

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

**Gender**

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### **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 them<sup>1</sup>.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 ontology<sup>2</sup>**

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

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<sup>2</sup> 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*<sup>3</sup>: 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*<sup>4</sup>. In this *relational becoming*, where any agent has the potential to mutually affect<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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 territorialization<sup>6</sup> (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

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<sup>6</sup> 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-territorialization<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>7</sup> 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).

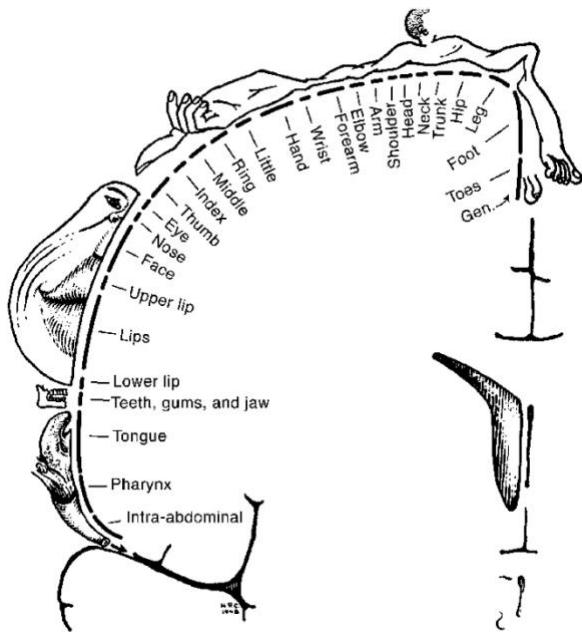
its development or characteristics (Prunas, 2019). De-territorialization<sup>8</sup> is the breaking out and the stepping outside of these practices, such as Preciado's Counter sexual Manifesto (2018). In this thesis, I referred to Preciado theory and re-named the "sex/gender system" (Preciado, 2018 p. 26) in the *sexualities-gender assemblage*. Thus, uniting Preciado's work with post-humanist viewpoint.

## ***Theory on sexualities: sexualities-gender assemblage***

In the scientific assemblage, territorialization fragments the body by delineating specific areas as erogenous zones. This is because through scientific methods higher specificity has been identified in such areas. For instance, the homunculus is a representation of sensory processing at the brain level, with larger representations being considered having higher sensitivity (Nguyen & Duong, 2024). See Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

## *Sensory homunculus*



<sup>8</sup> The expanding or disrupting aspect of an assemblage. For the research-assemblage, including practices outside this (e.g., including creative and non-traditional methods for knowledge creation and dissemination).

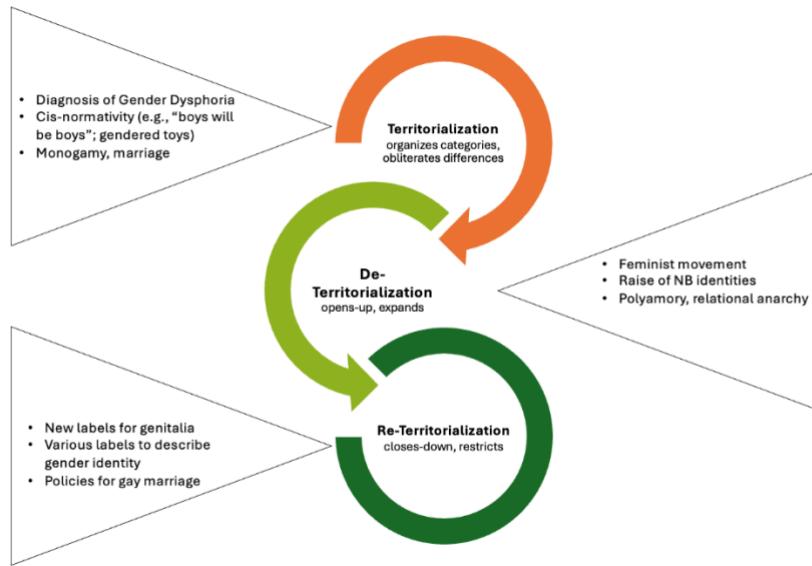
*Note.* Di Noto, P. M., Newman, L., Wall, S., & Einstein, G. (2013). The her munculus: what is known about the representation of the female body in the brain?. *Cerebral Cortex*, 23 (5), 1005-1013.

In this way, the body becomes fragmented, and genitals become the centre of human pleasure and assumed to be used for sexual practices. Thus, practices such as BDSM, kink, and anal play (Preciado, 2018) are breaking off from this territorialization, and offering the establishment of new ones (i.e., re-territorialization). Similarly for gender, some bodies are naturalized (e.g., male/female binarism), as well as some practices (e.g., hormones, and surgery according to a binary perspective), whilst other bodies are erased (e.g., the mutilation of intersex bodies), not imagined (e.g., surgical operations to move outside the binary sexual representation), or not desired (e.g., fat, disabled bodies).

The sexualities-gender assemblage is the relational interplay of various agents at the macro (e.g., heteronormativity, penetrative sex, policies), and at the micro level (e.g., re-labelling of sexual body parts, kink practices). For a visual representation of the sexualities-gender assemblage see Figure 2. In line with this thinking, in this thesis I do not assume there is a hierarchy or structure for gender identity (and its development/formation) or sexualities.

## **Figure 2**

### *Sexualities-gender assemblage*



*Note.* This diagram is linear for reader's ease and because of the limitations of 2D writing. Flows of affect are in an always-changing, unpredictable relational dynamic.

### Current context

According to the most recent census in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2021), with 45.7 million respondents for the question on gender identity, 262,000 (0.5%) stated that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. Within this group, 118,000 (0.24%) did not provide a response in the write-in box section, 48,000 (0.10%) identified as a trans man, 48,000 (0.10%) identified as a trans woman, 30,000 (0.06%) identified as non-binary, and 18,000 (0.04%) wrote in a different gender identity. In terms of sexual orientation, there is not a specific census for TNB people, neither has independent research been carried out for this population. In the 2021 census, from all respondents (44.9 million people), 43.4 million people identified as heterosexual, and only 1.5 million people identified as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or selected 'Other' for their sexual orientation. With these figures, it is evident how TNB people are a significant minority, and heterosexuality is the largest sexual orientation for the population.

Despite the low prevalence of these populations, hate crimes towards trans people in the UK has increased of 16% in 2021 from the previous year (Stop Hate UK, 2021). Most of these crimes were: verbal abuse, threats, harassment, and antisocial behaviours, with the perpetrators being either neighbours, colleagues, or strangers. In addition, it is possible that this number is underreported as 88% of transgender people did not report the most serious incident, and almost half of them were not satisfied with the Police response (Government Equalities Office, 2018a).

