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QUEERING GENDER: HOW TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENTS NAVIGATE GENDER

by

Rachel Jaggi

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of the requirements for the degree

of

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ABSTRACT:

In response to the "Doing Gender" theory as proposed by West and Zimmerman, some scholars have argued that the theory perpetuates gender inequality and leaves no room for social change. These scholars argue that research needs to be directed towards deconstructing the gender system, thereby "undoing gender." Transgender individuals, who appear to be playing with the system of gender, provide an important conduit through which to examine the possibility of transcending the gender binary. I conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with transgender college students to examine the extent to which these individuals are able to overcome the dichotomous gender system. My findings suggest that transgender gender performance varies widely across settings and evolves over time, resulting in both perpetuation and deconstruction of the gender system. Overall, while this research does advance theory considerably by identifying the variability of transgender identity and gender performance, it also provides some tentative support to West and Zimmerman's arguments of doing gender.

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INTRODUCTION

The publication of "Doing Gender" by West and Zimmerman (1987) was a catalyst for a new discourse in gender theory. According to the "Doing Gender" theory, West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not an inherent attribute of individuals, but is rather a performance of each individual. Gender is not something that one is; it is something one actively does. The individual performances of gender then serve to reinforce the gender binary and, in turn, perpetuate gender inequality. This new way of thinking about gender prompted much theoretical debate about the possibility for transcending or transforming existing gender categories, the possibility of 'undoing' gender (Deutsch 2007; Risman 1998; Risman 2009). In response, West and Zimmerman (2009) argued that it is impossible to undo gender; gender can, however, be "redone."

While there is much literature concerning the debate on the possibility of undoing gender, there is only a small, but growing reservoir of literature that considers how transgender individuals fit into the puzzle of doing gender. Much of the literature affirms that all individuals are obliged to 'do gender' and thus reinforce the gender binary (Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughey 1997; Schilt and Connell 2007). Considering transgender individuals within the context of the 'doing gender' theory allows for interesting new perspectives. Transgender individuals embody the possibility of completely rejecting gender norms and overcoming the dichotomous gender system (Connell 2010, Lucal 1999). Connell argues that transgender individuals don't "do" gender, neither do they "undo" gender, instead, because their experience as a gendered individual is so unique, she argues that they can be considered to be "doing transgender" (Connell 2010). Researching the lives of transgendered individuals could potentially reveal strategies individuals employ that enable them to move beyond gender

categories. If, as West and Zimmerman have proposed, gender boundaries are continually reproduced as a result of 'doing gender,' those transgender individuals, who do not participate in doing gender or who actively seek to challenge traditional gender scripts through everyday gendered interactions, provide a window into examining how gender may be deconstructed. On the other hand, if West & Zimmerman are correct about the rigidity of gender scripts, transgender individuals may find it difficult to transcend existing gender categories and rather than challenging gender scripts, actually reproduce them.

While there exists some research on the conditions under which transgender individuals challenge the gender binary, this research has mainly been conducted in the context of the workplace (Connell 2010; Schilt 2006; Schilt and Connell 2007). Because the workplace is a location where the gender binary and gender inequality is easily observable, it is an important context in which to study how transgender individuals do or don't do gender. However, a better understanding would be gained through looking at the gender performance of transgender individuals in a wide variety of contexts.

In this article, I will examine the strategies used by transgender students on a college campus as they navigate gender issues in everyday interactions. While much literature suggests that gender is a performance that can't be "undone," some research suggests that it can. Some research suggests that transgender individuals neither do gender nor do they undo gender. Instead, these individuals need their own category; they "do transgender" (Connell 2010). This article will contribute to the gender debate by examining to what extent transgender students on a college campus conform to "doing gender" or challenge the gender binary. This article will also examine under what conditions transgender students conform to doing gender or, conversely, under what conditions these students challenge the gender binary.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gender scholars have discussed at length how traditional gender categories are reproduced through interaction. Gender is commonly perceived as an innate characteristic of the individual. Erving Goffman (1976) made a significant argument against gender as inherent. In "Gender Display," Goffman (1976) argues that individuals display their gender through interactions with others, with these gendered displays being voluntary. West and Zimmerman (1987) summarize Goffman's argument: "Gender depictions are less a consequence of our 'essential sexual natures' than interactional portrayals of what we would like to convey about sexual natures" (West and Zimmerman 1987:130). According to Goffman, gender is something we choose to display and choose how we display it. Gender performance is a dramatization of our ideals of masculinity and femininity.

