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## Trans-masculinities, embodiments and the materiality of gender: bridging the gap

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### ABSTRACT

Transsexual and transgender men have had less visibility than other forms of gender variance, thus occupying a relatively narrow space in gender, masculinity or even trans-scholarship. They are neither particularly relevant subjects of masculinity studies nor particularly visible in Trans Studies. Furthermore, the theoretical and political struggles that separate theorization about butch female masculinities and the FtM transitions have contributed to an even higher invisibility of trans-men and a misconceptualization of their potential as emancipatory subjects in the field of gender as doers of masculinities. Drawing on fieldwork with trans-men in Portugal and the United Kingdom, two lines of argument will be developed. Firstly, from a theoretical standpoint, the importance of building bridges between different areas of critical gender studies, namely Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities and Trans Studies is advocated. Secondly, with the aim of contributing to a fruitful dialogue between two key areas of critical gender studies, trans-masculinities are discussed as practice, place and effect. Following Connell's proposal, it is suggested that redressing the conceptual premises of masculinity is a fundamental step so as to understand the plurality of trans embodiments, bodily materiality and the possibilities of doing masculinity without men.

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### Trans-masculinities and masculinity studies

Critical studies on men and masculinities (hereafter CSMM) have been often perceived as mainly focusing on straight cisgender<sup>1</sup> masculinities (e.g. Beasley, 2005), thereby reinforcing certain constructions of masculinity and side-lining the masculinities of a plurality of gender non-conforming men (Green, 2005). Such an argument might be an excessive criticism insofar as heteronormativity has been harshly viewed as a discriminatory principle. Gay or even genderqueer men and masculinities have indeed been under scrutiny, with many contributions exploring forms of masculinity other than the hegemonic (Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 2015). However, it is true that trans-men (whether transsexual, transgender or other)<sup>2</sup> have been fairly ignored. For the most part, in the field of CSMM, trans-men have not been considered particularly significant for the understanding of masculinities, even when research and theorization show an increased interest in subaltern masculinities vis-à-vis the hegemonic.

A number of reasons underpin this absence. On the one hand, trans-men have been seen as if located in a 'no man's land'. They seem neither relevant for transgressing the boundaries of male privilege and changing the order of masculine domination, nor important enough to assess the trappings of that same privilege or dividend. On the other hand, trans-men have also received less attention from the part of Trans Studies when compared to their female counterparts, which have gained far more visibility. It is as if trans-men have just been seen as wanting to 'pass', and, for that reason, they became more unnoticed. Interestingly, and as evidence of this lack of visibility even in pop-culture or the rapid mediatization of transgender topics, we verify that in one list of the 60 most famous transgender people, only 6 are trans-men or individuals performing masculinity.<sup>3</sup> In addition, when the attention falls on the emancipatory potential of transgression as common in queer-oriented studies, trans-men – especially if they enact a more 'conventional' or un-queer masculinity – can be easily put aside inasmuch as they bear the burden of reproducing the male privilege, even if as an embodied aspiration to some model of hegemonic masculinity. Caught between unduly desires of becoming, many trans-men can well be seen as unfitting, when fighting the gender binary is primordial. All in all, from the perspective of LGBTIQ+ scholarship, the tensions between the perceived subversive potential of lesbians – particularly butch lesbians and those performing female masculinities – the alleged conformity of trans-masculinities has also contributed to maintaining trans-men at the margins of the fields of (trans)gender and sexuality (e.g. Hausman, 2001). On the other hand, for many radical and womanist feminist strands, they are simply betrayers of the cause (e.g. Jeffreys, 2014). After all, they become men. In this train of thought, Jason Cromwell argues that:

Female-to-male transpeople constitute a prime subject for feminist thought and methods, if for no reason than being born biologically female or assigned at birth as female. Feminists should be concerned that male-dominated discourses have made female-to-male transpeople virtually invisible. (Cromwell, 1999, p. 9)