Studying sexualities within gender diverse populations is extremely important because TNB bodies and sexualities have been historically pathologized (Prunas, 2019) or fetishized. For instance, trans men face discrimination in gay spaces because of expectations of how a gendered body should look like and behave. Another example comes from older literature on transition (Nieder et al., 2018), whereby some researchers believed that trans people eroticize transition, implying that they are aroused by the thought of themselves as a man or a woman (Blanchard, 1989; Lawrence, 2012), or speculating that femininity and homosexuality are bound together (Bailey, 2003). A further example is the other end of the spectrum: fetishization (Montoya, 2023). There has been a surge in trans pornography searches in the last years (Faye, 2022), whilst trans individuals are also more likely to be fatal victims of partner violence (Peitzmeier et al., 2020). All this has historically skewed research towards the challenges faced by these populations (e.g., HIV, sexual violence) (e.g., Baral et al., 2013; Herbst et al., 2008). Whilst this is important to improve public awareness and make changes to existing policies, the narrative on wellbeing omits other important aspects of trans lives. This is especially true for sexualities, whereby most of the research focus and public discourse is on sexual health, gender affirmative surgery, sexual appearance, and sexual function (e.g., Schardein & Nikolavsky, 2022). A non-pathologizing approach to the sexualities of TNB people is still in its relatively infancy.

The quantitative literature on TNB sexualities has mostly focused on post Gender Affirming Surgery (GAS) (Schardein & Nikolavsky, 2022), or on measuring sexual orientation (Puckett et al., 2021;

Reisner et al., 2023). However, for the former aspect, the existing questionnaires are not validated for TNB population (Dearnley, 2005; Horbach et al., 2015; Schardein & Nikolavsky, 2022), and for the latter one the existing language to describe one's sexualities is limited (Puckett et al., 2021).

Thus, similarly to the human body, research on sexualities in Western countries has been fragmented. Some authors pinpoint the start of scientific fragmentation with René Descartes, whose thinking facilitated a dualistic conceptualization of the human experience (Damasio, 2001, 2006). Then, favoured by the industrial revolution, facilitated a hyper-specialization of sciences. However, this implied that research areas worked in silos, with little interdisciplinary collaboration, and no queering of methodologies and ontologies.

As above-outlined (Preciado, 2018), sexualities are relational. What is considered sexual (or sensual, or erotic, or arousing) is influenced by what we are exposed to, and witness (some cultural examples are Humphrey Bogart in *To Have and Have*, Mickey Rourke, and Kim Basinger in *9½ Weeks*, Elizabeth Berkley in *Showgirls*). It is important to note that most of the Western cultural icons were (and are) white. Feminine individuals from the Global Majority have traditionally been hypersexualised, objectified, (e.g., the Jezebel stereotype from the slavery area), and considered less than human (Turner, 2011). Masculine individuals from the Global Majority are, again, hypersexualised, and feared (Oluwayomi, 2022). Additionally, the history of sexualities is also ableist, and fat-phobic: who is considered able to be desired (i.e., *desire-able*) (Fielding, 2021). Finally, the behaviours that are deemed acceptable as sexual are traditionally binary. The mimicry of sexualities is undoubtedly territorializing. Humans, then, replicate such scripts within relationships, and communities. If those are the images of sexualities that we consume, and of binary gender roles, a fragmenting model for measuring them is reinforcing these oppressive forces. It is possible that a more imaginative (de/re-territorializing model) could expand understanding and sexualities. In other words, we could measure sexualities in a way that is generative (and not only observational), inviting people to think beyond the known. For instance,

engage with embodied knowledge, artistic methods, to name a few. This is not to say that quantitative measures of sexualities are not appropriate for research and clinical use but their current use (and how they conceptualize sexualities, including its ontological background) alone (i.e., without being integrated with other methodologies) is limited and limiting.

Qualitative research has attempted to offer alternative views and welcome a variety of epistemologies (e.g., critical realism, socio constructivism, phenomenological existentialism). Below I offer an overview of the existing academic qualitative literature on the sexualities of TNB (Burns et al., 2022; Gunby & Butler, 2023; Mellman, 2017; Pipkin et al., 2023; Thurston & Allan, 2018), with only Thurston and Allan (2018) exploring sexualities alongside transitioning (for trans people only).

Thurston & Allan (2018) carried out a systematic literature review on the sexuality and sexual experiences of transgender people undergoing gender-affirming processes. Using thematic synthesis, they identified two themes: Renegotiating Previous Norms, and Establishing Identity. Relating to the first theme, they found that some participants talked about re-negotiating previous sexual norms, including aspects such as going through a second puberty, connecting to sexual organs in a different way, and noticing a different motivation for engaging in sexual activity. Moreover, linked to the second theme, they found that participants' experience of shift in feeling more masculine/feminine and in their presentation had consequences, some of which included losing links with communities (e.g., lesbian community), and in public (e.g., being read as heterosexual in public for some trans couples).

The other reviews explored some sexual aspects but not alongside transition. I will provide an overview of these studies below. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for publication year was specified only by Pipkin and colleagues (2024) and Mellman (2017).

Burns and colleagues (2024) reviewed and synthesized the existing research between Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy (GAHT) and sexuality, focusing on aspects, such as: sexual satisfaction, sexual distress, experience of sexual orientation or identity, sexual behaviours. Despite engaging with

relevant literature, the quality of their report lacks academic rigor, as they do not specify the data collection process, the number of studies included or the data analysis strategy. In their findings, they identified how hormones are said to influence the likelihood of a behaviour to occur but not necessarily to be the *cause* of it. Additionally, they stated how even if some trans people change their sexual orientation and sexual identity labels with GAHT it is unlikely that the shift is due to GAHT. Most of the studies reported an increase in libido upon androgens administration. However, authors specified how these studies were retrospective and conducted in medical settings, therefore, additional factors might have influenced these findings (e.g., bias in memory, adherence to gender norms). Only one longitudinal study showed how sexual desire after initial increase, decreased after three months, returning to the initial level. Finally, authors stated how changes with hormones might be due to a plethora of aspects (e.g., increase sense of wellbeing, self-esteem, and, in turn, increased sexual desire).

