported by her statement

that you “*keep your opinions to yourself.*” and her laughter may indicate derision, at such obligation, or nervousness, that she may have revealed too much.

Western society, in comparison to others, is described as being liberal and beneficent however there is an undertone of misgiving. TG was constructed, by participants, as something that defies “traditional” values in non-Western cultures, is misrepresented in others and, possibly, something that is endured in Western ones. During the interviews, the role of the media in shaping participant attitudes also came up:

Extract AO2

“I think probably the media. Especially with I think, erm, (.) Caitlyn Jenner?” (Arina, L8)

Caitlyn Jenner, a TG ‘reality’ TV star, is talked about as an object similar to how someone might reference ‘the Renaissance’ or ‘the Royal Family’. It invokes drama, “*that whole Caitlyn Jenner thing.*” (Mati, L40), and something of a story, or well-known fairy-tale, rather than real life. As such, it may be dismissed as unrealistic either as a result of the format that Caitlyn’s narrative is presented in or represent participants’ construction of TG. Likewise, Celie stated “*it’s always like in a soap [opera]*” (Celie, L116), which adds to the view of TG as something surreal, fictional, and divorced from the ‘real world’. Other statements “*I have heard about it*” (Arina, L20) and “*watched documentaries on it*” (Olivia, L380-L381) refer to TG as a topic, “it”, that was passively interacted with. Such language, dehumanising people, creates ‘distance’ which permits suspension of empathy and may serve to alleviate any negative feelings or indicate sentiment had never been attached (Haslam, 2006).

Othring was further revealed when participants drew on socialisation or psychological differences as an explanation of being TG. As they had not had any personal interactions with

anyone who was TG it was possibly easier to presume such contrasts between their own experience and that of a TG person.

Extract AO3

“I don't think it's genetic, I think like, you know how they say schizophrenia like develops over time like I think it would be like that” (Celie, L47-L48)

Celie disputes genetics, contrary to most of the other participants, and describes being TG as a product of environment, akin to mental health issues. Similarly, healthcare practitioners, positioning themselves as ‘gatekeepers’ of medical help, constructed developmental stages to being TG (Rosqvist et al., 2014). In this study, this is not about reaching ‘mile stones’ in identity development but rather the use of discourse to ‘other’ TG people as outside the ‘norm’. This is furthered by describing it as a lifestyle choice;

Extract AO4

“it's not like a health issue but (.) they don't think like us. It's just like loads of people like one thing, but there's a minority of people that doesn't like (.) that thing, so they're like the minority.” (Lily, L18-L20)

There is an emphasis on how “they don't think like us” and their place as a “minority”. Language used creates a connection between the interviewer and participant to place them both in the majority, presumably heteronormative, group thereby ‘othering’ TG people as outside of this because of how they think. This extract demonstrates a belief that it is a ‘lifestyle choice’, in the simplistic context presented, while being unprejudiced, people permitted agency, and

prejudiced, these same people are consigned to a lower social status. An alternate use of 'othering' was undisciplined parenting;

Extract AO5

INT: You mentioned that it could be something in childhood.

C: Maybe if your parents are like, erm, really like fluid with what they let you play with, maybe, or like what they allow you to do.

(Celie, L31-L34)

Celie uses "your" and "you", when discussing the impact of upbringing, to denote that this was not her experience hence why she is not TG. Parallels with mental health and upbringing are discontinued when the situation becomes more personal.

Extract AO6

"An' then she'll be like 'Oh, erm, I can't play with that 'cause that's for boys an' people are gonna tease me' and stuff like that. And she's six. So, (.) you just have to be like 'You can play with it. It doesn't mean anything.'" (Celie, L85-L91)

When discussing her younger sister wanting to play with "boy toys" she talks about this as being part of development and advocates a relaxed approach because playing with toys of the opposite gender "doesn't mean anything". This change could reflect the consideration that gender non-conforming behaviour doesn't have to signify being TG; possibly as she does not wish to consider a sibling as having mental health issues or unusual parenting. Alternatively,

such variability, throughout the interview, may demonstrate ongoing re-evaluation of her own beliefs and not responding with a 'snap' judgement. This was seen in other participants.