Against this backdrop, if we wish to build bridges between CSMM and Trans Studies, it is my contention that trans-men and masculinities should be brought to the forefront of the analysis. Theoretical connections between different areas of gender critical studies should be fostered, not only as to avoid the ghettoization and closure of perspectives but also because objects pertaining to particular fields or sub-fields might inform and enhance developments in neighbouring areas of research. In this sense, though there are already a number of studies about trans-men (for a brief overview, see Green, 2005), not many have discussed the problem of masculinities as constructed by CSMM. We know that trans-men's masculinities may be seen as contingent (Blackwood, 2009), defensive or constrained (Abelson, 2014), hyper-masculine, women hating and aspiring to the patriarchal hegemonic pattern (quite evident in Jeffreys, 2014; and Raymond, 1979) or, conversely, feminist (Hines, 2002). However, regardless of all the plurality of masculinities enacted by trans-men (and non-trans-men), which has been portrayed in the studies of Devor (1997), Rubin (2003), Vidal-Ortiz (2002) and Green (2005), among others, there is still a gap to be bridged. The conceptual connections between masculinity studies and studies of trans-men have yet to come of age. One example of such fruitful linkages has been the importance of Halberstam's work on *Female masculinities* (Halberstam, 1998) for redressing debates around what men and masculinity really are.

In particular, Connell's (1995) theoretical edifice has suffered from criticisms that point out, following Halberstam, the problems of rigidly equating masculinity with men's practices or even just men themselves.

In what follows, I will argue in favour of a sociological analysis of trans-masculinities that might bridge the gap between trans-men and masculinity studies. Such an endeavour would enable to widen the space for critical gender studies, rather than narrowing debates to the dynamics of each subfield, important they might be. One key contention is that debate around masculinities must be expanded and include as many subjects as possible if we want to understand the doings of masculinity and emergent changes to the order. Otherwise, at the cost of breaking new ground and bringing innovation to masculinity studies, we may be losing sight of many challenging forms of reinventing masculinity outside the traditional canon (whatever it might be). Ignoring other masculinities – including trans-masculinities – would narrow down the field, with the risk of (re)producing mainly knowledge about how men at the centre and the expected normalized margins are evolving. As a consequence, in what follows, I will discuss Connell's formulation of hegemonic masculinity and the foundations of her theory of masculinity as practice, place and effect.

### Doing trans-masculinities: from practice to effect

Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity became unavoidable – inasmuch as it represents, to a great extent and by itself, a cornerstone of the institutionalized field of men and masculinities – that it became almost a universal panacea. Only rarely are masculinities approached without the help of this concept. Yet, it is also true that in many cases, hegemonic masculinity is used out of context and clearly misunderstood, as many authors acknowledge. Its conflation with the simple and acritical notion of traditional masculinity (whose meanings vary a great deal from study to study, and, of course, from one social context to another) tends to generate reification. Many times, what Connell, on the basis of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, envisaged as complex processes of gender power are simply regarded as types of masculinity without any explicit or implicit linkage to its initial theoretical formulation. Debating such central problems and operating with such a perspective will permit to tackle the definition of masculinity. Through the reflection on trans-men's doings of gender and their journeys of transition, we might be able to bring a degree of clarity to Connell's canonical definition of masculinity as:

[...] simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell, 1995, p. 71)

In this perspective, masculinity can certainly be defined as simultaneously a practice, a place and an effect (Connell, 1995). Individuals embody masculinity from a particular place, enact masculinity as it is embodied and live with the effects of the masculinity they contribute to reproducing and shaping at the interactional and structural levels of society. In the end, masculinity would be what men do. Such proposition has been the object of criticism by various authors. One main problem systematically pointed out lies precisely in the potential conflation of the category men (biological males) with

masculinity or masculinities. This assumption may well engender reification and reductionism and lead us to simplistically perceive black men as enactors of black masculinity, gay men as performers of gay masculinity or white men as holders of the dominant white masculinity. As a consequence of this stance that can conflate sex and gender, the risk would be falling into what Connell (1987) critically labelled categoricism. Rather than plurality, the peril would be – as in sex role theory and similar essentialist approaches – just setting men and women in opposition as a sort of homogeneous blocks rather than heterogeneous groups of individuals.