Pipkin and colleagues (2023) carried out a systematic literature review (n=16) using meta-ethnography methodology to understand what is important in the experience of trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people exploring their sexuality, and developed a theoretical explanation. They included studies from 2007 onward. In their findings, they outlined the intersection between gender and sexuality, with some participants of studies exploring sexuality through gender or vice versa. Seven of their papers mentioned about use of labels (e.g., to access community, medical support, challenge binary systems, reclaiming body parts). Nine papers talked about relationships (e.g., sense of affirmation or liberation from engaging with some partners), and seven talked about communities and belonging (e.g., finding kink community affirming, loss of lesbian community). Finally, they outlined a theoretical rationale based on previous models. The quality of their study is good (e.g., clear explanation of methodology, inclusion of reflexivity statement). However, including gender non-conforming (GNC) in their search terms, might have influenced their final results as there are trans people that might not identify as GNC, and some GNC people (e.g., genderqueer, lesbian) who do not identify as trans.

Gunby & Butler (2022) carried out a meta-ethnography of qualitative studies review exploring relationship issues in couples where one of the partners identifies as trans. They included a total of 22 articles, comprehending both qualitative and mixed methods studies. They identified 9 core themes: Living With and Fighting Oppression, Multiple Levels of Dissonance and Dysphoria, Experience of Loss, Validating and Expressing Gender Identity Through Relationships, Language as a Tool to Liberate or Oppress, The Paradox of Hetero and Cis Frameworks, Visibility Issues and (Dis)Membership to Communities, Beyond the Caretaking Role, Personal and Relational Growth. They identified that some relationships aspects (i.e., communication, honesty, openness) were important to navigate relationship issues. Furthermore, they found that language was an important tool mentioned in papers, for example, for exploration, and to navigate dysphoria. However, this study had several limitations, including that, it was not always clear which of the participants was speaking, and that they focused on relationships issues, not discussing sexualities more widely.

Mellman's review (2017) was published as part of a Doctoral thesis. The aim of the study was to review the literature of the relationships of transgender men. The final number of studies was 20 (published between 1980 and 2016), including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research. They used several databases (e.g., ProQuest, Google Scholar, PubMed) as search engine. Overall, studies reported that transgender men and their partners had high levels of relationship satisfaction. From the included studies they found how the existing literature on relationships of transgender men focused on five main domains: Sexual Intimacy and Satisfaction, Sexual Minority During Transitioning, Shifts in Power and Privileges (in light of changing gender roles), Transgender Men Who Identify as Gay or Bisexual, and Sexual Risk Behaviours. The challenges reported in the studies were: financial difficulties, communication, and the partner's family not being accepting. The steps carried out for data collection and reflexivity were described in detail. However, the strategy for data synthesis was not outlined or referenced and the Methods section was not as clear compared to the rest of their review.

The existing reviews covered various aspects of sexualities. However, there were several limitations. Burns and colleagues (2024) looked specifically at the literature of sexuality and GAHT. However, not all TNB people take hormones, thus, possibly excluding some studies. Additionally, they focused on specific aspects of sexuality, instead of utilizing a broader understanding. Finally, the study is poorly reported considering the current guidance for reviews (Page et al., 2021). Pipkin and collaborators (2023) found from their study how gender can influence one's sexuality, and vice versa. However, they did not include studies that explore sexualities specifically during transition, and they included studies with GNC participants. Gunby & Butler (2022) focused on relationships, and not on sexualities more broadly. Thurston & Allan (2018) reviewed papers on sexuality alongside gender-affirming care. Despite providing interesting insights on this phenomenon, the did not include non-binary people in their inclusion criteria, and only focused on qualitative studies, resulting in only seven papers being included. In addition, the study was carried out six years ago, which in this emerging field of research might require further review to capture the latest developments.

### **Literature review**

Systematic literature reviews are a common practice in science to identify, critically analyse, and summarise the existing literature on a specific topic (Boland et al., 2023). In this section, I provide a detailed analysis of the literature on changes in sexualities for TNB alongside transition. The review was carried out by the principal researcher (me), and supported by three other researchers: two authors who have previously published in this field (Pipkin et al., 2023), and a PhD student. The steps are outlined below.

### **Method**

The initial search was carried out by me using the following databases: Scopus, Ebsco, CHINAL Plus, and Open Dissertations. Google Scholar was also used as additional data source, selecting the first 3 to 5 pages of each search. Limiting the pages on Google Scholar was decided upon when irrelevant

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  Qualitative data collection and analysis  Not included grey literature  Including dissertations	mixed method* OR qualitative  Longitudinal OR Between groups  OR Within group  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	Qualitative  mixed method* OR qualitative

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### ***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

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- 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

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- Mixed methods
- Qualitative
- Quantitative