These findings demonstrate a variety of ways in which TG is constructed as 'other'. Similarly, this has been shown in online discourse through comments made about TG issues, specifically the 'bathroom debate', where participants used biological, psychological and social discourses to account for being TG (Colliver, Coyle, & Silvestri, 2019). This happened throughout these interviews but were not mutually exclusive. There is inconsistency in how participants do this; such as initially stating one thing but countering with a different theory, introducing different lines of thinking or even using similar reasoning to support different arguments. This type of variability is expected and welcomed in qualitative research, particularly discourse analysis (Potter, 1998). It indicates that having the time and space, in an interview setting, to follow these lines of thought is valuable when researching attitudes. The 'snap' judgement could be that which is measured when conducting something like a survey or sampling online comments however, with complex and unfamiliar issues, the introduction of further context, by the researcher or participant, can serve to challenge this.

4. Discussion

Participants consistently drew on discourses constructing TG as ‘other’, in relation to themselves and society, with heteronormativity being used as a standard; behaviours of TG individuals were presented as deviant from that which is ‘normal’. A clear indication of this unconscious framing of heterosexuality as the ‘norm’ was when participants used “*we*” and “*us*” which presumed the interviewer shared their dominant-group membership. As described by Colliver et al. (2019), language is used to position those who are TG ‘as a problematised and problematic out-group who are responsible for any distress they experience and any negative social responses they encounter’ (Colliver et al, 2019, p.233). Negative language used, identified in ‘The Ease of Disclosure’ and ‘Heteronormative Benchmarking’, depicts TG people as dishonest and ashamed. Imbuing them with such traits furthers the notion of their separation from the ingroup who, by default, are upheld as proud, honest and aspirational examples of ‘normality’. Language employed in this way has been observed in other research as an example of ‘discursive discrimination’ (Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015) or ‘mundane transphobia’ (Riggs et al., 2016). Such implicit uses of negative language and positioning, while not consciously prejudicial, have been conceptualised as ‘microaggressions’; these “are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed groups.” (Nadal, 2008, p.23). While this study is not concerned with everyday speech, the unconscious manifestation of these throughout the interviews may be more evident outside such a ‘manufactured’ setting.

Suggestions that ‘coming out’ is a necessity if TG people are not to be viewed in such a way subtly justifies anti-TG prejudice as a consequence of dishonesty; participants normalised it further as the socially ‘done thing’ because being TG was a contravention of majority values. Othering was also accomplished when participants drew on socialisation and/or psychological

difference as an explanation of being TG; possibly it was easier to presume such contrasts between their own experience and that of a TG person. This does lead to the difficult question; it is ever possible to not 'other' others? It has been argued that "something like othering takes place in any encounter between two intelligent, interpreting creatures" (Brons, 2015, p.70). This question is particularly salient when, as was the case, there is no personal experience with members of a different group to inform personal views. The only recourse is to draw on discourse that is prevalent in wider society such as cultural, political and media discourse. Alternatively, where even these avenues are lacking, or conflicted, one can only look for comparisons that may be relevant, such as conflating the TG 'other' with the homosexual 'other' and drawing parallels or conclusions from there. The findings in this study indicate that this is what could be happening for participants as they verbalise their thoughts. Social identity theory speculates that people will place emphasis on intergroup differences, constructing them as negative, while promoting intragroup similarities (Tajfel, 1982). Consistent with this, a stable self-concept can be promoted by the imposition of social rules only on outgroups; this serves to alleviate insecurities, of the dominant group, at the expense of another's privacy, dignity and potential safety (Hornsey, 2008). Similarly, "[o]ur sense of self-worth depends partially on the lesser worth of others; the boundaries of our in-groups depend on the clear exclusion of others as belonging to out-groups;" (Brons, 2015, p. 84)