While West and Zimmerman agree that gender is a performance, they argue against the assertion that such a performance is optional. They contend that individuals do not have the option of being seen as either male or female.

Doing Gender

The "doing gender" theory as proposed by West and Zimmerman (1987) has reached near canonical status and can be considered one of the most important writings in the modern discourse of gender. They "contend that the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially-guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not something one is, but rather it is something actively performed by all members of society. Gender is then 'invented' through these

performances and through social interaction. People interact knowing that they will be judged by others on their gender performance; they will be judged on how well they perform masculinity or femininity. Although concepts of appropriate masculine and feminine behavior vary across time and space, the requirement to behave according to social expectations of masculinity and femininity is omnipresent. It is through these gendered performances that gender categories are produced and reinforced (West and Zimmerman 1987).

By focusing on how gender categories are produced and reinforced, "doing gender" theory is central to the discourse on gender. However, the theory has also been heavily critiqued on the grounds that it leaves little room for social change. Critics argue that "doing gender" is a theory of reproduction, not one of change (Deutsch 2007; Risman 1998; Risman 2009).

Undoing Gender

For those scholars interested in effecting social change, the "doing gender" theory remains inadequate. Some argue that the "doing gender" theory perpetuates a system of gender inequality by illustrating gender as something that is impervious to change. These critiques of doing gender have led scholars to conceptualize alternative theories of gender. Deutsch (2007) argues that it is possible for gender to be "undone." She argues, that while the "doing gender" theory does highlight the importance of social interaction in gender theory, the theory has also become one of gender persistence and inequality. In order to change this, she argues that different questions need to be asked. The focus of the debate needs to be shifted toward change. While "doing gender" refers to interactions that reproduce gender categories, Deutsch argues that "undoing gender" should refer to the interactions that reduce gender divisions. She argues that research should focus on "(1) when and how social interactions become less gendered, (2) whether gender can be irrelevant in interaction, (3) whether gendered interactions always

underwrite inequality, (4) how the institutional and interactional levels work together to produce change, and (5) interaction as the site of change" (Deutsch 2007: 107). Through further research of these areas, she argues that gender can be undone, allowing researchers to answer what Deutsch believes is the central question of gender theory: "How can we dismantle the gender system to create real equality between men and women?" (Deutsch 2007:124). Undoing gender aims to change gender relations and eliminate gender inequality.

Risman's work also advances the concept of undoing gender. In *Gender Vertigo* (1998), Risman investigates the possibility of undoing gender. Through her research of non-traditional families, Risman provides empirical evidence that human beings are capable of interactions within an intimate relationship that are not structured by gender. She argues that the normally strict gender categories can be overcome if the individuals are willing to risk "gender vertigo." She investigates single fathers, married baby boom mothers, and heterosexual egalitarian couples. She looks specifically at how family relationships can work without gender as the central organizing principle. She argues that there is evidence of heterosexual relationships that are not organized by gender. It is only through the creation of interactions where gender is irrelevant that society will overcome the gender system.

In a symposium on the importance of West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender," Risman presented "From Doing to Undoing: Gender as We Know It," (2009) in which she further promotes the importance of undoing gender. She argues that "If […] we believe gender is socially constructed and used to create inequality, our political goal must be to move to a postgender society." (Risman 2009:83-84). According to Risman, undoing gender is about changing; it is about creating a society without gender.