## Study type/content

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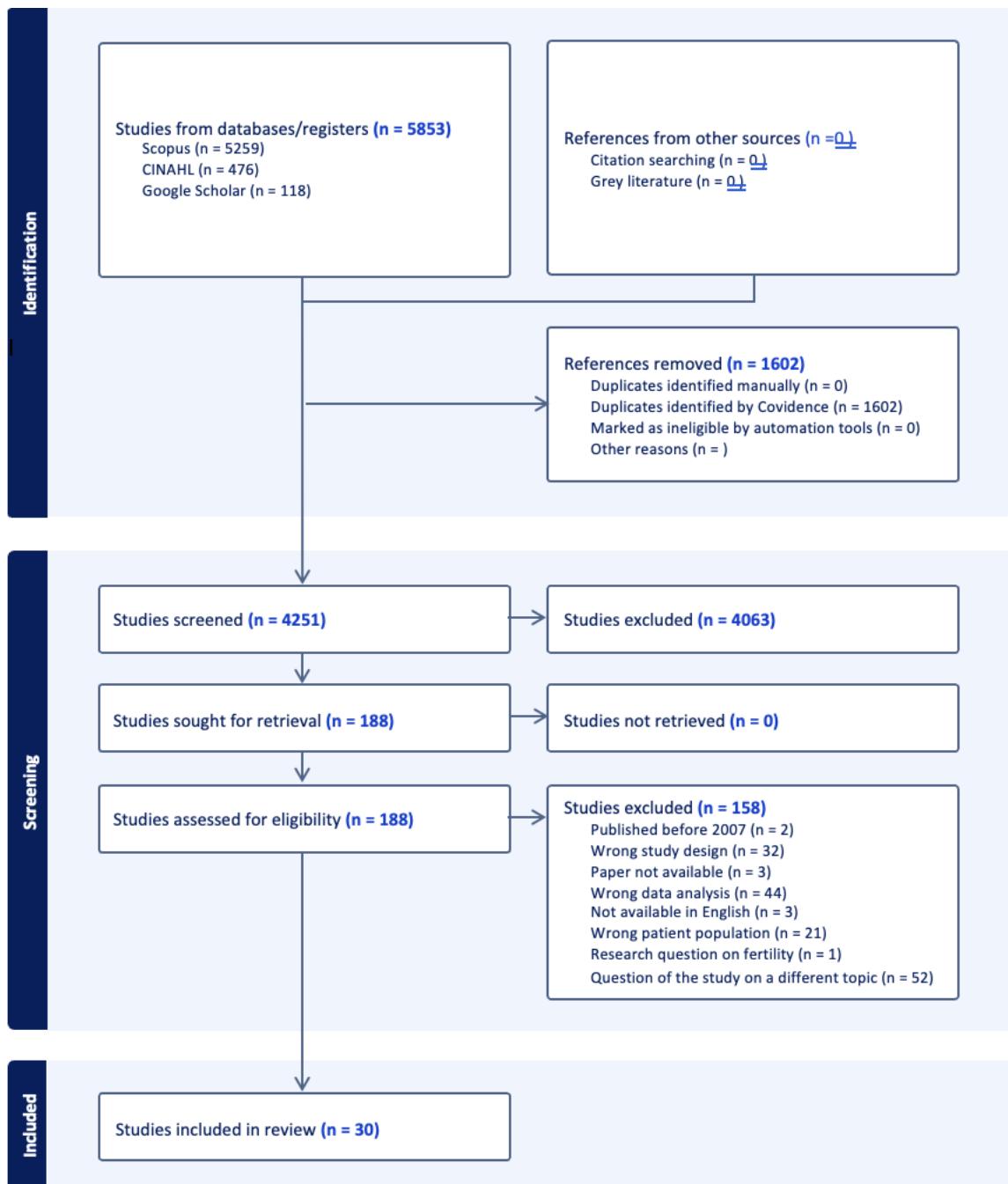
- The study has to specifically mention time or change over time or this can be inferred by reviewers in reading what mentioned in the data (e.g., comment on experience before and when starting GAHT, change of name and pronouns)
- Book chapters
- Essays/memoirs
- Reviews
- Medical paper (i.e., if only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

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

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**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)

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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

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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/sexual, 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-advocation 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 * 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.

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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	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	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	* 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.	(-) 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)
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Schilt & Windsor (2014)	US	To explore how trans men sexual practices is affirmed/transfor med 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, positionality 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

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people preferred using terms such as “pansexual” in a political way. \* The key aspects related to the 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.

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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 Northern 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/Reflectivity 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.

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Doorduin & 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	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	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)	* 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)	(-) 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
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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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in the intensity and nature of their arousal, and a change in their sexual organs and made sex more pleasurable.  
\* Several participants also stated how medical transition helped them to be more able to communicate their sexual preferences.

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Richards (2016)	UK	To understanding of what trans people's sexuality is from trans people themselves (i.e., phenomenological exploration of trans people's sexuality)	Existential-phenomenology	Sample size: 11 Age: 18-42 range Ethnicity: 4 White British, 1 White, 1 White Scottish, 1 Caucasian - Irish, 1 Scottish, 1 African Scot, 1 Jewish - Hispanic Sexual orientation: not collected Gender Identity: 3 Female, 2 Male, 2 Trans Man, 2 Trans (almost) male, 1 female bodied. Experiment (sp?) trans, 1 Gender Queer, 1 Male-Trans Man	Study design: Qualitative (thesis) Sampling strategy: Convenience sample via advertising at an annual BiCon convention Data collection method: Interviews and creating models using LEGO Data analysis: Phenomenology and double hermeneutic - various analytical strategies used.	* Some participants reported that as a man/embracing masculinity are able to have sex with men (e.g., feeling more comfortable with their own gender allowed to be explore sexuality). Gendered embodiment allowed sexual exploration. * Labels (for sexuality) can be limiting. Thus, some participants preferred freedom from these labels albeit being confusing and psychologically demanding. * Some participants experienced rejection by homosexual partners because of body expectations in these communities (e.g., trans men in relation with	(-) No mention of co-production (-) No details of interview structure/schedule (-) No mention of antiracist or decolonial lenses (+) Good description of methodology (e.g., data collection, data analysis, theoretical framework) (+) Detailed ethics section
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gay cis men). This can have an impact on people's confidence to have sexual relationship with others and fear of exposure.

\* Some participants talked about the difference over time pre/post transition in their sexuality. It seems that embodiment allowed for participants' expression of themselves and further exploration in the sexual realm.

\* One participant mentioned that having a congruent body was important to them but their sexuality has various forms dykey, fluffy girlie, BDSM, some of which have a gendered component to them.

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Williams et al., (2016)	US	To explore the sexuality of trans women and how they engage in <i>bodily techniques</i> when doing sexuality (Crossley, 2006).	Sociological framework emphasising agency, and reflexive trans embodiment	Sample size: 25 Age: age range 22-83 years Ethnicity: 17 White Caucasian, 1 Cuban-Dominican, 1 Puerto Rican/Hawaiian, 1 Hawaiian, 1 Indian/Mixed, 1 Pacific Islander, 1 Multi-racial, 1 African American, 1 Mixed Sexual orientation: Not collected in the study Gender Identity: People who identify themselves as transgender/transsexual. All trans women were selected for this paper.	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Face-to-face, flyers, snowball Data collection method: Face-to-face interview Data analysis: Grounded theory using a 'doing sexuality' framework (Crossley, 2006).	* Some participants described disembodyment/ de-gender body parts (e.g., feeling detached from them, feeling they are just "there" and not bothering participants). * Some participants talked about re-discovering/re-territorializing body parts (e.g., anus as one's vagina, anus as a genderless body part). * Hormones helped some participants with better gendered embodiment * Several participants talked about the penis, with some feeling not wanting to engage in penetrating others (e.g., too masculine), and others allowing sexual partners to engage in oral	(-) No discussion of implication (e.g., clinical, theoretical) (-) No mentioning of co-production (-) No mentioning of reflexivity or use of supervision (-) Poor description of analytical process and methodology used (+) Rich use of quotes and distribution throughout the text (+) Good description of existing literature and aims fitting with study design
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sex with them.  
\* Some participants doing sex work talked about needing a penis for penetration because that's what customers want.

\* Most of the participants talked about using oestrogen allowed them to feel more sexually attractive by being more feminine.

Similarly was spoken about cosmetic surgery.

