

Trans and Non-Binary People's Experiences of Their Sexualities and Relationships Alongside Their

Gender

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	7
Introduction.....	9
Literature Review.....	21
Methods.....	105
Results.....	126
Individual accounts.....	126
Louise.....	126
Jack.....	128
Eddie.....	131
C.....	134
Blue.....	137
Minotaur.....	140
Peter.....	144
Toby.....	147
Collective Storylines.....	148
Discussion	164
Conclusions.....	172
References	173
Appendices	192
Appendix A: Glossary.....	192
Appendix B: Quality Assessment Outcome for studies included in the literature review	205
Appendix C: Ethical approval.....	212
Appendix D: Information sheet.....	214

Appendix E: Consent form.....	218
Appendix F: Distress Protocol.....	220
Appendix G: Debrief sheet.....	223
Appendix H: Interview guide.....	224
Appendix I: Recruitment poster and information shared on social.....	227
Appendix J: Background information.....	230
Appendix K: Data analysis extract.....	232
Appendix L: Reflexive Journal.....	235

List of Tables

Table 1: SPIDER Flowchart.....	22
Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	24
Table 3: Overview of the studies included in the systematic literature review.....	27
Table 4: Step-by-step overview of data synthesis.....	85
Table 5: Ontology, Epistemology, and their implications for the stages of research.....	110
Table 6: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	117
Table 7: Participants demographics.....	119
Table 8: Step-by-step data analysis and links with epistemological and ontological stance.....	123

List of Figures

Figure 1: Sensory homunculus.....	14
Figure 2: Sexualities-gender assemblage.....	16
Figure 3: PRISMA Flowchart.....	26
Figure 4: Conceptual map to visually represent data synthesis of the systematic literature review.....	89
Figure 5: Visual representation of Collective Storylines.....	149

Abstract

Sexual health is an important aspect of one's wellbeing. However, historically, research in this field within trans and non-binary (TNB) populations was either pathologizing, or focusing on risk-behaviours. Additionally, in research, sexuality has been fragmented (e.g., sexual orientation, sexual health, risk-behaviours, sexual acts, pleasure), thus, producing research findings that use different methodologies and outcomes. Conversely, this study focused on sexualities, with these being understood as an umbrella term including, but not exhaustive, relationships, sexual behaviours, and desires. This thesis applied a post-humanist ontological framework, combined with queer epistemology and epistemology of ignorance to TNB sexualities. More specifically, the research aim was to understand how the sexualities of TNB people change alongside their gender. The study implemented Narrative Inquiry, combining this method of art-based methods for data collection. The study highlighted how relationships (past and current) influenced one's sexualities, and this being in the context of society's norms and cultural narratives, which might influence one's behaviours and preferences. Additionally, transition and positive representation seemed to increase one's sense of confidence, which also affected how participants engaged in relationships. Implications and recommendations for future clinical practice and research are outlined. These include inviting Clinical Psychologists to think beyond the individual when working with TNB populations. This might imply helping TNB people bolster their communication skills (e.g., setting boundaries), and ensure Trainee Clinical Psychologists are apt in working with couples and various relationships structures (e.g., polyamory, ethical non-monogamy). Additionally, gender clinics are encouraged to offer couples/relationships therapy and/or psychosexual therapy as option. In terms of research, engaging more with communities could facilitate offering a more diverse sample group, and welcome additional insights to these findings. Finally, as space was

mentioned as an important element, future research should consider both rural and urban setting to understand TNB people's experiences in different geographic areas.

Introduction

Terminology

Terms and expressions around gender and sexuality have increased in recent times. To guide the reader throughout this thesis, I have included a glossary in Appendix A. Language is a fluid aspect of human experience, and people continuously flex their meanings. As such, the terms are not *objectively* accurate but how I decided to use them¹.

Throughout this thesis, I also used footnotes as spaces where multiplicities lay (annakcompton, 2019). In them reside and live playfulness, resources, reflections (and distractions) for the reader.

Overview

This thesis focuses on the sexualities of trans and non-binary (TNB) young adults alongside their transition. *Sexualities*, as conceptualized here, comprehend various aspects, such as sexual attraction, sexual orientation, sexual behaviours, desire, and relationships. *Transition* in this thesis refers to any fluid (i.e., not based on pre-determined steps) process that a trans person goes through to embody a feeling of congruence across the multiple aspects of gender that are relevant to the person. To achieve this, I interviewed eight people. In this thesis, I told their stories through my lenses, together with a wider story about trans bodies and sexualities within this socio-political context. Stories are told by a speaker within a specific context. Therefore, in this Introduction, I started by outlining my epistemological and ontological stance, and then, writing about myself. Following this, I talked about the interlink between gender and sexualities. Subsequently, I offered an overview of the current context.

¹ I aimed to use inclusive and affirmative language for LGBTQIA+ communities. For instance, I used the term trans woman and not transwoman, as trans for some is preferred to be used as an adjective. Using the term transwoman as one word is a noun, somehow implying that is a different category of person altogether. source: (jackk225, 2024). Nevertheless, it might be complex to be inclusive for vastly different identities or groups. Furthermore, my knowledge is limited to the resources I have access to, and what I come across (e.g., via listservs, social media, literature). Hence, I *aspired* to be inclusive and affirmative but also aware I might not always be.

Finally, I presented the results from a systematic literature review on change in sexualities for TNB people during transition.

Epistemological position

I do not believe that there is one single narrative about an event or a person's life (Chödrön, 2008; Smyth, 2002). Often a story acquires different meanings based on the interaction between a speaker, a (or many) listener(s) and their socio-cultural contexts. This view is in line with queer theory (Browne & Nash, 2010), where knowledge and reality are not hierarchically organized. Hence, multiple forms of knowledge are constantly being created without an a-priori structure. Together with this, I am aware that I am biased in my observations and way of working because of various identities I hold (Burnham, 2018). Knowledge itself is always contextualized, and what is considered valid in one context might not be in another one (e.g., the role of magic in society has changed over time). Thus, I coupled queer theory with epistemology of ignorance (Tuana, 2004), recognizing that knowledge is influenced by existing power structures in society. The way these concepts translate in practice are explained in the Methods section.

Ontological position: relational ontology²

Relational ontology is derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). This philosophical framework is also defined as post-humanist or new materialist, as compared to humanist traditions where reality is human-centred, there is no distinction between the physical, the social world. Hence, agents (e.g., technological tools, architectural building, social discourses, bodies) are in constant relation (Braidotti, 2013). This worldview is unifying, and non-hierarchical (Fox & Alldred, 2022): there is no pre-imposed structure or systemic explanation of how society and cultures work. Therefore, the social world

² To help readers unfamiliar with concepts from this philosophical tradition, I encourage them to keep at hand the Glossary section of this thesis to easy access to key terms.

is characterized by the interaction of various agents in a constant *flow*³: what we call reality. In this way, any phenomenon is understood as the product of a non-hierarchical and ever-changing relationship between human and non-human agents interacting with one another. This is called *assemblage*⁴. In this *relational becoming*, where any agent has the potential to mutually affect⁵ and be affected, assemblages can go through territorialization (i.e., defining, specifying), de-territorializing (i.e., opening up, breaking up with customs), and re-territorializing (i.e., the emergence of a new set of relational specifications).