Risman describes the postgender society as "A just world . . . where sex category matters not at all beyond reproduction; economic and familial roles would be equally available to persons of any gender" (Risman 2009: 84). In direct response to Risman, West and Zimmerman argue that it is impossible to undo gender. They argue that even according to Risman's view of a "just world," individuals are still held responsible for gendered reproductive issues. West and Zimmerman argue that in this case, gender hasn't been eradicated, it has merely been changed. Because of this West and Zimmerman argue that gender can be "redone", but never "undone" (West and Zimmerman 2009).

While there is much debate about the possibility of undoing gender, a significant number of studies done in recent years have not supported this possibility. From studies involving auto repair mechanics to female soccer players, researchers have produced many findings supporting "doing gender" theory's assertion that social interactions reinforce the gender binary. (Fenstermaker et al. 2002; Frame and Shehan 2005; Halleröd 2005; Heather et al. 2005; Søndergaard 2005; Stobbe 2005).

Doing Transgender?

The emergence of literature concerning transgender individuals in recent years has provided a new way to consider the doing/undoing/redoing gender debate. As more and more transgendered individuals feel comfortable being "out" about their gender identity, researchers see the experiences of these individuals as a new lens through which to examine gender theory. Transgender individuals feel that their biological sex does not correspond to their gender identity, the inner sense of being either a man or a woman. To correct for this disconnect, some individuals choose to change their body to fit their gender identity. This may include hormone therapy, surgeries, etc. Others may not make physical changes, but instead make symbolic social

changes, such as changing the preferred name and pronouns. These individuals seem to be manipulating the gender system. Transgender individuals could be seen as rejecting gender norms and overcoming the dichotomous gender system, perhaps achieving Risman's ideal of a genderless society.

Most of the research conducted concerning the social interactions of transgender individuals has been in the context of the workplace, an important location for such research because of the easily observable reproduction of gender difference and inequality. In a study of twenty-nine female-to-male transgender individuals, Schilt (2006) found that when these individuals undergo the transition from female to male, they experience significant advantages, both social and economic, in the workplace, regardless of whether they are "out" as transgender or are "passing" as a true man. These individuals, biologically female, but receiving the benefits of being male create new questions in the "doing gender" debate. Are these individuals doing gender? Or are they undoing gender?

Further research suggests that these individuals neither do gender, nor do they undo gender. In a study of nineteen transgender individuals in the workplace, Connell (2010) argues that these individuals can be described as "doing transgender." She argues that the social interactions faced by these individuals are very unique and while they may be sites of stability and reinforcement of gender norms, they can also be sites of change. Connell states that the social interaction of transgender people "results in moments of interactive resistance to gender stability that deserve careful attention" (Connell 2010: 52).

While there is some literature suggesting that the social interactions of transgender people have the possibility of deconstructing gender, much literature suggests that the experiences of transgender people only reinforce the existing gender binary. In a study done on identity

formation of transgender individuals, Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughey (1997) found that while the transgendered individuals believed they were challenging the dichotomous gender system, they were actually reinforcing the very system they believed to be fighting. Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughney also argued that the challenges to gender were not sufficient to challenge the greater system of gender. According to this study, transgender individuals most often 'do gender' and thereby reinforce the binary system.

In another study of transgender individuals in the workplace, Schilt and Connell reported similar findings. While the transpeople and their coworkers are involved in renegotiating gender during an open transition from one gender to the other, Schilt and Connell found that there was little change in attitudes towards gender. Gender was still viewed as unchangeable and naturally binary. Attitudes toward gender hierarchies within the workplace also remained constant. Because of this, Schilt and Connell concluded that "the mere introduction of a visibly transgender subject does not result in an undoing of gender or the creation of gender alternatives" (Schilt and Connell 2007: 615-616).