The masculinities of trans individuals would remain a problem if seen from this perspective and little space would be given to all of those whose doings of masculinity challenges the idea of a linear transition from one pole to the other, from a woman into a man (e.g. Prosser, 1998). The critical contributions brought by Trans Studies for the study of trans-masculinities have led me to propose an inverse definition of Connell's tripartite notion of masculinity. Rather than falling into the trap of locations (the place from which a man enacts masculinity) as the triggers of all practice, we can, provisionally, position 'the place' as an effect – a journey of multiple embodiments as in the case of transmen – and not necessarily as the beginning or the end. In this sense, individuals – whether born male or not – can practice ('do') masculinity while embodying the effects of that very same practice. In this formulation, the doing and its effects create the places. Rather than a casual teleology, this formulation emphasizes the role of entangled embodiments in the making of (trans)masculinities and the strength of bodily materiality as permanently built as a process of becoming. Whitehead (2002) advanced a similar proposal when discussing the ontology of the masculine. As he wrote, masculinity can be seen as 'the pursuit of being and becoming masculine by the masculine subject' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 210). For the author, however, the masculine is contingent and unstable, and, for that reason, a masculine sense of self can only be achieved through the 'constant engagement in those discursive practices of signification that suggest masculinity' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 210). This approach is not distant from that taken earlier by Deleuze (1990) in his conceptualization of desire and embodiment. The desire to have a self – always aspirational as rightly pointed out by Arjun Appadurai (2014) in his 'Cultures of aspiration' – is, nonetheless socially determined. Aspiration to be or become has its material roots, in this perspective.

Therefore, for trans-men, gender journeys and transitions – as multiple and multisided they can be as in a permanent state of becoming – produce, even so, a different place and positioning, which implies, as argued above, inverting Connell's definition and being cautious with the causality implied in the linkages between place, practice and effect. However, returning to Whitehead's contribution, we can argue for the de-conflation of the masculine subject with biological males and, rather, in favour, of the role played by desire or aspiration. In this sense, materialism, even if I do not refuse it, is quite different from a more fluid conceptualization of materiality, which is key to open the spaces for doing masculinity by different doers and in different ways.

Insofar as doing masculinity implies an individual (a someone that enacts), distinguishing between the two levels of reality becomes essential. Even if we agree with a theoretical positioning that places power relations in the material world, it is still theoretically useful to work with the distinction between masculinity and men, or, more accurately, doers of masculinity. It might be real that masculinity is, for the most part, what men do, in the sense West and Zimmerman (1987) gave to the notion of 'doing gender' in and

through interaction. Yet, by working with such a definition, we may end up with an overlap between masculinity and men (or femininity and women, for that matter). From this angle, two opposite but tautological outcomes may occur. We can either fall into an entrenchment of the definitions of men or, on the other hand, we can foster the dilution of that same category, with a degree of biologicism troubling the theorization of masculinity.

In this respect, the work of Judith Halberstam, *Female masculinity* (1998), broke new ground and presented a compelling theory that dissociates men from masculinity, while also fuelling the linkages between feminism and queer theory. Instead of assuming that white masculinity is foundational, Halberstam proposes that it is possible to do masculinity without men. In effect, Halberstam contends, masculinity is most complex and transgressive when it is untied from the male body. Particularly, the straight, white male body, Halberstam adds. Bearing in mind the will 'to make my own female masculinity plausible, credible, and real' (1998, p. xi), Halberstam argues that female masculinity – that she found among a variety of women from butch lesbians and tomboys to drag kings – is not purely an awkward appendage to dominant configurations of gender. On the contrary, masculinity cannot be entirely understood without female masculinity being considered. Similarly, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) came to recognize that professional 'bourgeois women' are nowadays appropriating masculinity.

From this perspective, masculinity and men can be different things, which is a persuasive proposal. Yet, we are compelled to inquire about what masculinity is. A problem of major relevance in any analysis of trans-men is thus tied to the discrepancy between men (or biological males to be more precise) and masculinities itself. In a way, and following our line of argument, masculinities can indeed be more plural than men, even if the reverse might also be true (Hearn, 2004). If it has been acknowledged that the lives of 'real men' would have difficulty fitting into the model of a hegemonic masculinity, the lives of trans-men and masculinized individuals can only bring more depth to this already old critique. However, when viewing masculinity as practice without a pre-determined structural place in a gender order, then all forms of practice can be a constituent of masculinity. All in all, it is through practice (and its effects) that masculinities, regardless of performers, come to organize social life, either sustaining a patriarchal gender order or challenging it in unprecedented forms. Establishing a tentative dialogue between CSMM and Trans Studies obliges us to deal with some key theoretical challenges that imply, again regardless of the who (FtM transexuals, transgender men, gender fluid or non-binary and agender individuals, and so forth), chipping away some of the conceptual canon of CSMM.