\* Some trans women talked about the difficulty in relationships (e.g., finding partners in lesbian spaces, shifting labels to find themselves sexually and because of fear of rejection)

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Lindley et al., (2021)	US	To explore the experience of fourteen trans individuals on how the transition process affects their gender and sexual identity from an eco-developmental framework (Baker, 2018; Kuper et al., 2018; Warner, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013).	Eco-developmental model framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999).	Sample size: 14 Age: age range 18–35 years old Ethnicity: 6 White not Hispanic, 3 Hispanic/Mexican , 3 did not respond, 1 Amrical Indian, 1 Blackout Hispanic Sexual orientation: 3 Pansexual, 3 Bisexual/Pansexual, 2 Bisexual, 2 Heterosexual, 1 Heteroflexible, 1 Asexual Bisexual Gay-male Queer, 1 Queer, 1 Bisexual Heteroflexible, 1 Asexual Bisexual Gay-male Heterosexual Questioning. Gender Identity: 3 Female to male, Transgender, Trans-man; 2 Male/masculine; 1 Two spirit, Female to male, Transgender, Transsexual; 1 Trans-man, Male/masculine, Gender-queer, Gender non-conforming; 1 Female to male, Transgender,	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling via online adverts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Data collection method: in person interviews, online interviews (i.e., Skype) Data analysis: deductive category analysis (Mayring, 2014), a strategy for content analysis.	* Some participants mentioned how bodies can be a source of distress when dating or engaging in sexual activities (e.g., too complicated, others not being attracted to them). Specifically, one trans participant mentioned rejection from gay man because of genitals and having "tits". Others mentioned not wanting to engage in any sexual act until receiving "chest surgery". All this was described at a micro-level by the researchers. * Participants mentioned how transitioning allowed them to explore their sexuality. For some participants being seen by men as men allowed them to	(-) No mention of reflexivity/bracketing/use of supervision (-) No mention of intersectionality in terms of race/ethnicity or of other forms of oppression, and no mention of attempted antiracist/decolonial practices. (-) No mentioning of co-production (+) Sufficient description of recommendation for future research and clinical implications. (+) Clear description of Interview Questions (+) God description of methodology (e.g., theoretical model, epistemology, analysis, description of ethical procedures followed for the study) (+) Good use of
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Trans-man,  
Male/masculine;  
1 Female to male,  
Transgender,  
Trans-man, Male  
masculine; 1  
Transgender,  
Trans-man,  
Male/masculine;  
1 Transgender,  
Trans-man, Male/  
masculine,  
Androgynous; 1  
Female to male,  
Transgender,  
Trans-man,  
Male/masculine;  
1 Transgender,  
Gender-queer,  
Gender non-  
conforming,  
Gender-variant,  
Gender-fluid,  
Androgynous

engage in their  
sexuality more  
comfortably.  
Relationships was  
an element  
described at the  
meso-level by the  
researchers.  
\* Some  
participants  
experienced a  
shift in their  
sexuality because  
of the effect of  
HRT (e.g.,  
understand  
themselves  
better, feeling  
more  
comfortable  
within  
themselves).  
\* After transition  
participants also  
needed to  
change the way  
they approached  
dating as it  
changed the  
expected way of  
interacting with  
others and the  
way others flirt  
with them, as  
well as  
expectations  
from a given  
gendered body  
(e.g., straight)

quotes  
throughout the  
paper

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women when  
dating).

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Platt & Bolland (2017)	US	To explore the experiences of partner relationships for trans people.	Not stated.	Sample size: 38 Age: Age range 18–70 years Ethnicity: 32 White American, 6 African American, Hispanic, or biracial Sexual orientation: 10 pansexual, 7 lesbian, 7 straight, 5 bisexual, 4 no label, 3 queer, 2 demisexual. Gender Identity: Participants self-identified as either (a) having transitioned or (b) having expressed gender fluidity from MtF (21) or FtM (17).	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling via online adverts (i.e., Facebook) Data collection method: Online interviews via Skype Data analysis: Phenomenological analysis (Baker et al., 1992; Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).	* Some participants mentioned about navigating dating in an oppressive binary gendered world. * Some people were concerned about disclosing being trans and fear of violence. * Some participants talked about fetishisation/objectionification or being othered/dehumanised by romantic partners. * Some participants talked about emotional (e.g., change of labels and gender identity for partners, fear of discrimination from partners) and sexual changes (e.g., struggling to find partners that love them for who and how they are) with partners/ex-partners.	(-) Little description of participants' demographics (-) No mention of co-production (-) No mention of reflexivity/bracketing/use of supervision (+) Good description of methodology (e.g., data analysis, relevant framework) (+) Good and creative description of recommendation for future research and clinical implications. (+) Clear report writing and good engagement with the literature
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\* Out of 19 participants that were in a long-term relationship when transitioning, 18 were no longer partnered at the time of the interview.

\* A specific point was made about language/labels. Participants mentioned difficulties in defining their own sexual orientation in relation to their gender identity.

\* Living an authentic life was mentioned as a theme and important aspect. Some participants stated how being authentic to oneself is important to co-create relationships (e.g., “loving”, “with substance”) with others.

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Davidmann (2014)	UK	To represent trans intimate partnerships through photography, allowing for new perspectives.	No specific theory mentioned but several references were used as rationale for using photography as a model for social inquiry.	5 relationships with a member being transgender. No other details were mentioned in the paper.	Study design: Mixed media, qualitative and photo-elicitation for social inquiry. Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling through word of mouth and social media groups. Data collection method: Photographs and semi structured interviews, audio-recorded. Data analysis: The author defines it as practice-based research combining photographic practice (Harper, 1984, 1998) with qualitative text for social research coming from her previous work (Davidmann, 2006, 2010).	* Changes in the body allowed participants to relate differently to others (e.g., feeling more confident, how seen by others allowed participants to decide who they wish to engage with romantically/sexually). * Some participants struggled with current labels to define their sexuality/sexual orientation, and others flexed/used more than one term to accurately describe themselves. * Some participants talked about the rejection/loss experienced within the LGB communities.	(-) Interview content/schedule not described (-) No mention of reflexivity/bracketing/use of supervision (-) Demographics of participants is not described in details (e.g., ethnicity, pronouns) (-) Some mentioning of implications/future recommendations but remains limited (+) Creative use of mixed multimedia and textual research for social inquiry (+) Methodological framework is well referenced but not mentioned in the study itself. (+) Good use of quote throughout the text (+) Acknowledgment (e.g., photography can be exploitative)
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and ways to  
navigate that)  
and good  
attempt in co-  
production with  
participants