While there has been important research concerning how transgender individuals fit into the puzzle of doing gender versus undoing gender, this research has been conducted primarily within the workplace. While this is a very important institution in which to study gender and gender inequality, it presents a very specific social situation for transgender individuals. Within the workplace, the transgender individual may feel more pressure to conform to binary gender norms, especially if employment is contingent upon it. A more comprehensive understanding of gender performance would be gained through evaluating the interactions of transgender individuals in a variety of social situations. In a college setting, for example, it could be expected that transgender individuals would be confronted with less rigidity and may feel more

comfortable rejecting gender norms, in which case, the individual would be "undoing gender." However, while a college campus may have a certain degree of a fluid, open, social atmosphere, the transgender individual may still encounter significant pressure to conform to "doing gender." The college campus is also an intriguing context for examining the gender performance of transgender individuals because the individual frequently moves among very different social settings – some formal, some informal, some social, some professional – thereby allowing an analysis of a full range of interactional settings and strategies.

This article will focus on transgender individuals navigating social interactions on a college campus and how transgender college students either do gender or challenge the gender binary. The conditions under which these individuals will do gender or will challenge the dichotomous gender system will also be explored. The results from this research will contribute to the extensive theoretical debate on the possibility of undoing gender.

METHOD

The research relied on in-depth interviews of 5 trans-identified college students. Those interviewed included both male-to-female and female-to-male transgender individuals. This sample included individuals who have not yet started a transition (N=2), are in the process of transitioning (N=2), or consider the transition to be completed (N=1). A transition may consist of physical changes (hormone therapy, surgeries, etc) or only symbolical social changes (name changes, using different pronouns, etc). Eligibility for participation in the study included self-identifying as transgender, being between the ages of 18 and 25, and being currently or recently enrolled as a student at a university or college. Research participants were located through contacting transgender advocacy groups at two universities.

The interviews were conducted in person and lasted approximately an hour. The interviews were semi-structured in order to ensure comparability across interviews. The interviews covered a range of themes, including identity development, strategies used to negotiate daily gendered interactions, experiences of gender-related violations and sanctions, and strategic interactional styles across settings. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

The research also relies on three focus groups on transgender issues: one on the wide array of issues facing transgender people, one about transgender health concerns, and another on maintaining healthy relationships for transgender individuals. Analysis of the interviews and focus groups focused on identifying commonalities in strategies used to navigate gendered observation, as well as the conditions under which transgendered individuals reinforce or challenge the gender binary.

RESULTS

While analysis of the interviews provided rich information on various aspects of transgender gender performance, two themes emerged as particularly prominent in the experiences of transgender individuals. The interview findings revealed that the gender performance of transgender individuals varies both across setting and across time.

Variation Across Settings

The analysis of the interview findings highlighted important variations in gender performance across social contexts. An important dichotomy between formal and casual social settings emerged. Transgender individuals expressed highest comfort with a transgender identity within the structure of the university. All expressed ease in interactions with official university

employees, including professors, office workers, etc. They reported feeling relatively comfortable portraying a genderqueer or a transgender identity in these situations. Michael said:

> With professors I am fairly comfortable and I don't really try to, I mean, I never really had much stress with passing in front of professors, if they don't like it, they can deal with it.

This displays the sentiment expressed by multiple interviewees. Interactions with professors were not a major source of stress.

This feeling of comfort was generally also felt in the workplace. Joe was employed on campus when he began to transition. He described telling his boss about his pending transition. He told his boss that the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) services on campus offered training on how to interact with transgender individuals. The boss and the entire department voluntarily participated in this training. Joe reported immediate acceptance in the workplace. His boss and coworkers began using the different names, correct pronouns, etc. A relative comfort in transition in the workplace was common among many of the interviewees. Many expressed acceptance from employers and coworkers.

Mary, a transwoman who has not yet started the transition process, did however, express anxiety about coming out at work. She works at a local fast food restaurant and has amiable relationships with her coworkers. She reported that most assume her to be a gay male. She expressed concerns about coming out as transgender, but was planning on taking that step in the near future. While some transgender individuals felt relative comfort in coming out as transgender in the workplace, this did vary from person to person. The level of fear also seemed to vary according to type of employment. Those in low-wage service jobs expressed more concern than those who were employed in university services, for example.