As said, the material, social world and abstract aspects of life do not hold ontological essence as *things* but exist only as relational (Deleuze 1988; Haraway, 1991). Assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of these relations are non-hierarchical, not pre-organized or humanly constructed but monist. Therefore, reality is not influenced by human production but is always in an independent, spontaneous, and unpredictable flux. The internal *flux* (i.e., micropolitics) within assemblages of relations amongst human and non-human agent/thing/element gives opportunities for the phenomenon to be continuously shaped and re-shaped. The image often used to represent this concept of assemblage is the

³ The always-evolving forces within assemblages. They change the capacities of an entity (e.g., a body, a collectivity, an object, a thing) in one direction or another (Duff 2010).

⁴ An always-in-flux/always-becoming, relational, and non-hierarchical unpredictable phenomenon comprised of a myriad of existing agents. Also defined as “*machines that link affects together to produce or do something*” (Fox & Alldred, 2014; p. 5). For instance, the research-assemblage itself.

⁵ Affects are the non-hierarchical multiple influences (i.e., to affect and be affected) agents/things/elements (human and more-than-human) have. For instance, for the research-assemblage these are (human) conversations with supervisors or collaborators, (more-than-human) ethics application processes, standards for publication.

rhizome: a subterranean root that grows from its nodes and doesn't have a set structure, unlike trees. This shifts the focus from anthropocentric to more-than-human ontology, which has implications in understanding the research process itself.

Research assemblage

Science has historically been understood as anthropocentric, with the researcher being the main responsible agent for producing knowledge, and, considering its tradition and established methodologies (Okasha, 2016) generally comprehends less unpredictable relations and has more of a territorializing aspect. For instance, psychology, as it is considered a science, is affected by territorialization⁶ (e.g., use of randomized controlled trials, generalizability of results across contexts).

Conversely, in this thesis, the researcher, the methods (e.g., hypothetico-deductive) the human and non-human processes (e.g., supervision, thesis writing, journal publication), the technologies (e.g., questionnaires, interviews), and the physical realities (e.g., university buildings) are all considered elements of the research assemblage (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2015; Masny, 2013).

Being aware of this assemblage, making it explicit, is vital for this ontological stance. As a result, for this thesis reflexivity (Finlay & Gough, 2008) can function both as a territorializing aspect in qualitative research, and an opportunity to make readers aware of one of the relations of this research assemblage. Additionally, as I am part of this assemblage and cannot simply *bracket* my assumption, this thesis is written in the first person.

(Some) Positionality

I was born male and raised as a man. Four years ago, I came out as non-binary. People around me were not surprised as I never conformed to the stereotype of a Western man. Coming out was

⁶ the closing down, aggregating aspect of an assemblage. For the research-assemblage, the criteria that needs to be met for a thesis submission (e.g., respect a specific wordcount, use of the written word).

nothing massively strange for me either, it gave me the words to describe how I had always been feeling. I remember being 4 years old and wearing my grandmother's clothes and shoes, whilst my dad was chasing me around the house, persuading me to take them off. I did not stop there. I always cross-dressed, either for birthdays or Carnival celebrations. I felt at ease, almost at home, wearing culturally coded women's clothes. There was something liberatory and grounding to it. Having the word non-binary allowed me to say: 'aaaah! I can explore more!' So, I started being more feminine with the way I dressed, wearing nail polish, and make up –without it needing to be a special celebration to feel allowed to do so. With the exploring of my gender identity, I also felt free to explore my sexualities. I binged YouTube videos, queer literature, zines and anything I could dig my teeth into. I wanted to explore the queer world more. My relationships have also evolved through this time. All this (and more) is part of my journey, as well as this thesis. When I had to pick a research topic for a Doctoral thesis, I wanted to choose something that helped the trans community I belong to. Here it is, and here I am.

Assemblages and sexuality

A result of this territorialization in the medical world is generalizing what is considered *healthy* to *normative*; in terms of sexuality, there is a *normality* and what resides outside of it. For instance, this territorialization led to consider homosexuality a medical disease by psychiatry until 1972 (Kunzel, 2017). Another example is considering an inability to have an erection as sexual dysfunction, warranting treatment. A re-territorialization⁷ of impotence is to engage in alternative sexual practices, such as muffing. Similarly, theories of sexuality, policies and guidelines can all be considered territorializing: normalizing a behaviour, a body, or a certain attraction, specifying the criteria or setting hierarchies for

⁷ The re-creation of a set of aggregating/limiting aspect of an assemblage. For the research-assemblage, the re-creation of a set of standards/customs (e.g., creative methods research within academia).

studies began appearing. The databases selected were agreed based on existing literature on systematic literature reviews (Boland et al., 2023; Bramer et al., 2017). Dissertations were included after consultation with colleagues, and through researching existing social consensus in higher education settings (Meraj, 2023). Additionally, dissertations were included as it is coherent with this study's theoretical framework, facilitating to observe a more nuanced spectrum of the multiple flows of sexualities (e.g., dissertations are considered grey literature and generally not published in peer-reviewed journals, providing aspects of divergence from mainstream published studies). Qualitative and mixed-methods papers were both included in the review. Mixed method studies were part of this review because they reported participants' experiences of their sexualities. Quantitative data of such studies are weaved throughout the synthesis, and not included in a separate section. Narrative Synthesis was selected as a review and synthesis method because it is suitable for studies with high heterogeneity. Thus, being apt in integrating studies with different methodologies. The search terms used were a combination of 'sexuality', 'transgender', 'relationship*', 'non-binary', 'sexual*', 'trans*', 'transitioning', 'transition*', 'sexual desire', 'sexual experience'. A full description is in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of search strategy using the SPIDER flowchart

SPIDER	Description	Search terms
<i>Sample:</i> Which groups of participants are of interest?	Trans and non-binary people	Transgender OR non-binary OR transgender OR trans*
<i>Phenomenon of Interest:</i> Which behaviours, decisions, experience are being considered?	How do sexualities change during transition, and what is the experience of this change by individuals?	Sexuality OR sexuality OR sex* OR sexual* OR relationship* OR sexual experience

Key area: time specifically mentioned AND

OR change over time inferred by

what mentioned in the data (e.g., transition* OR transitioning

start of hormones, change of name

and pronouns)

Sexualities are understood as a broad

phenomenon, including fantasies,

desires, sexual behaviours.