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Engelmann, Nicklisch & Nieder (2022)	Germany	To explore specific sexual components (i.e., good sex, sexual pleasure) in trans (Assigned Female at Birth; AFAB) people who are young adults.	Not stated	Sample size: 16 Age: age range 18-35 years Ethnicity: 15 White, 1 Afro-German Sexual orientation: 10 Bi-/pansexual or queer, 4 Heterosexual, 2 Poly, 2 Homosexual, 1 Asexual (participants could chose more than one) Gender Identity: 12 Trans Man, 4 Nonbinary	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Quota sampling Recruitment through community sampling, snowballing, queer organisations, online trans support groups and forums. Data collection method: In person/ video interviews Data analysis: Qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2019, 2018, 2014)	* Transitioning was mentioned as a positive aspect to feel more relaxed and engage in good sex by some, whilst for others coming out brought worries how one's body might be perceived by others and hormonal/surgical strategies helped in being more relaxed when relating to partners. * Some participants used specific aids (e.g., prosthesis), and used specific strategies (e.g., reducing visual aspects, drinking alcohol, deconstructing sexual norms, relaxation) and sexual practices to engage in good sex. * Participants relationships with their bodies changed with transition,	(-) No mention of reflexivity/bracketing/use of supervision (+) Good description of demographics (+) Good use of quotes (+) Good description of methodology (e.g., interview content, analysis strategy) (+) Good mention of implications/future recommendations
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allowing for more self-confidence, self-acceptance and being more comfortable within oneself.

\* Some participants mentioned feeling accepted an important part to engage in good sex and this being related to trust, respect of one's body.

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Nagoshi, Brzuzy, & Terrell (2012)	US	To identify how trans people define their gender role and gender identity and how they perceive the relationship amongst three aspects: gender role, gender identity, and sexual orientation.	Constructionist/performative theories (Butler, 1990)	Sample size: 11 Age: age range 19-43 years old Ethnicity: 10 White, 1 Hispanic Sexual orientation: not collected with demographic information. Gender Identity: 8 born female, 2 born male, 1 born intersex. All participants self-identified as trans.	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling, half recruited through community contacts, and the other half through LGBTQ bulletin board at local university. Data collection method: Interviews Data analysis: Deductive qualitative analysis (Gilgun, 2010)	* Participants reported how transitioning and changes in their gender presentation allowed changes in sexual orientation, which in turn had influences in their gender identity. Authors perceive gender and sexual identity as dynamically intersectional identities. * Half of participants rejected a connection between sexual orientation influencing/defining gender identity.	(-) No mention of reflexivity/bracketing/use of supervision (-) Gaps in collection and outline of demographics (+) Sufficient description of methodology (e.g., recruitment strategy, data analysis, theoretical framework) (+) Good use of quotes, well distributed throughout the text (+) Clear report
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Rossman (2016)	US	To understand sex, sexuality, and sexual practice of trans individuals and their partners, and contribute to the theoretical understanding linking gender and sexuality.	Feminist constructivist grounded theory	Sample size: 16 (8 couples) Age: age range 22-39 years old Ethnicity: 10 White, 3 Caucasian, 1 Multi- racial (Hispanic & White), 1 Half-Iranian, 1 White/Asian (mixed) Sexual orientation: 3 Queer, 1 Top, 1 Lesbian/queer, 1 Bisexual, sexual reference women homoromantic, 1 Heterosexual but living in a lesbian relationship, 1 Lesbian queer, 1 Queer/Pansexual, 1 Grey asexual, 1 Pansexual, 1 Straight cisgendered woman attracted to men and women, 1 Straight, 1 Trans lesbian, 1 Bisexual Gender Identity: 1 Cisgender Female, 1 Female-to-Male Transsexual,	Study design: Qualitative (thesis) Sampling strategy: Purposive and sampling strategy, recruiting through emails and fliers to communities (e.g., LGBT university centres, online via blogs and social network websites) Data collection method: Semi-structured interviews. In person, at home or other location dependent on participant choice Data analysis: Grounded Theory Charmaz (2006)	* Transitioning and changes in gender impacted both cis and trans partners understanding of sex (i.e., sexuality, sexual behaviour), and the relationship structure. * Four levels of experiences of sex where identified by the authors: Internal Level (e.g., role of sex, fantasies related to body, gender dysphoria, worries about surgery, masturbation, experiences of orgasms, sex positions), Change Processes (e.g., sex during transition, surgery impact on sexual function, change in fantasies, strap-on, hormone therapy and sex drive), Relationship (e.g., gender-affirmative	(-) Some mentioning of implications but remains limited (-) Little diversity of participants (e.g., White, education level) (+) Good review of the literature (+) Good description of methodology (e.g., data analysis process, description of participants' demographics, theoretical framework)
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Femme, I don't have an answer to describe my gender identity, 1  
Transgender  
Female/Female,  
M2F Post-Op  
Transsexual, 1  
Transman/man/  
male, Cisgender,  
1 Transman, 1  
Transwoman,  
female, MtF, 1  
Male to Female  
Transsexual, 1  
Just Female, Cis  
Female, 1  
Genderfluid  
Nonbinary  
Trans\*, Cis, 1  
Trans Female, 1  
Female

terminology,  
communication  
about bodies and  
during sex, sexual  
practice,  
challenges  
related to sex,  
mental health  
and  
communication,  
kinky sex,  
topping/bottomi  
ng), Level and  
Outside the Dyad  
(e.g., Poly/open  
relationships,  
sexual  
communities,  
threesomes).  
\* Some  
participants  
talked about how  
transitioning  
changed their  
relationship to  
sex (change  
process). For  
example, one  
participant  
wasn't happy  
within  
themselves and  
for this did not  
have any sex for  
a long time.  
Another  
participant  
mentioned how  
having sex in a  
female body was

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"okay" but then being attracted to women their frustration with body parts (i.e., not having a penis) grew.

\* Some participants talked about being open about exploring sexuality.

\* Some participants talked about fears of surgery in the context of their relationship and if their partners would still be interested in them.