Although there were varying experiences with coming out as transgender in the workplace, those interviewed expressed similar sentiments in casual social settings. Interestingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, the informal social setting was the situation in which transgender students expressed the greatest concern with monitoring their own gender performance. Michael provided this example:

> When I am going to be around people that I have never met before and I am going to be talking to them, I try to do it then just because first impression is everything. I started doing something with spirit gum where I will do sideburns and a little sole patch and it looks a lot like facial hair. Enough, that if I see someone later when I am not wearing a sole patch they are thinking, 'He already has facial hair. He has just shaved.'

The need to present a very gendered self in social situations was common to all individuals interviewed. Social settings were the situations where the most apprehension about passing and the greatest desire to pass were expressed.

This is interesting because it is counter-intuitive. This may be because the individual's social standing is at stake. According to West and Zimmerman, the individual's competence as a member of a group is held hostage to an appropriate gender performance (West and Zimmerman 1987). The individual may see a traditional gender performance as a prerequisite for participation and integration in a social group. Some interviewed expressed discomfort in situations where they are not immediately recognized as either male or female. They reported a feeling of "awkwardness." According to Halberstam, the cardinal rule of gender is that "one must be readable at a glance" (Halberstam 1998:23). The interviewees expressed a common need to be readable at a glance in social settings. The gender is often conveyed to a new acquaintance before anything else, usually even before exchanging words. To successfully establish a relationship with a new acquaintance without awkwardness, transgender individuals may feel the need to convey a clearly defined, traditional gender.

It is also interesting to note that the desire to be seen as a "real" man or a "real" woman was not unique to casual, acquaintance-type relationships. This same desire was also expressed in social situations involving close, intimate relationships. The relationships were often seen as sources of validation for the transgender individual. Intimate relationships are another situation to affirm the desired gender. This is particularly interesting in sexual situations, where anatomy very obviously does not correspond with the transgender individual's gender expression and gender identity.

During a focus group discussing issues of sexuality and being transgender, many transgender individuals expressed a strong desire to receive validation from their partner particularly in sexual interactions. Transgender individuals reported feeling validated through specific responses from their intimate partner. For some, certain areas of the body were off-limits during sexual encounters. For most, language was a very important conduit to feelings of validation. Transgendered individuals expressed that the vocabulary used to refer to various body parts was particularly important to feeling validated as a man or a woman. For example, transmen expressed preference for the term "chest" over "breasts." It is through a very specific vocabulary that transgendered individuals felt validated by their intimate relationships. One transman described a sexual encounter in which he was feeling "super masculine" until his partner made reference to his "pussy." He said he felt immediately deflated and emasculated. Intimate relationships are an important context for affirming the desired gender for transgender individuals.

Along with illustrating the important dichotomy between formal settings and casual, social settings, the interviews and focus groups findings also reveal that transgender gender performance varies across time.

Evolution over Time

My research findings suggest that the gender performance of transgender individuals is an evolution. Through analysis of the interview responses, four stages of the gender performance process emerged: 1) Gender confusion stage, 2) Genderqueer stage, 3) Transbounce stage, and 4) Stabilization stage. While the intensity and duration of each stage varied, the stages were seen in responses by all interviewees.

Gender confusion is the stage in which the individuals realize that they are different from the other little boys or little girls. Many of those interviewed remembered feeling like something just wasn't right, but were unable to describe it. Joe illustrated this confusion. He would get up every morning and look in the mirror at the female reflection of himself and not recognize himself. He would search his face, thinking "Where is he? Where is Joe?" Through interactions with parents, peers, and siblings, the transgender individuals eventually learn that their biological sex doesn't match their gender identity. As the individuals grew up and came into contact with transgender information, usually through media sources, they finally were able to put words to what they were feeling. These media sources were most often Internet sources, including pornography, Youtube videos, and blogs written by other transgender individuals. It was largely through these media sources that individuals were finally able to put the word "transgender" to what they were experiencing.

This stage eventually evolves into the "Genderqueer" stage. Genderqueer is a term used to describe a gender identity or performance that is neither male nor female. This stage is characterized by either an explicit identification as genderqueer or through an androgynous gender expression. This stage appears to be a stepping-stone for many transgender people, a way

to slowly begin the daunting process of transitioning. Michael explained why he identified as genderqueer:

> It was overwhelming. I couldn't be a guy just yet, it was like ok well, I am not a woman, and that is enough to deal with right now."