<i>Design:</i> Theoretical framework or research method?	Mixed methods data collection and analysis	mixed method* OR qualitative Longitudinal OR Between groups
	Qualitative data collection and analysis	OR Within group
	Not included grey literature Including dissertations	Dissertation
<i>Evaluation:</i> Are there specific outcomes to be considered?	Sexualities (e.g., sexuality, sexual attraction, relationship, and relationship)	Experience OR sexual experience OR sexual* OR relationship
<i>Research type:</i> Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods?	Qualitative Mixed methods	mixed method* OR qualitative

Study selection

The initial number of articles, after software automatic deletion of duplicates, was 4251. I screened all the titles and abstracts, and two other reviewers screened 10% of these, to ensure consistency in decision-making. The initial number of papers for the full text review was 188. The research team reviewed the research question, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The final decision was made in line with suggestions from previous reviews, and existing guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2015; APA Task Force on Psychological Practice with Sexual Minority Persons, 2021; E. Coleman et al., 2022). The steps for study selection are presented in Figure 3, following good practice for scientific reviews (Page et al., 2021). The final number of studies (n=30) complied with the eligibility criteria. See Table 2. Papers not in English were not included because of lack of resources (i.e., financial for the translation process, and the researchers' lack of proficiency in non-English language). The participants included were only TNB people (alone or in dyads). GNC participants were not included as term because it might have confounded the study results (e.g., some people identify as woman, lesbian, and GNB but not trans, and some TNB would not define themselves being GNC). The nuanced nature of this language issue is currently under debate, with further details offered in this review limitation. Quantitative papers were not included for the extensive heterogeneity (e.g., there is a lack of consensus on how to measure sexual orientation; a lack of consensus in what and how to measure post medical surgery). The final review question was: *How do sexualities of trans and non-binary people change during transition, and what is their experience of this change?*

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
English language	Not in English
Published from 2007	Published previously to 2007

Participants

- Clearly reporting the lived experience of sexualities from the perspective of trans and/or non-binary people
- If participants themselves use the terms trans and/or non-binary
- Studies including dyads
- Age: 16+
- Papers not clearly reporting the voices/experiences of TNB people
- If data for TNB and cis people are together and not differentiated
- Gender non-conforming
- Only reporting partners of trans and/or non-binary people

Study design

- Mixed methods
- Qualitative
- Quantitative

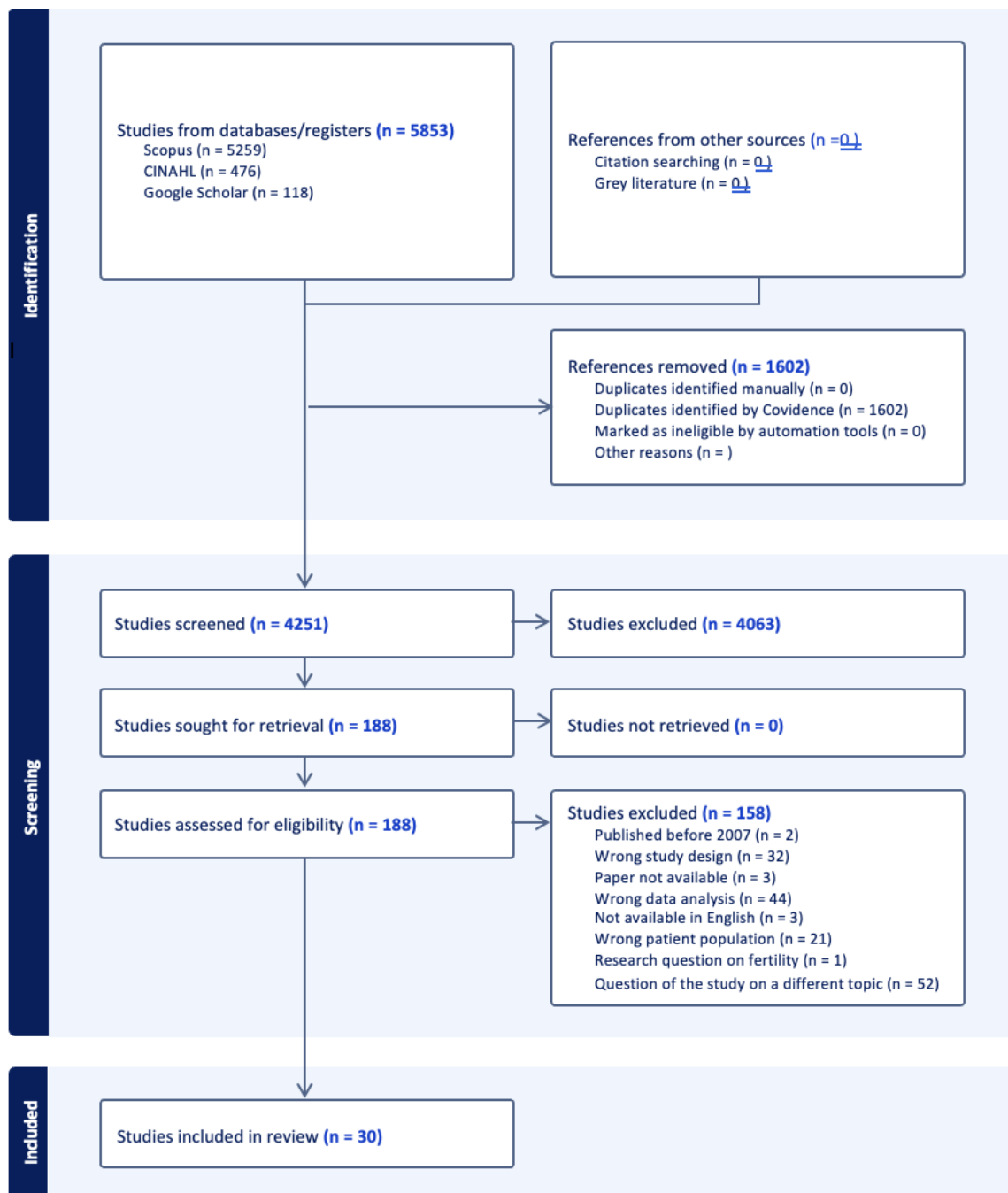
Study type/content

- The study has to specifically mention time or change over time or this can be inferred by reviewers in reading what mentioned in the data (e.g., comment on experience before and when starting GAHT, change of name and pronouns)
 - Book chapters
 - Essays/memoirs
 - Reviews
 - Medical paper (i.e., if only sexual satisfaction/sexual function of body parts is measured, and more broadly papers that do not mention/measure the psychosocial component)
-

-
- Any study type (e.g., longitudinal, between group comparison)
 - Dissertations
 - Psychological interventions
-

Figure 3

PRISMA flowchart



Quality assessment, data extraction

It is impossible to research sexuality without considering relationships (including dating), spaces (Smith et al., 2023), and communities. Therefore, these aspects were included in the extraction process. During this stage, three team meetings were held: the first, at the time of paper allocation to discuss the strategy for data extraction, the second, mid-way, to discuss discrepancies, finally, the team met to discuss the data synthesis of the whole dataset, where I explained the synthesis process and presented a visual representation of the data.