Furthering the main argument, I would argue that the dissociation of masculinities from the material power of men involves an inquiry into the practice-based definition inasmuch masculinity is not, after all, what men do. Rather, norms and ideologies gain more importance, a proposition which eventually fits the Gramscian concept of hegemony from which Connell drew her theorization. In truth, and in spite of recent advances in her theorization, Connell does not present us with a solution and tends to jiggle between a practice-based approach and certain a priori definitions of groupings, a problem that she recognizes in the article co-authored with Messerschmidt and published in 2005 (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). And the plot thickens, as we face yet the same problem. What ideologies underpin masculinity in a given time and space and how are

these connected to and produced by practices? And what masculine traits are valued? In the journey or the process of becoming, which representations of masculinity integrate the multiple trans subjectivities, aspirations and practices? In the end, what it means to be masculine or a man? Additional difficulties emerge, therefore, once we aim to trace out the core traits of masculinity, as we might be missing a conceptual apparatus that enables different forms of masculinity to be identified in different contexts and historical settings.

Some illuminating ideas to address these questions have been developed by poststructuralist approaches to masculinity (e.g. Whitehead, 2002). From a poststructuralist viewpoint, discourses are power and the prominence is placed upon the plasticity of masculinities, when observed as discursive practices (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Following Foucault, the embodying subject, as the centre of productive power, now becomes the key object of concern and theorization. The emphasis is placed upon the multiplicity of meanings that men/people can assemble, perform and cope with in accordance with situational interaction. Furthermore, men or biological males cannot be synonymous of masculinity as there is no essential subject. The problem with this perspective is that it brings in an individualistic approach compatible with the notion that masculinities might vary just as much as practices can burst into an endless variety (e.g. Aboim, 2010; Jefferson, 2002; Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

It is then conceivable to argue that by focusing more on men rather than on masculinities we might be able to avoid the perils of reification. Such danger is likely to emerge whenever general principles of power are coupled with particular groupings of men. In addition to the most common divide between dominant and subaltern masculinities, we would have to assume that trans-men would be enacting trans-masculinities as a novel form of 'doing' the masculine. This is perhaps a rather too simplistic interpretation that could easily lead to the obfuscation of the plurality of trans-masculinities and, consequently, to their conceptualization as just another box in the larger group of non-hegemonic masculinities. From this angle, we would risk overlooking the plurality of masculinities as well as the multiplicity of enactors of masculinity. The concern with the plurality under all-encompassing umbrellas – whether men, masculinities or even trans – brings in some difficulties. When analysing trans-men (whatever the specific form of self-definition a particular individual might undertake), it is difficult, if not impossible, to operate either with the canonical notion of masculinities – as a hierarchy among groupings of men or practices performed by men – or the category of men as biological males. Trans-men are the bearers of masculinity but imagining them as a group along simple intersectional axes of power and subordination (in the same way hetero and gay men appear in opposition) falls short as a starting point for analysis. Hence, masculinity must be conceived also as a trajectory, a journey as flexible as possible and only constructed by successive embodiments (Prosser, 1998). Epistemologically, the *who* can be heuristically replaced by the *how*, with an emphasis on the processes and effects of becoming or transitioning. Rather than asking who does masculinity, the trigger question should be about how it is done. The notion of a masculine/masculinization trajectory does not translate either into common notions of socialization, in which becoming a man might be equivalent to entering a stable category, or into views of the trans as a transition from one pole to the other along a gender line. On the basis of the discourses (voices) of trans-men, it is key to reconfigure all ontological premises that might hinder our perception of liminality, that is, of virtual and material spaces

for different epistemologies of masculinity (e.g. binary and non-binary). Such a perspective poses problems at the core of what masculinity is, and sees wider possibilities in a conceptualization of liminal and open spaces of becoming.

From this perspective, even if masculinities and masculine subjects may be increasingly diverse (Jefferson, 2002), men – for now, regardless of biology – remain at the centre of power. Brittan (1989) when approaching masculinity from a poststructuralist standpoint, makes an interesting claim and addresses the problem right in the belly of the beast. As Brittan (1989, p. 2) writes: ‘While it is apparent that styles of masculinity alter in relatively short time-spans, the substance of male power does not’. Indeed, our research with trans-men in Portugal and the United Kingdom<sup>4</sup> has shown that those performing masculinity (whether they self-define as men, FtM transsexuals, non-binary masculinized individuals or other) gained some advantages. The dividends that came with the fact of being perceived by others as men are acknowledged, even if they are unwanted or viewed with criticism (Schilt, 2010).