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Scheim et al., (2019)	Canada	To understand trans men's strategies to negotiate sexual fields (both virtual and physical) with male sexual partners.	Not stated	Sample size: 40 Age: 18-50 years old Ethnicity: 57% White, 10% Aboriginal or Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Me' tis), one-third non-Indigenous people of colour Sexual orientation: 68% Queer, 33% gay, 25% bisexual, 5% Two Spirit, 5% straight. 40% of participants selected multiple categories. Gender Identity: trans men or any other gender identity along the trans masculine spectrum	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Quota sampling, recruitment through social media and LGBT organisations and LGBT venues Data collection method: Semi-structured interviews conducted in person, by phone, or by Skype. Data analysis: Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014)	* Trans men navigate sexual fields at a personal level through masculising effect of transitioning, and through negotiation * Participants talked about the differences between men gay spaces (i.e., being more oppressive and apolitical) and queer spaces (e.g., more accepting). However, trans men who "jumped" in these spaces reported positive experiences. * One participant talked on how through medical transitioning they would feel more comfortable entering some gay men spaces (i.e., gay male spaces). * Regarding dating, participants preferred the	(-) No mention of reflexivity/supervision/positionality (-) Not detailed description of participants (-) No mention of implication (e.g., clinical, research) (+) Nuanced perspective of gay, queer and trans issues and communities. (+) Good review of the literature (+) Clear report writing
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safety of Craigslist website, where they had control over disclosure of their sexual identity if they wished to, and were more able to set boundaries.

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Rowniak & Chesla (2012)	US	To explore the experience of 17 trans men within the gay and queer community (mostly resident in San Francisco)	Not stated	Sample size: 17 trans men who have been taking testosterone for at least one year Age: age range 23- 64 years old Ethnicity: 10 White, 1 White/Hispanic, 1 Hispanic/ Native American, 1 African American/Hispanic/White, 1 White/ Basque, 1 Jewish, and 1 Mixed Race. (As reported in the study) Sexual orientation: 10 gay, the remainder queer or fluid, and none as heterosexual. Gender Identity: not collected. The recruitment was a call out for trans men	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling Data collection method: Two phases study. Phase 1: To understand the population and the parameters to investigate six participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Phase 2: 11 participants were interviewed using in-depth interviews asking about the following areas: earliest recollection of discordant with one's gender identity, sexual orientation (and their thoughts, feelings, behaviours around it) before and after transition. Data analysis: Interpretive Phenomenology (Benner, 1994;	* Authors organised the data around sexuality in four categories (in terms of patterns of behaviours observes): steadfast (i.g., identified as lesbian prior to transition and remained almost only attracted to women after transition), aligned (i.e., experience led gender dysphoria from an early stage to the extent that they did not feel comfortable to engage sexually in teen years and after that), shifted (i.e., from lesbian orientation to gay men), and fluid (i.e., transitioning made sex with men more a possibility but not really changing the nature of their desire).	(-) No mention of reflexivity/supervision/bracketing/positionality (-) Demographics are poorly described (+) Interesting that an initial interview process was used to hone the research question and areas of interest. (+) Ample use of quotes throughout the paper (+) Good acknowledgment of limitations (+) Interview Guide clearly included in the study (+) Clear description of methodology used (e.g., recruitment, data analysis process)
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Chan, Brykczynski, Malone, & Benner, 2010; Leonard, 1994) \* Three of the participants in the steadfast group used testosterone for more than 5 years and reported how they experienced a second adolescence and an hypersexuality. They all stated how their attraction to women did not change. Participants in this group reported feeling outcasted from lesbian spaces after transitioning. \* The aligned group was the largest (n=6). They were all attracted to men but struggled to engage sexually with them because of gender dysphoria. \* Four participants were in the shifted group. They all

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experienced an unexpected change. Some train men felt validated by being cruised by gay men. One participant mentioned about putting themselves at risk at one point during their transition because being HIV positive was perceived almost as a proof of being part of the gay community. \* From the fluid participants, two of them described how the lesbian term didn't feel appropriate for them. One of them talked about how testosterone gave him an impetus for sleeping with men and was unsure if it was because was more sexualised or was exploring their identity.

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Martin & Coolhart (2022)	US	To understand how trans masculine people navigate sexual experiences in the context of experiencing body dysphoria.	They mention using relational lenses	Sample size: 10 Age: age range 24- 67 years Ethnicity: 8 Caucasian/white participants, 2 African-American/black Sexual orientation: 6 heterosexual/straight/ attracted to women, 1 queer, 1 gay, 1 bisexual, 1 uncertain/ bi Gender Identity: not specified. Assigned female at birth and either identified as male or along the trans masculine spectrum. The study only mentioned 6 identified as trans man/male, 3 as male, one as non-binary leaning towards trans masculine.	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: purposive and homogenous, recruited through Facebook groups and therapeutic clinics Data collection method: phone semi-structured interview Data analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).	* Participants talked about their transition being a journey, because of how others perceived them and how they perceived themselves instead. * Participants mentioned how surgery helped them to enjoy sex more. * Some participants talked about strategies to negotiate gender dysphoria, including: boundaries (e.g., physical such as keeping the lights off, relations such as limiting areas sexual partners can touch), use of language (e.g., correct pronouns, use new terminology for body parts).	(-) Demographics could have been offered in a table and be more clear (+) Good description of methodology (e.g., data collection, recruitment strategy, interview process, data analysis) (+) Good acknowledgement of researchers biases (via reflexivity) and society's oppression (i.e., reflecting on minority stress models when interviewing) (+) Good use of quotes throughout the account
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Anzani et al., (2020)	Italy	To investigate how trans masculine and non-binary individuals describe their bodies during sexual activities.	They mention about masculine and non-binary phenomological approach, without any theoretical framework for reference	Sample size: 361 Age: age range 18 and 74 years Ethnicity: 277 White, 25 No answer/others, 22 Biracial/multiracial, 18 Hispanic/Latin, 11 Asian/Asian American, 5 Black/African American, 3 American Indian/Alaska Native Sexual orientation: 82 Queer, 74 Bisexual, 73 Pansexual, 43 Asexual, 32 Other, 28 Gay, 19 Heterosexual, 6 Lesbian, 4 Fluid Gender Identity: Not described in the paper but collected as a write-in text to allow people to express their identity instead of using predetermined containers/taxonomies.	Study design: Qualitative part of a larger mixed-method investigation Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling via Facebook, Reddit, Tumblr, friends, and other means (as mentioned in the study). Data collection method: One line open-ended single question (i.e., "Please, describe how you use your body during sex") Data analysis: Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2014)	* Eleven themes were then summarised in 4 themes: Relational Factors, Behavioural Factors, Sexual Roles, Transgender Related Factors. * Some participants mentioned engaging in different practices (e.g., bottoming, anal sex) and found it affirming. * For the most part participants responded in ways that was coded as Behavioural Factors. * Some participants mentioned how hormone helped them to feel more comfortable, others talked about how some physical changes led to less positive sexual experiences.	(-) Implications are mentioned but short compared to the depth of detail of the rest of the paper. (-) No mentioning of the implications of using in-text instead of interviews specifically for this community (as generally internet spaces have often been described as safe in other research) (+) Good description of demographics (+) Good description of methodology (e.g., sample characteristics, data collection ,data analysis)
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Auer et al., (2014)	Germany	To understand how sexual orientation changes in transsexual population in relation to relevant transitioning 'real-life' experiences (i.e., hormone therapy, surgical operation).	Not stated	Sample size: 115 (70 MtF and 45 FtM) Age: MtF age range 18-80 years. FtM age range 19-60. Ethnicity: it was mentioned in the study all caucasian Sexual orientation: in the MtF group the following was reported: 51.4% attraction to females (gynephilic), 25.7% attraction to males (androphilic), 12.9% to neither (analloerotic), and 10% attraction to both (bisexual). In the FtM group the following was reported: 73% attraction to females (gynephilic), 13.3% attraction to males (androphilic), 8% attraction to both (bisexual), and 2% to neither	Study design: Mixed Methods Sampling strategy: Convenience sampling, recruited through the endocrine outpatient clinic Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich Data collection method: self-report questionnaire, including questions about first sign of gender dysphoria, first time coming out, start of hormone treatment, date of sex re assignment surgery, date of starting "real-life experience", date of first meeting with mental health professional. Data analysis: ANOVA between more than two groups for sexual orientation, post-hoc comparison	* One participant talked about sexual orientation shift after sex-affirming surgery * Sexual orientation can shift during transition but also influenced by previous experiences. * Transition alone cannot explain change in sexual orientation.	(-) No mention of reflexivity/positivity/use of supervision (-) No clear mention/reference to strategy for qualitative data analysis. (-) Implications poorly mentioned (-) Language used not inclusive considering recent developments and customs in trans research (+) Good outline of methodology for the quantitative part (+) Good use of quotes considering the word limitation and the big article (+) Good acknowledgement of some of the limitations of the study
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(analloerotic).  
Gender Identity:  
collected as FtM  
or MtF