As mentioned, there was much variability in the way that participants constructed a TG discourse and how this then translated to the 'othering' of those who are TG. The use of categories, such as assigning specific behaviours to a group (for example, heteronormative society as accepting or TG people as dishonest), are subject to revision dependent upon the context the perceiver is working from (Stott & Drury, 2000). Also, variability in what, and when, differences and similarities are most salient is dependent upon context and goals of the perceiver (Hornsey, 2008). This could account for the inconsistent views expressed, within and

across interviews. The importance of context and variability emphasises concerns expressed about the 'GTS' (Hill & Willoughby, 2005) not measuring covert anti-TG prejudice (Ali et al., 2016; Walch, Ngamake, et al., 2012). In this study, participants describe themselves as unprejudiced however their construction of TG people, using language with negative connotations, paints an unfavourable picture without being overtly discriminating. This could reflect participants' difficulty grappling with the implications of these discourses or complexity of the topic, dissonance between their own views and those deemed socially acceptable, or it could be a product of an education in psychology which emphasises the 'fallacy' of nature versus nurture. Importantly, such reasoning withstanding, the reductive, and superficial, nature of quantitative attitude measures (Potter, 1998) is brought into stark relief. It would be impossible for such measures to provision for this complexity and participants 'agreeing' to more than one perspective could result in redundant or dismissible responses. This is not to suggest that quantitative research methods are not important in the investigation of attitudes or that this study is not without its' own limitations.

Only six people were recruited and were all heterosexual females, of similar ages and educational backgrounds, and none of them were Caucasian. This could be the result of recruiting from a culturally diverse, but female-dominant, student sample or be indicative of a reticence in men to engage with the topic. It does not, however, detract from the results obtained because the focus of qualitative methodology is not to generalise to larger populations but rather gain an in-depth appreciation of participant narratives (Potter, 1998). However, Nagoshi et al. (2008) surmised that anti-TG prejudice was different for heterosexual men and women so it would be useful for future research to determine if they utilise different discourses to construct a TG discourse. Similarly, exploration of other sexual minorities' constructions of a TG discourse would be beneficial as TG participants have raised the issue of discrimination

from within the LGB community (Brown et al., 2016) despite shared membership of the non-heteronormative minority.

5. Conclusion

This study also highlights that language use about TG individuals is often convoluted and that there is a need to attend to context as well as content. It highlights the importance of targeting covert forms of prejudice, as well as overt, which could be helpful in informing anti-prejudice interventions and in the creation of future transphobia measurements. It has been posited that challenging the use of everyday language to construct, and promote, a heteronormative reality is a necessity to combat prejudice (Coates, 2013; Kitzinger, 2005) which has been shown to be detrimental to the physical and mental health of TG people (Nadal, 2008). Findings from this study would agree that countering such language could aid in tackling anti-TG prejudice as could addressing the consistent 'othering' of TG people.

Endnotes

¹ The questions used during the interviews were

- 1) What does 'transgender' mean to you?
- 2) What do you think transgender is due to?
- 3) What you have seen in the media about transgender individuals?
- 4) Can you describe a situation where you ever come across, or met, anyone who stood out, or didn't fit in, based on how they were 'doing gender'?

QUESTIONS ASKED AFTER VIGNETTES² WERE INTRODUCED

- 5) What do you think about these two individuals?
- 6) What do you think their experience of University, work, or socializing would be like?
- 7) There are debates around whether transgender individuals should be using the facilities of their born gender or the gender they identify with. What are your thoughts on that?
- 8) How do you think someone would feel if they were dating Alex or Jordan and found out that they had been born a different gender? How would you feel?
- 9) Are there any other comments you would like to make or any questions that you have?

² The vignettes used were '*Jordan was born male but now, at 17 years old, is living 'full time' as a female and she intends on getting the required treatment to transition to a female body within the next couple of years*' and '*Alex is 23 years old and underwent surgery to transition to a man 2 years ago. He was born female but has been living and working as a 'full time' male since his second year at University at age 19.*'

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