Data synthesis was performed using Narrative Synthesis (Popay et al., 2006). The quality of papers was assessed using Yardley's appraisal tool (Yardley, 2000, 2017), and Vincent's (2018) guidance on ethical research for TGNC populations. See Appendix B for the quality assessment outcome table. Data extraction was conducted using Covidence (Veritas Health Innovation, 2022). Results sections and relative parts of the discussion sections, where authors' meaning-making were presented, were extracted and combined to create the dataset for the synthesis. For the data extraction process, first order concepts (i.e., direct quotes from participants) were preferred to second order concepts (i.e., quotes derived from authors and their interpretations). However, second order concepts were also used to complement, enrich, and better contextualize data synthesis. A summary of the studies included is in Table 3. In the table, I used the labels that participants specified for themselves (when this was collected by the researchers) as it is important for people to identify themselves instead of using pre-existing *containers* in which one must fit (Harrison et al., 2012). However, I sometimes used language that I did not consider inclusive (e.g., FtM, MtF). I have done this only to reflect the language that the researchers used in the study.

Table 3*Overview of the studies included in the systematic literature review*

Author (year)	Country	Study aim(s)	Theory	Participants	Methodology	Data analysis/outcome	Limitations (-) and Strengths (+)
Lindley et al., (2020)	US	To explore a community, non-clinical sample of trans masculine and non-binary people's descriptions and experiences of their sexual dissatisfaction.	Not stated	Sample size: 358 Age: age range 18-74, 50% age range 18-24; Ethnicity: 77.1% White/ Caucasian; 6.15% Biracial/Multiracial; 4.75% Hispanic/Latinx; 4.45% Other; 3.6% Asian/Asian American; 2.25% No Answer; 1.4% Black/African American; 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native Sexual orientation (defined sexual identity in the study): 22.9% Queer; 20.05% Pansexual; 20.4% Bisexual; 11.65% Asexual; 8.9% Other; 7.9% Gay; 5.35% Heterosexual;	Study design: Qualitative, part of a larger mixed methods study Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling. Online recruitment (e.g., Reddit, Facebook) Data collection method: Online survey with open-ended questions Data analysis: Thematic analysis with phenomenological approach	* Participants talked about the difficulties of finding partners who understand their gender identity and don't fetishize them * Non-binary participants talked about partner dynamics leading to sexual satisfaction or mentioning about limitations imposed by partners. * Some participants talked about how they wished the prosthetics they used during sexual activity could be felt more, desiring also for more physical connection that	(-) Demographics are skewed towards White, educated participants (+) Good report of the study (e.g., mention of positionality, reflexivity)

1.65% Lesbian;
1.1% Fluid
Gender Identity:
177 Trans
Masculine, 181
Non-binary

the device can
allow
* Sexual
dissatisfaction is
not the opposite
to sexual
satisfaction, with
both general and
specific elements
to transition
contribute to this

Cook-Daniels & Munson (2015)	US	To understand the experience of sexual violence towards transgender adults, age 50+	Not stated	Sample size: 53 Age: 89% 50's, 11% 60's. Ethnicity:76% White, multiracial (n=5), Native American (n=4), Jewish (n=3), Black (n=2) Sexual orientation: 23% bisexual, 17%heterosexual, 15% lesbian, 12% queer, 9% pansexual/omnisexual and 9% each celibate/asexual, 8% gay male, and 7% questioning Gender Identity: 50% MtF, 32% FtM, 11%cisgender female, 6%or cisgender male	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling Data collection method: Online recruitment via listservs Data analysis: organised by themes. Not specified	* Use of labels relationally to describe sexual orientation * Surgery/body alteration ameliorating wellbeing (e.g., confidence, sexual acts, asexuality) * Transitioning (and change in gender) shaping sexual arousal, and attraction (e.g., identity, acceptance)	(-) Not specifically an article about sexuality (-) Data analysis not clear but organised by themes (+) Older demographic (+) Several quotes throughout the test
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Tree-McGrath et al., (2018)	US	To investigate positive and negative aspects of sexuality and sexual development for transgender men who have sex with men in relation to gender affirmation	Not stated	Sample size: 16 Age: mean age 32.4 SD 11.1, Ethnicity: White Non-Latino (n=14), Mixed race/ethnicity (n=2) Sexual orientation: 75% Queer, 12.5% Gay, 12.5% Bisexual, 6.3% Heterosexual, 6.3% Unsure Gender Identity: 16 Transmen	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Venue-based opportunity sampling and snowball sampling Data collection method: Semi-structured interviews Data analysis: Grounded Theory	* Language can be important and complicated when in relationship. This can also be aligned to their bodies and sexual acts. * Transition increased sexual exploration, self-advocacy for use of language, and self-acceptance (influencing sexual behaviour, attraction, and how they felt in their gender). * For some trans men can be validating to have sex with cis men.	(-) Demographics are skewed towards White, educated participants (+) Good report of the study
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Murchison et al., (2023)	US	To understand how trans and non-binary young people navigate romantic relationships, and develop a theoretical framework to describe this phenomenon in light of multiple forms of oppressions.	Gender Affirmation Framework (Sevelius, 2013; Reisner et al., 2010), and intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Combahee River Collective, 1978; Crenshaw, 1991)	Sample size: 30 Age: age range 18-29 (mean 23.6; SD 3.0) Ethnicity: 56.7% White; 13.3% Black or African American; 6.7% Asian; 6.7% Hispanic or Latinx; 3.3% Asian, White; 3.3% Biracial or multiracial; 3.3% Black or African American, Native or indigenous, biracial or multiracial; 3.3% White Native or indigenous, Jewish; 3.3% White, Hispanic or Latinx Sexual orientation: 23.3% Queer; 20.0% Bisexual; 16.7% Pansexual; 13.3% Lesbian; 6.7% Asexual; 6.7% Gay; 3.3% Demisexual; 3.3% Fluid; 3.3% Queer, pansexual; 3.3% Queer, lesbian, pansexual Gender Identity: 26.7% Nonbinary,	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: convenience sampling. Participants were recruited via LGBTQ-focused organisations, campus groups, and social media group Data collection method: Semi-structured interviews, some in-person some online Data analysis: Template analysis (an approach to thematic analysis)	* Several participants were pushed into conforming to gender roles and behaviours. They experienced restrictions by their previous partners. * Some participants found being with a queer/trans person accepting them for how they are validating. * For some PGM, experiences of racism in relationship made them decide to stop dating White people romantically. * Some participants spoke about the need to affirm themselves after difficult relational experiences. This is talked about in the context of increase in confidence and self-worth	(-) No description of interview content (-) No mention of data saturation (+) Good mentioning of existing literature (+) Good outline of methodology (e.g., clear report, use of quotes, description of data collection)
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23.3% Woman,
female, trans
woman, and/or
MTF; 13.3% Man,
male, trans man,
and/or FTM;
10.0%
Genderqueer;
6.7% Agender;
6.7% Gender
fluid; 6.7%
Transmasculine;
3.3% Agender,
gender fluid,
nonbinary; 3.3%
Transfeminine

through
transitioning.