Diniz (27 years of age, Portuguese, self-defining as a non-binary FtM and not wishing to undergo a genital surgery) clearly reports how being seen as a man generated a competitive advantage in the labour market. As Diniz said:

Sometimes I apply for jobs, and I was looking for a job before changing my name. I have a *LinkedIn* profile, and the only thing I did was to change my name, my gender ... I didn't even change my picture, it's very androgynous. And, I noticed that if before I had only received an offer within one year and a half, from the moment I changed my name and my gender, in a month I received two job offers. I was thinking: Wow, this is ... It's sad, very sad, because I'm the same person with the same qualifications. But now that I've changed my gender and name, employers come looking for me ... [*Laughs*]

In the same vein, Jay (27 years of age, British, self-defining as a non-binary trans-man and also not wishing to undergo a genital surgery) mentions the discomfort, but also the improvements, brought by the process of transition:

I think my transition has improved my life, but I think a lot of that is down to my confidence growing and being able to feel more myself, rather than a stranger to my own body. But also, I think it might be to do with how I am perceived as male. I think that is a big one as well, because I think definitely since transitioning that now that people view me more as male, there is definitely male privilege, which does make me feel uncomfortable.

### **Embodiments: the centrality of the masculine body**

In spite of all differences – in discourses and practices – the majority of trans-men, at least those who participated in our study in both Portugal and the United Kingdom, share one common and central feature: the desire for a masculinized body. If a penis is not always necessary or desired, a masculinized appearance seems to be key. Only very few trans-men or trans-masculine individuals refused the idea of undergoing hormonal treatments, mastectomies or any other form of medical intervention in the body. The majority desired to live and be perceived as men or masculine. Even if the ideal of a hegemonic masculinity or even any form of normalized masculinity (or gender itself) were put aside by many individuals, the dissociation from the feminine and femininity was clear-cut for the most part. A certain form of ‘moral genitalia’ (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 127) or ‘cultural genitalia’ (Kessler & McKenna, 1978) – that is, the genitalia one is presumed to have on the basis of public



performance – seems not to be incompatible with the degenitalization of gender, although there is no specific style or type of masculinity that prevails. All in all, neither the macho nor the genderqueer imageries are dominant in trans-men's aspirations to masculinity, though, again for some, a quest for 'normality' is often mentioned, particularly when the topic is social interaction. Interestingly, however, the definition and meaning of masculinity is not necessarily the same thing for all individuals falling under the label of trans. In other words, while masculinity as an ideology can have quite different implications (e.g. Donaldson, 1993), being/becoming a man/masculine ends up by being shaped through the materiality of the body as the effect of a desire or an aspiration of becoming. The importance of bodies and embodiments is of paramount importance. In this sense, bodily capitals (e.g. Wacquant, 2004, 2005) emerge as central, though flexible and context-specific, a feature of masculinity.

In sum, I argue that if masculinity encompasses a wide number of definitions, maleness (that is, bodily masculinity as 'flesh' or as 'moral genitalia') might be more monolithic. Styles, costumes or even performances vary, but what is beneath – the canvas made of skin – can often require more stability as a key capital of masculinity. However, if masculinity can exist without full bodily maleness (e.g. a genitalia), a certain degree of recognizable maleness seems to be a condition for masculinity to subsist and sediment over time. Therefore, perceptions of difference and of gender binaries appear much more tied to notions of maleness than of masculinity. While maleness seems quite clear-cut, throughout the journey of the embodiment, masculinity (as femininity) is far fuzzier and hard to define.

Maybe the linkages between place, practice and effects as put forward by Connell are yet imprecise and overly conflated, at least for analytical purposes, especially when tying together CSMM and Trans Studies. In the case of trans-men (or all men), I sustain, there might be a conceptual, and more flexible, inversion of this scheme, with bodies being more than an effect but rather a vital constituent of the place and, through embodiments, the core of all gender praxis. From this angle, practices can indeed build up the locations, including, in the case of trans-men, bodily locations.

### **Final notes: position and privilege**

The arguments developed must not be interpreted as the defense of a citational version of masculinity inasmuch as materiality (as phenomenology) is ever-present. Doing masculinity should not be reduced to a text, a disembodied discourse or even to performative exaggeration, as argued in some versions of queer contributions (e.g. Isaiah Green, 2007). Rather, bodies matter, as Butler (1993) stated, but not only because they are campuses where stories are written but because they have a material reality, a shape defining self-perception and the perception of others. Doing masculinity can take varied forms, but whatever its doings, it is through bodies that it gains a palpable form and becomes more than a mere disembodied discourse. Derridian iterability, which Butler takes as key for her performativity theory, cannot then be effective if we dismiss all the material dimensions of the body, without obviously falling into any form of essentialism or dismissing Connell's contributions. After all, bodies are paramount and ultimate capitals of masculinity because they are interpreted through the historical and cultural lens of the gender order. Not because their value exists *per se*. However, without bodily masculinities, the doings of

masculinity fall short and tend to live theatrically, if ever, outside the *apparent (but still potentially subversive) normality* of everyday life, as Goffman would say.