Sam, a transman, also identified as genderqueer for a period of time. In practice, Sam said this included not telling anyone whether he was male or female. While at work, a child approached him and asked him if he was a boy or a girl. He said responded by saying "Shh! It's a secret." He said he performed a genderqueer identity primarily through his dress. He dressed in clothes that were neither particularly female nor male. He also dressed and held his body in a way that would hide his breasts.

Interestingly, all interviewed who explicitly identified as genderqueer, even those who had intended on remaining genderqueer for the remainder of their lives reported eventually making the complete transition. These individuals also expressed greater satisfaction after abandoning the genderqueer identity for either a purely male or female identity. Those interviewed expressed feeling significant external pressure to conform to the gender binary. During a focus group on managing intimate relationships, a transman described how he identified as genderqueer for a time, but felt like fulfilling a traditional gender role was pushed upon him. He did say this varied by situation. For example, he felt less pressure while interacting with gay men and more pressure to conform while interacting heterosexual males.

Individuals reported greater comfort in interactions when they were clearly identifiable as one gender or the other. This may be due to the comfort level of the partner in the interaction. Because gender is a central organizing principle for social interactions, an interaction where the gender is not clearly identifiable as either male or female results in confusion, which could be a significant impediment to a successful interaction.

The third stage is the "transbounce" stage. This stage occurred after the individual started the transition, whether this was through physical or social changes. This may be after changing the name and pronouns used, while some considered the beginning of their transition to be when they started hormone therapy. All interviewed and a significant number of those in the focus groups had already began or planned to begin hormone therapy. Hormone therapy was seen as very important because it is seen as a vital component of the physical transition. Hormone therapy brings the body in line with the gender identity.

The transbounce stage is characterized by hyper-gendered presentations of self. Transgender individuals, worried about looking too much like the gender assigned to their biological sex, often reported overcompensating by performing a hypermasculinity or hyperfemininity. This is accompanied by an intense desire to be seen by others as the desired sex. In this stage, Michael reported talking in an especially low voice, using fake facial hair, setting his jaw to make it more prominent, and dressing extremely masculine to prove his male identity. Michael stated that his male friends were very important during this stage. He said:

> I have really good guy friends that would take me places and be like, ok so normally you wouldn't do that, you would do this. And they were very comfortable and they tried to help me learn how to pass, how to, in my body language, show other people that I am a guy.

He relied on other men to correct his performance.

Joe also displayed an intensified male gender performance. He started going to guys' nights, where they would smoke pipes and play poker, very stereotypical masculine activities. For Mary, although she had not yet made her transition public, her gender performance was hyperfeminine; the clothes she wore around the house were often pink and covered in glitter. She used excessive make-up. It is a stage where many felt they needed to prove to others that they are the gender they are trying to portray.

After the initial stage of the transitioning is over, as a result of biological changes to the body, transgender individuals reported looking physically more like their desired gender and report less need to proves their masculinity/femininity. In this stabilization stage, the transgendered individuals expressed greater comfort in expressing and displaying what they feel to be both the masculine and feminine aspects of their personality. For example, Sam, a transman reported always loving gymnastics. He never participated in it before the transition or during the transition, because he didn't want to be seen as one of "those gymnastics girls." He didn't like its feminizing effect. It seems that he was seeking to prove that he was a "real" man. However, after the transition and after he started passing as male, he discovered that he was comfortable enough with his male identity to participate in this stereotypically feminine activity. Michael illustrated this same sentiment when he said that he is comfortable ordering an apple martini in a bar now because he knows and everyone around him knows that he is male, despite liking stereotypically feminine drinks. He feels comfortable embracing both the masculine, and the feminine aspects of himself. It appears that once the performance as the desired gender is perfected, the risk of being "outed" as not a "real" man is low, making stereotypical feminine activities once again safe.