Neubauer et al., (2023)	US	To explore the experiences of trans and non-binary people of dating, and their relationships undergoing social transition	Not stated	<p>Sample size: 12 Age: age range 24-62 Ethnicity: 9 White; 1 White Jewish; 1 White Latinx; 1 Asian Tyldum Sexual orientation: 2 Queer; 2 Straight; 1 Bisexual Hetero-Romantic; 1 Pan-romantic Pan-sexual; 1 Gay-trans man; 1 Poly-Fi, Pan-sexual, 1 Bisexual Gender Identity: 2 Trans man; Gender fluid; Female; Gender punk; Binary Trans woman; Female; Gender vague/non-binary; Female; Trans woman; Woman; Trans woman or Woman</p>	<p>Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling (e.g., Facebook ads and flyers in local venues) Data collection method: Online and community recruitment via Facebook and ads in venues Data analysis: Phenomenological hermeneutic approach, thematic analysis</p>	<p>* Resilience, and hope were important aspects for most participants. * Participants shared the need to find growth in interpersonal contexts. * Clear difference of sense of self before and after transitioning. * Affirmative love from oneself and partners.</p>	<p>(-) Lack of representation from non-White ethnicities (-) Several influencing factors were not considered (e.g., study conducted during COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, ask if individuals ever dated before current dating/partnership) (+) Exceptionally good report of the study (e.g., mention of positionality, reflexivity)</p>
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Schilt & Windsor (2014)	US	To explore how trans men sexual practices is affirmed/transformed or challenged as their embodied masculinity shifts and becomes more visible to themselves and others during transition.	Sexual habitus / erotic habitus	Sample size: 74 trans men Age: 18-64 years old (mean 33) Ethnicity: 82% White Sexual orientation: 47% gay, queer, or bisexual, 37% heterosexual, 16% opted for another label, such as hetero-queer, pansexual, and asexual. Gender Identity: trans men	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sample (e.g., social groups, mailing lists) Data collection method: Semi-structured interviews Data analysis: Mention about codes and themes but did not talk about a specific framework	* Changes in gendered embodiment through transition made possible shifts in sexual habits, including modifying sexual behaviours, and fantasies. * For some people medical transition did not match their idealised self and made them less confident, whilst others had increased confidence as they felt better embodied in their gender and their masculinity. * Trans men in this study through navigating gendered sexuality challenged normative assumptions about bodies and behaviours.	(-) Information provided on the study was not rigorous enough (e.g., demographics, reflexivity, supervision). No clear overview of how data was analysed and reflexivity. (-) No mentioning of strengths and limitations. (-) From a decolonizing perspective, it lacked nuance in offering people choice of preferred gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity label (+) Good and clear theoretical overview and link with findings. (+) Good transferability of the study to other contexts. (+) Good description of narratives and links with theory.
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Motter & Softas-Nall (2021)	US	To explore the experiences of transgender couples who stay together through transition, including their strengths and challenges.	Constructivist theory	Sample size: 13 couples where one partner transitioned gender. Age: age range 25-66 years old. Ethnicity: Not described in the study. Only that nearly all were White. Sexual orientation: Not gathered in the study. Gender Identity: In the cis gender participants 2 identified as men and 11 as women. Amongst the trans gender participants, 8 identified as transgender men, 4 as trans gender woman, 1 as gender.	Study design: Qualitative. Refereed by the authors as a phenomenological study. Sampling strategy: Diverse (e.g., community organisations offering transgender support and care, professional contacts, snowball sampling) Data collection method: Semi structured interviews in person or online, 80-120 minutes long together and then individual interviews. In person or on skype Data analysis: Dyadic interview analysis (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010)	* Four themes were identified by the researchers regarding their experience: Love Is Gender Blind, Relationship Changes Connected to the Transition, Benefits of Transition, and The Political Is Personal. * Transition considered as one, like others, life events and people being interested more in the person than their gender. * Most participants (except one couple) reported feeling more satisfied or as satisfied as before transitioning. * Language and communication is where there was most change. More specifically, honesty and openness.	(-) Information provided about participants was not rigorous enough (e.g., demographics, reflexivity, supervision). (-) No details of the interview schedule/questions. (+) Clear outline of how data was analysed and reflexivity. (+) Good attempt for trustworthiness and credibility (e.g., data triangulation through reflexive journal and interviewing couples and individual partners, member check, positionally of researcher). (+) Good use of quotes throughout the text
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* Couples had to redistribute power (e.g., alpha, the man of the house).

* Some of the benefits of transition mentioned were: better relationship (e.g., as trans partners were able to bring their own selves, knowing having been through a challenging event), finding support (e.g., trans gender support group or clubs for partners), social and self-awareness, "passing privilege"

* The study was carried out during the 2016 US presidential election and concerns about physical safety and violence from others in public was mentioned. For this reason, some

people preferred using terms such as “pansexual” in a political way.

* The key aspects related to their perceived relational strengths and challenges in transitioning were: unconditional love, non-judgmental acceptance, assertive advocacy, commitment and security, respect, perseverance, friendship, flexibility, honest listening, humour, and sexual fluidity.

Baker (2018)	US	To understand how sexual orientation and gender identity interconnect with transgender men as they transition.	Focus on intersectionality	Sample size: 8 Age: 16-62 years old Ethnicity: 4 Jewish, 4 Christian, 1 Asian American, 1 African American who is also of Hispanic descent Sexual orientation: in the paper refers to before and during transition with various categories for this. Gender Identity: 3 trans man, 1 trans guy or boy, 1 trans guy, 3 man.	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Purposive Sampling (to be more specific regarding the research question and intersectionality focus) Data collection method: Multiple semi-structured interviews Data analysis: Not described. Only talks about coding and later talks about themes.	* Considering the data from participants, it was argued that fluidity in gender (i.e., identified as female prior to transition) pre-transition often reflected fluidity in sexual orientation. Conversely, binary gender identity (i.e., not identifying as a female/lesbian), then reflected binarism in sexual attraction. However, no change in sexual behaviour was significantly noticed by the researcher. * Relationally, people were aware of their gender privilege as men. * The more people felt comfortable with the way they experienced their bodies due to transition, the more able they were to have sex	(-) Data analysis not described in detail but only talked about coding and themes. (-) Only three themes were discuss (-) Some of the interpretations are not inclusive of LGBTQIA+ (-) Limitations of the study demographics (+) Good rationale for methods used for research and implication for procedures in the study (+) Good consideration of ethical practice (e.g., ethical approval, impact of research on participants) (+) Good outline of reflexivity and positionality (+) Good mentioning and outlining clearly stereotypes and societal's narratives (e.g.,
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and improve
sense of overall
wellbeing.