Also in line with Bourdieu's (2001) views, there is no gender without locations, composing a field and market of struggles, or a gender order. Nonetheless, when a body – or even just a hexis – is transformed, there is a change in its location. It is this nuanced version of gender, and particularly of masculinity, that can be furthered by bringing trans-men to the frontline of the analysis. In a way, we can argue that masculinity precedes men – being or becoming a man – but without men or individuals performing the masculine, masculinity loses its bearings. It becomes no more than a masquerade, transgressive it may be (or not). Trans-men then are men or masculine only to the extent they are bodily perceived as men or as masculine, navigating along their journeys between available categories and systems of categorization. Nonetheless, as evident from the cases we analysed, bodies do matter in a very material sense. In sum, neither Connell nor Halberstam are quite right. In the former's case, we cannot say that men (the location) always precede masculinity. Masculinity makes the man and what is deemed as masculine. In the latter case, I cannot fully agree that female masculinities can be the equivalent of male or masculine masculinities. A key example that must be taken into consideration regards violence. It is known that transgender people experience multiple forms of violence (Valentine, 2007). However, trans-men's and trans women's experiences differ significantly. At the intersection of gender, race, nationality or class, the violence against transsexual, transgender and other gender non-conforming individuals is striking, with the rates of homicide rising visibly. According to the Trans Murder Monitoring project conducted by Transgender Europe (TGEU), since 2008, nearly 2000 trans-people were reported to have been killed. These official numbers cover 64 countries and affect mainly trans women – 99% of the reported victims – and sex workers – 65% (Transgender Europe (TGEU), 2016). This worldwide pattern is far from random and targets the most vulnerable segments of the trans population, coupling transphobia with the particular violence of femmophobia.

Certainly, when not naturalized as emanating from the *male* body, what defines masculinity can become clearer. However, as it has been proposed, masculinity cannot be understood without taking into account the materiality of bodies regardless of their diversity and transformations. In the end, when the meanings of masculinity and femininity are increasingly diffuse and changeable, the body resists as the focal point of gender performativity, whether self-recognized or perceived by others. Recognition is, in fact, fundamental as a moment that cannot be dialectically separated from body materiality and the privileges awarded by the position in a gender order that is pervaded still by the striking force of a binary system. Henceforth, CSMM cannot ignore trans-masculinities and the multiple challenges they pose to advancing the theorization and the analytical tools of the field.

## Notes

1. The terms cisgender and cissexual are used to refer to individuals who identify as the sex/gender they were assigned at birth. Cisgender replaced the nowadays pejorative notion of 'gender normals', commonly used in the social sciences since Garfinkel (1967).
2. *Trans-people* or, in the case, trans-men, is a provisional umbrella term to name those who in a variety of ways challenge the naturalness of gender as emanating from the sexed codification

of bodies, whether they are transsexuals (both male to female, and female to male), transgenders, transvestites, ‘travestis’, cross-dressers or other forms of gender variance, such as genderqueer, non-binary, gender fluid, androgynous, among other designations. For an overview, see Stryker (2008).

3. More information available at: [www.ranker.com/list/list-of-famous-transgender-people/famous-gay-and-lesbian](http://www.ranker.com/list/list-of-famous-transgender-people/famous-gay-and-lesbian)
4. In-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork were carried out with a variety of trans-men, some of them self-defined as transsexual or FtM trans. Some have also explicitly defined themselves as transgender or trans. Others have expressed themselves through terms such as non-binary, genderqueer, bi-gender and so forth. A clear-cut divide emerged between those keener on resorting to medicalized categories and those defining their identities in ways that directly targeted the binary gender system. However, in both the countries, only rarely was a single definition enough to account for gender identity across the life courses of participants. For instance, categories such as cross-dresser, drag-king or lesbian were often associated with former life stages. The current reflection, though not empirically oriented, was triggered by the grounded research work carried out in 2015 and 2016.

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