Overall, the findings from the interviews and focus groups suggest that the gender performance of transgender individuals varies widely depending on social context and evolves over time. In general, transgender individuals express comfort in non-traditional gender performance in formal, institutional settings and apprehension concerning gender performance in social settings, even very intimate social settings. These findings make significant contributions to the literature on how transgendered individuals fit into the debate surrounding West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender" theory.

DISCUSSION

Scholars have investigated the experience of transgender individuals to determine just how they fit into the puzzle of doing gender. Some scholars have argued that these individuals do gender, thereby reinforcing the gender binary and reproducing gender inequality. Meanwhile, others argue that transgender individuals embody the potential to break down the barriers between male and female, through "doing transgender." Both sides of this argument do explain the contribution of transgender students in certain situations. Transgender individuals can be described as "doing gender" in social contexts and in the transbounce phase. Transgender individuals, however, don't always do gender. In more formal contexts and in the genderqueer phase, undoing gender is a more accurate description of their gender performance. Both the "doing gender" and "undoing gender" theories only hold partially true for transgender individuals. Neither theory accurately describes the gender performance of transgender individuals.

"Doing Transgender" as suggested by Connell comes closer to accurately describing how transgender individuals navigate gender. Transgender individuals' interactions can be sites of stability as well as sites of change. However, the concept of doing transgender oversimplifies transgender identities and performances. Transgenderism has been conceptualized as a destination, rather than a process. A better analysis of the role that transgender individuals play in the "doing gender" debate is obtained through seeing transgender as a process. This research suggests that there is no such thing as "doing transgender." Rather, how transgender individuals perform gender depends on the stage of transition as well as on social context. The gender performance of transgender individuals cannot be viewed as a snapshot, it must be viewed as a process.

None of the existing theories completely or accurately explain how transgender individuals contribute to gender theory. Transgender individuals undergo an evolution, resulting in various "genders" and varying gender performances. The general trend is a progression through stages of gender confusion, genderqueer identification, a transbounce, and finally, a stabilization of gender performance. It is also important to note that they also experience various genders, not just over time, but also across settings. The initial hypothesis predicted that formal settings would elicit very specific gendered interactions. Interestingly, it was in social settings where individuals faced the most stress related to gender performance.

It is also important to note that transgender individuals display various gendered selves not just over time, but also across settings. I originally hypothesized that formal settings would elicit very specific gendered interactions. I hypothesized that these formal situations, such as interactions with professors or student support services would result in very traditional gender performances. I also expected to find that transgender individuals would be most willing to express a less traditional gender in casual social settings. Through thematic analysis of the interviews, I was not able to support the original hypothesis. The interviewees expressed relative comfort in being out as transgender or expressing a non-traditional gender in interactions with professors, student support services, official university student organizations, etc. It was in causal social situations where the most apprehension concerning gender performance was expressed.

In formal interactions, such as with professors, students have ways of responding to a negative reaction to their gender performance. They can write official complaints, write letters, etc. They have ways of exposing the injustice experienced. In formal settings and institutions, like universities, professors and staff are more accountable to institutional rules regarding courtesy and civility. Even if they are uncomfortable with the non-traditional performance of

gender, they are bound by institutional regulations. Transgender individuals can rely on these formal rules to limit negative responses. The study of the workplace experiences of transgender individuals done by Schilt and Connell also had similar findings. In this study, transgender individuals were often quickly invited to be involved in same-gender spaces (Schilt and Connell 2007). This was even sometimes done very explicitly. For example, Schilt and Connell reported an instance where a transman was formally presented with a key to the men's restroom from his coworkers (Schilt and Connell 2007: 610).

My research had similar findings. In the previously mentioned example of Joe's experience with his employer, he experienced relative ease in transitioning in the workplace, with seemingly immediate acceptance by his employer and coworkers. Other interviewees also expressed relative quick acceptance as their new gender in the workplace, which they believed to be evidenced by an almost instant adoption of their preferred name and pronouns.