* Testosterone
was named as
contributing to
increasing sex
drive, facial hair,
and deeper voice.

trans men being
lesbians)

Williams et al., (2013)	US	To explore how trans men used material (bodily), discursive (interpretive), and social resources in doing sexuality and its relationship to gender.	Gendered embodiment (e.g., West and Zimmerman 1987) and sexualised embodiment (Jackson & Scott, 2007, 2010).	Sample size: 25 Age: age range 20-65 Ethnicity: 12 White, 2 White & Hispanic, 1 Native American, 1 Native American & Hispanic, 1 Jewish & African, 1 White & Roma, 1 Mexican American, 1 Asian, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Black & Hispanic, 1 African American, 1 Hispanic, 1 Norther European. Sexual orientation: 9 Queer, 5 Gay, 4 Bisexual, 3 Straight, 2 Heterosexual, 1 Queer/Pansexual, 1 Straight-Queer Gender Identity: 19 man, 2 trans guy, 2 genderqueer, 1 TS male	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling (e.g., Multiple recruitment, face-to-face, flyers, snowball). Data collection method: In person interview, mostly in participants' homes. Data analysis: Inductive coding, borrowing from Ethnographic methodology (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995) and Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).	* For some participants, hormones and surgery allowed a change in sexualised embodiment (i.e., doing sexualities with oneself and others), allowing having sexual relationships with heterosexual women. * Some participants re-labelled body parts for a better embodiment. * Hormones for some facilitated a change in sex drive, reason for sex, and orgasms. * Some gay participants found homosexual sex as validating. * There was a shift in sexual practices (e.g., vaginal sex bringing masculinity into question, anal sex as genderless). * For some	(-) Supervision/Reflexivity was mentioned but only superficially (-) Quotes not in detail and not equally distributed for themes (-) Interview content not present (+) Consistent aims and in line with research methodology (+) Clear writing and description of theoretical framework
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people the sexual
orientation label
of queer allowed
for
experimenting
with gender
configuration and
ease of
transitioning.

Doorduyn & van Berlo (2014)	Netherlands	To explore the experience of sexuality of 12 Dutch trans people to provide new hypothesis and perspective for future research.	Not stated	<p>Sample size: 12 Age: age range 18–60 years Ethnicity: 11 White Dutch, 1 White Dutch and Jewish Sexual orientation: 3 Heterosexual, 2 Gay, 1 Asexual, 1 Asexual homoromantic, 1 Questioning, 1 Lesbian after transition, 1 Bisexual lesbian, 1 Lesbian, 1 Attracted to women Gender Identity: 2 Man, 2 Woman/Transwoman 1 Boy, 1 Woman/man, 1 Both male and female aspects, 2 Woman, 1 80% man and 20% No Gender, 1 Man/Boy 1 Does not fit in a box</p>	<p>Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling to obtain maximum variation regarding gender identity, sex assigned at birth, transitioning stage (if applicable), and body transformation Data collection method: Semi structured interviews Data analysis: Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)</p>	<p>* Some participants engaged differently with their bodies: reinterpreted body parts/“let go” of interpretation, imagined having a different body. * Some participants noticed with Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) a change in the quality of their orgasms, arousal, sensitivity of sex organs, and their desire. * Some participants spoke about experiencing sexual time in a different way (i.e., not discovering sexuality when other cis peers did in early developmental years and discovering that later)</p>	<p>(-) Poor mentioning of limitations (-) No mention of supervision, bracketing or reflexivity (-) The language is not trans affirmative but perhaps because published 10 years ago and not published in an English-speaking country and it's a matter of translation (+) Outline of topics covered during the interview (+) Good description of participants (+) Sufficient description of methodology used</p>
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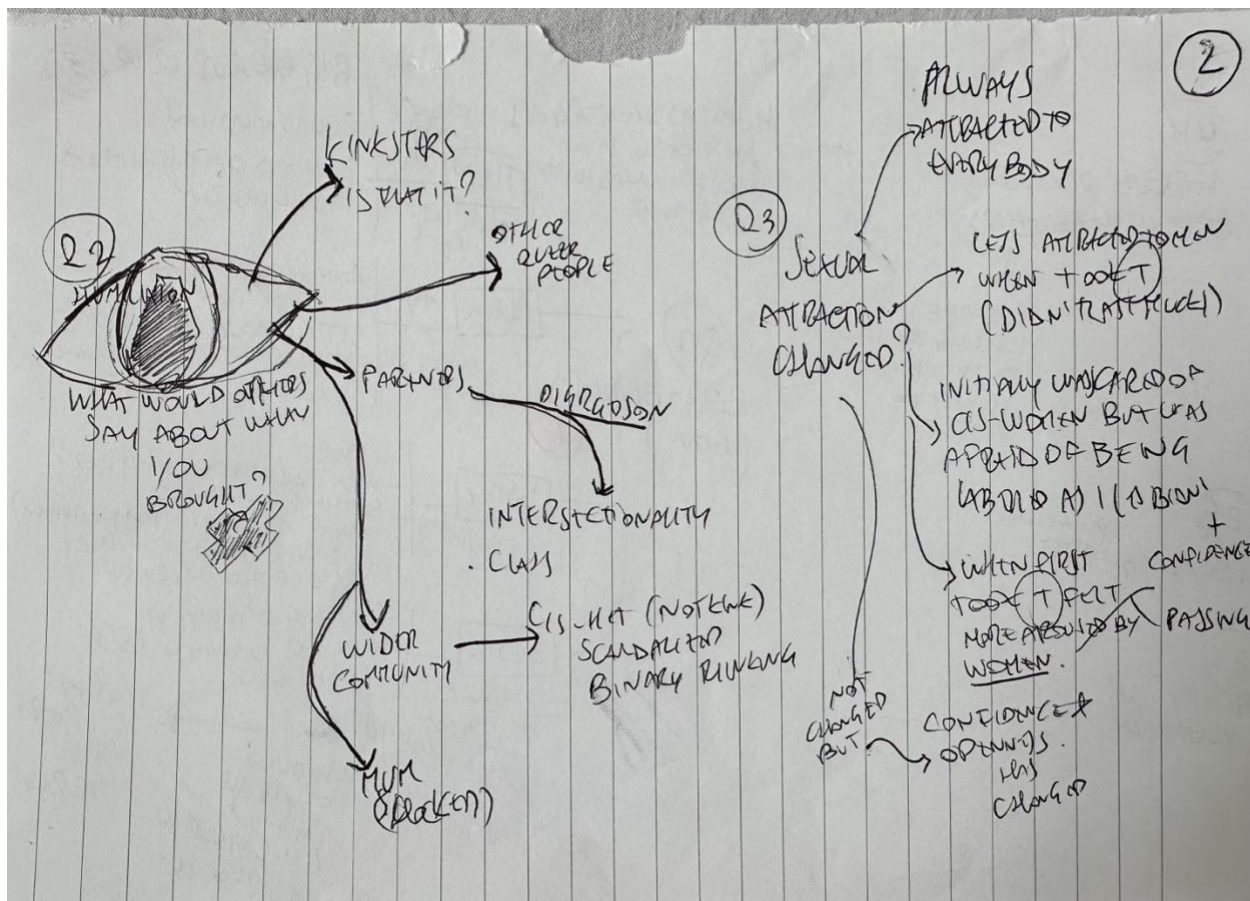
Ross et al., (2024)	Netherlands	To understand the factors that contribute to sexual experience of trans non binary and gender non conforming people and the impact of gender-affirming treatment (GAT) and areas for improvement in treatment. Please note this paper was included in this review because it has only one person who identified as gender non-conforming. It was a decision that was made as a team.	Only mentions about having a "sex- positive approach"	Sample size: 21 Age: age range 18-62 years Ethnicity: not stated Sexual orientation: not stated Gender Identity: 12 trans men, 7 trans, woman, 1 transgender, 1 genderqueer	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Purposeful sampling, prospective participants were approached by researchers, clinicians from Amsterdam University Medical Centre, peer support groups and social media Data collection method: In-person interviews, mostly in people's homes Data analysis: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014).	* Participants reported how HRT facilitated change in sexual desire and orgasms. Especially some trans feminine participants found difficult to handle sexual desire but that improved with the start of HRT. Some of these participants also reported a decrease in sexual desire upon starting HRT and this being perceived as a positive experience of their overall sexuality. * Some trans masculine people experienced an increase of sexual desire after starting HRT, which was perceived as positive as long as congruent with one's gender. These population also noticed a change	(-) No description of sexual orientation but it's worth mentioning that sexual attraction/orientation is not one of the areas covered in the interview schedule (-) No mentioning of ethnicity (+) Good description of methodology, especially in terms of interview areas/structure, reflexivity (+) Whilst the clinical implications are relevant, there is no mention of challenging existing theoretical or research practices
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Nagoshi et al., (2012)	4	4	1	1	1	3	2	3	4	4	0	0	0	3	3	2	1	3	4	3	3	0	3	4	5.4
Rossman (2016)	4	4	4	2	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	0	4	4	2	3	2	4	4	3	4	2	2	N/A
																									The sis
Scheim et al., (2019)	3	0	0	1	3	3	1	2	3	2	0	2	0	3	1	1	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	1.0
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Rowniak & Chesla, (2013)	2	0	0	3	1	3	3	0	3	2	0	0	1	3	3	4	4	4	0	3	3	2	2	0	3.8
Martin & Coolhart, (2022)	3	0	0	1	1	3	3	2	3	2	1	0	3	3	3	0	0	4	4	3	3	3	3	0	1.1
Anzani et al., (2021)	3	0	0	1	3	3	3	1	4	3	0	0	1	0	2	0	4	4	1	3	2	3	1	0	2

Auer et al., (2014)	2	1	1	2	4	3	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	3	4	3	1	2	3	1	2	1	3.7
Rossman et al., (2019)	4	0	0	1	4	3	4	0	3	3	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	4	4	2	2	3	3	3.8
Rosenberg et al., (2019)	2	3	3	4	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	3	1	1.5
Bockting et al., (2009)	2	1	1	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	2	1	3	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	2	3	1	3.8
Mellman (2017)	3	1	1	4	4	4	4	2	3	4	2	1	1	3	4	3	4	1	4	4	4	1	4	4	N/A
Pugliese (2013)	4	0	0	2	4	3	3	0	3	3	0	2	1	3	4	1	4	3	1	4	4	4	4	1	N/A

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Appendix L: Reflexive Journal

22/01/2023

Free writing about my research topic:

I am trans and in being trans I want to hold the herald, the pain, the struggle that my fellow trans people do. I haven't felt understood as a trans person in a lifetime so I needed to do this (thesis) for myself as well for others, in a non-stigmatizing way.

Can I write a poem about this?

I see my trans

friends

siblings

different but

similar

mum and dad are angry at us

I got your back

as you have mine

and you always did,

before I even knew.

03/07/2023

I spoke with Louise. It was hard – at times I felt tearful. At times I wanted to be like her: polyamory and all that. It's interesting how I feel more comfortable doing polyamory more than in these days compared to monogamy. It was hard to not be able to interact with her freely because of the researcher-

interviewee boundaries I had to keep. It was hard because I have always been in groups with trans and NB people, so, it was a continuous back-and-forth. It's hard because I feel a part of me would like to live as a woman OR both as a woman and a not-woman/agender.

25/07/2023

I had another interview. There is so much I could say....I am reflecting...What does it mean to be a researcher? What does it mean to have an intimate conversation? How will they read me? Who am I, if I am femme and I have to constantly hide from the world presenting with the old snakeskin? I also had the realization I have always been genderqueer/androgenous whilst my participant was speaking!

11/19/2023

I cannot write to the participants of my study for member-checking, so, I write you a letter. Like a message in a bottle.

Dear participants,

I have been thinking for a long time about writing you a letter. I have listened to the interviews many times, and re-read the transcripts an equal number of times. In revisiting our conversations, I often cried because of a shared narrative. You described with poetic precision some feelings I experience too as a non-binary person. The t4t aspect, the limitations of the body in the heteronormative world, the struggle faced in non-queer spaces. I felt we were having a conversation: you were speaking with me, and I was having an internal dialogue with myself, directed at you. Mostly, I was thanking you.

Sometimes, I imagined myself jumping on my soap box shouting to the world to drop this divide between cis and trans and that our bodies and ways we have to navigate our bodies are all valid and beautiful, or "yummy" like the writer Lucie Fielding would say. Now, I am here having to write data analysis, interpreting what you told me in relation to wider societal narratives and considering the effect your words had on me. I struggle to interpret, I don't want to interpret trans lives. There has been too much interpretation of our bodies throughout history. I wanted to witness your journey with openness

and compassion. Instead, to be a researcher, to pass (both my doctorate and society's expectations of what a researcher), is to fit this heteronormative word, I need to interpret. This is not an evaluation of you but more an observation of the dynamic between you and the world, and you and I. I tried to be as careful as possible with my words, holding all of you in mind as I was writing. I hope I did justice to the story you gifted me.

I thank you once more and once again. A part of you will always be with me, not only having shaped my research, but also being affirming my gender, reminding me that we are all yummy!