In these institutional settings, transgender individuals can rely on institutional regulations to protect them from negative reactions to their non-traditional gender. These same rules do not exist in social settings. It was in these social settings that all interviewees expressed the greatest degree of apprehension concerning their gender performance and felt the most pressure to conform to traditional gender performances. The most extreme case of this was in a party setting. Michael reported performing a hypermasculinity when he was attending big parties where there would be a large number people, including some he may not be acquainted with. In this situation, he reported that he would dress more masculine and talk in an especially deep voice to convey an unmistakable male identity. It seems counterintuitive that transgender individuals feel the most pressure to conform to the traditional gender system in casual settings. It is in these very informal situations, however, that the transgender individual feels the greatest sense of

powerlessness. In casual social interactions, transgender individuals are subject to sanctions from peers. There are no institutional regulations that require civility. Individuals are not accountable in any formal way for negative responses to non-traditional gender performance.

While it is important to consider transgenderism as a process that varies across settings and evolves over time, it is also important to consider that the end of the transgender process is stabilization. The individuals experienced comfort in expressing both masculine and feminine aspects of themselves, but only within the framework of a clearly defined female or male gender. This suggests that most transgender individuals conform to the gender binary, although they do maintain some ability to incorporate non-traditional performances into their presentation of self. This suggests at least partial support of the argument that transgender individuals are limited in their ability to transcend the gender binary. Michael reported that he identified for a time as genderqueer. When asked what problems he saw with an androgynous gender, he said:

> Well, I wasn't sure how to dress. You can dress androgynously, but it is really hard to not dress as an androgynous woman or an androgynous man. It is really hard to dress so that you really don't have a label still. I wasn't sure how to do that, I wasn't sure how I was going to live the rest of my life. Was I going to live it as an androgyn person? How does that work? Was I always going to be telling people, 'No use this pronoun. Use zee, zer, zim.' I wasn't sure how I would do that. I don't know how anyone would do that.

Similarly, during a conference on transgender issues, transgender students reported not knowing how to perform a gender that is neither one or the other. They also reported receiving significant pressure to conform to binary gender performances. Those interviewed also reported a greater sense of comfort after choosing to identify as either male or female as opposed to a genderqueer identity. This suggests that transgender individuals ultimately conform to traditional gender identities and performances.

Of the individuals interviewed, all expressed preference for being "stealth." They all preferred to be known and recognized as their intended gender, rather than be known as

transgender. All interviewees described being stealth as "passing." All conveyed how important it is for them to pass. Michael, a transman who started transitioning within the last 6 months, stated,

> I want to act like a guy enough to look like I was socialized, but I don't want to look like a socialized male. I want to act like I know what people expect men to be like, but at the same time, I want to be comfortable enough with me if I don't act like men [...] I don't have to be a stereotypical man. I want enough to pass, but not enough to be a jock. I don't have to be macho. I just want to pass.

This sentiment, shared by others interviewed, reveals that, despite not needing to be hypermasculine or hyperfeminine, the respondents do want to be able to navigate everyday gender interactions without being recognized as being transgender. Overall, while this research does advance theory considerably by identifying the variability of transgender identity and gender performance, it also provides some tentative support to West and Zimmerman's arguments of doing gender.

CONCLUSION

The main limitation of this research is the homogenous sample. Due to the extremely small size of the sample population and its relative concealment, I had to rely on snowball sampling, which may have caused the homogeneity of my sample.

The study is further limited by the research method. All findings are from interviews with trans-identified individuals, who self-reported their gender performance. A better understanding of the gender performance of these individuals could be gained through participant observation of these individuals in a variety of settings. These findings could be further augmented through interviews of cisgender individuals who interact with the transgender subjects. This would give

an important perspective on the gender performance of the transgender individuals as it is perceived by others.

Further research should focus on gaining a more diverse sample of transgender individuals. Investigation of transgender individuals of various racial, economic, and possibly religious backgrounds would contribute significant insights into understanding the gender performance of transgender people. While this study was focused on transgender college students, a greater understanding of transgender individuals would be gained through research of transgender individual in a variety of other contexts. Such research would further reveal the important contributions of the transgender individual to the "Doing Gender" debate.

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