Sandro

31/04/2024

I kept thinking: how much does a reader need to know about myself and how I came to these conclusions? When is it enough? When will the reader be satiated about my story? How can this not be a memoir? To understand how I see the world, you need to appreciate me and the nuances of my life, my experiences, my sorrows, my pains and joys. Reflexivity and keeping a reflexive journal are performative acts. How can I write to you about the changes in my body? From before to after speaking to a participant or within myself when I look at vaginoplasties, wondering. And when does my input is presented in a coherent enough way and territorialized enough way that my supervisors don't have anything to comment upon? Is it all this conformity to some standard so I can *pass*? I always struggled with that, and I guess always will.

10/04/2024

Reading Marshall et al paper (2020) on the quality and satisfaction of romantic relationships of trans people and their partners, I pause several times to think

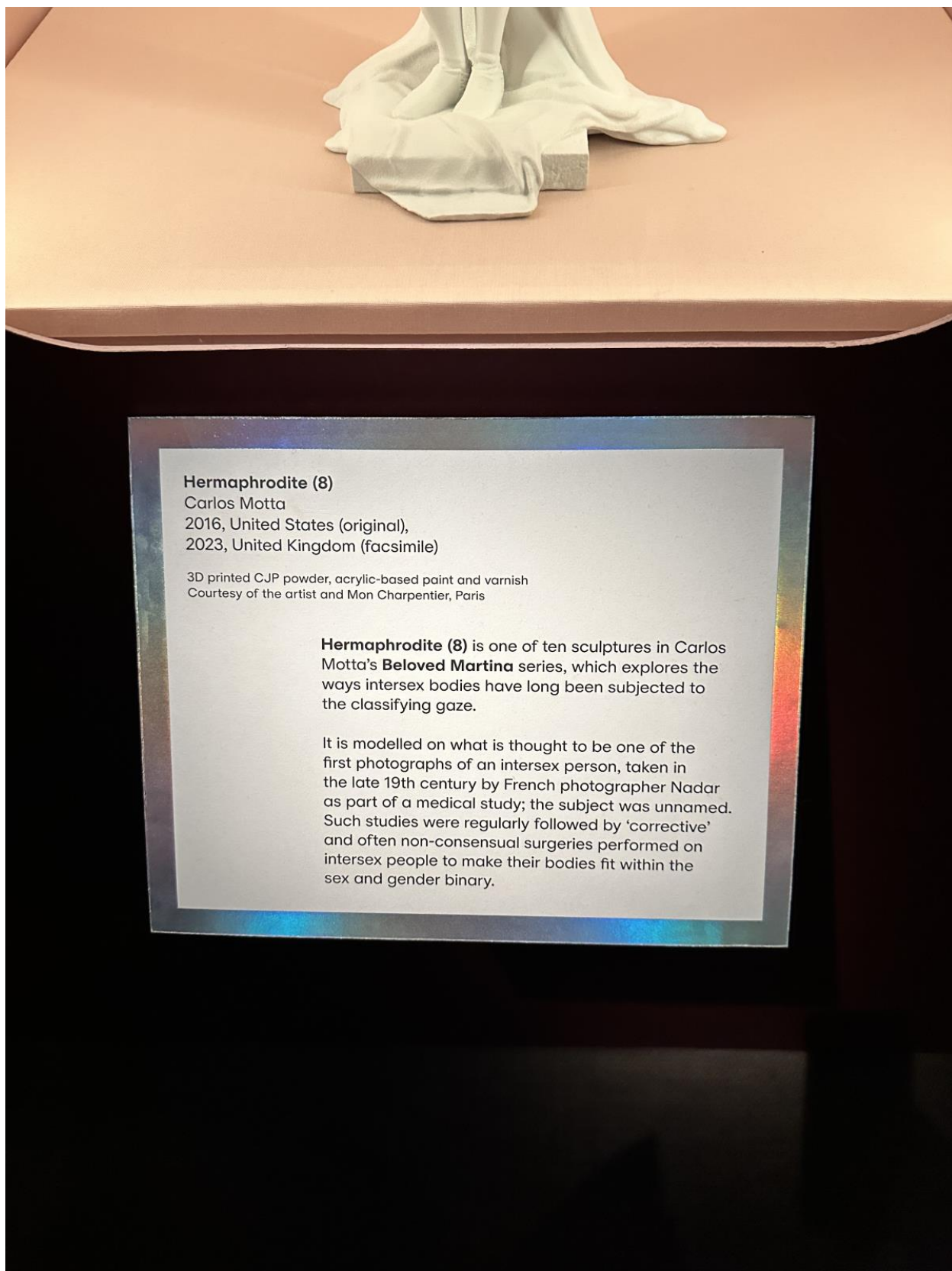
What if relationship longevity is not the answer? What happens during a breakup and afterword? After 1 month, 1 year, 10 years? Maybe the ending of the relationship is a positive thing. Is longevity another normative assumption? A friend, a professor in anthropology (not sure why this detail is important for the reader!), told me that time can define if two people have a certain groove, if they can fit next to each other. Is that true? People can avoid conflict and live in parallel. I am not sure what time adds. I have experienced love, deep connection and other hard-to-describe-with-words feelings with various people. Time is one variable for a *successful* relationship. It depends also on what we consider *successful* and what are the standards for it. How do we currently measure relationship success? And can we re-write it and be more creative? Can we be more creative with how we structure our social life?

28/04/2024

On writing

I will need to submit my thesis soon, and I went to the Wellcome Collection to see 'The Cult of Beauty', an exhibition with around 200 pieces showing the concept of beauty through cultures, and time. It highlights the structures of oppression, and the industry of beauty as a self-feeding machine (standing on the shoulders of his older siblings: racism, ableism, and patriarchy, I would add). I cried looking at this image below- don't worry, I took the photos so I hold the copyright. The sculpture made me think on how bodies are constantly inscribed, policed, restricted, punished by society. We all had (and have) to fight for bodily autonomy- which should be a basic human principle in a non-dictatorial state.





Hermaphrodite (8)

Carlos Motta
2016, United States (original),
2023, United Kingdom (facsimile)

3D printed CJP powder, acrylic-based paint and varnish
Courtesy of the artist and Mon Charpentier, Paris

Hermaphrodite (8) is one of ten sculptures in Carlos Motta's **Beloved Martina** series, which explores the ways intersex bodies have long been subjected to the classifying gaze.

It is modelled on what is thought to be one of the first photographs of an intersex person, taken in the late 19th century by French photographer Nadar as part of a medical study; the subject was unnamed. Such studies were regularly followed by 'corrective' and often non-consensual surgeries performed on intersex people to make their bodies fit within the sex and gender binary.

Bodies are forced to hide their non-conformity. Look at when it was produced. We are fighting demons with an old history.