Fisher's LSD. For  
qualitative  
analysis it only  
states that they  
were organised  
thematically,  
without  
mentioning a  
specific  
strategy/method.

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Rossman et al., (2019)	US	To explore experiences of CNM (Consensual Non-Monogamy) for trans individuals and their partners.	Not stated.	Sample size: 6 couples Age: age range 24-39 years Ethnicity: 10 White and non-Hispanic-non-Latinx, 2 multiracial (1 Half Iranian; 1 White-Asian) Sexual orientation: Queer, and Queer; Bisexual, and Trans Lesbian; Pansexual, and Gray asexual; Queer-pansexual, and Heterosexual but living in a lesbian relationship; Queer, and Top; Lesbian-queer, and Bisexual, sexual preference women, homoromantic. Gender Identity: 8 transgender. Couples were described as following. Femme, and I don't have an answer to describe my gender identity;	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) and snowball methodologies (Patton, 1990). Recruitment was carried out via email to trans communities via email and online via blogs and social network websites. Data collection method: In-person interviews. Data analysis: Grounded Theory Charmaz (2014)	* Key themes identified by the authors were: Impetus for CNM, Impediments to CNM, CNM Identity, and Relationships. * Sexual fantasies was connected with sexual identity process. Some participants talked instead about the opposite, how the sexual identity process was connected with sexual fantasies but also limiting themselves because of current relationships. * CNM was implemented by some participants to heal previous trauma, address issues of incompatibility in sex, develop solutions for challenges that arose during transitioning.	(-) Future directions/implications limited (+) Good mentioning of reflexivity and positionality (+) Overall good description of methodology (e.g., data collection, data analysis) (+) Good distribution of quotes throughout the paper (+) Good outline of interview question (+) Innovative article in the literature
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Transgender  
female-female,  
and M2F post-op  
transsexual; 1  
Trans man, and  
one Trans  
woman, female  
MtF; Male-to-  
female  
transsexual;; and  
Just female, cis  
female;  
Genderfluid non  
binary trans\*,  
and Cis; Trans  
female, and  
Femme.

\* Some  
participants  
talked on how  
CNM allowed  
them to find  
satisfying sexual  
relationship and  
better  
understand their  
bodies and how  
their needs can  
be met.

Rosenberg et al., (2019)	Australia	To understand the negotiation of psychological and physiological sexual shifts in a group of trans women taking gender-affirming hormones	They mention hermeneutic approach (Gadamer 1975) in the context of their data analysis	Sample size: 12 trans women receiving Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy (GAHT) for more than 12 months but not any surgical operation Age: age range 23-54 years old Ethnicity: not collected. Same as income because authors wanted to avoid the study seeming pathologizing or clinical. Sexual orientation: 2 heterosexual, the rest used a variety of items, such as lesbian, gay, queer, pansexual, bisexual, demisexual, polysexual, or sapiosexual Gender Identity: referred in the article as trans women	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: leaflets at local LGBTQ+ centres, sex work services, and snowball sampling Data collection method: interviews. A copy of transcripts and an invitation was sent to participants, offering a follow up interview, to which only 2 people agreed. All transcripts were approved via email.	* The authors grouped the data under the following main themes: experiences of GAHT, Physiological and Appearance Changes, Psychological shifts, Psychophysical Shifts in Orgasmic experiences, and Additional Minor Findings (i.e., mainly referring to hormones being essential for participants' self-acceptance). * Some participants mentioned about financial/interpersonal aspects influencing decisions. More specifically, some participants talked about needing to * Some participants talked about Physiological and Appearance Changes. They talked about	(-) Recommendation s only for research aspects, not clinical and theoretical (-) Unclear interview structure/schedul e (-) Little description of participants. A table would have been clearer (+) Good description of data analysis process and theoretical background (+) Good involvement of participants in data analysis process (+) Good use of quotes throughout paper
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changes in which area is sensitive (less or more), and in other body areas (e.g., skin being softer). It was also mentioned a shift/change in erogenous zones.

\* Some participants talked about Psychological shifts. These included: noticing less libido, needing to adjust GAHT dosage to re-gain arousal and sexual pleasure. In addition, some participants considered having less libido being a 'female thing', others reported a lessening in their gender dysphoria.

\* Some participants mentioned about Psychophysical Shifts in Orgasmic Experiences and it varied widely across

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participants. The type of orgasm changed (e.g., from feeling like a climax to 'waves over' one's body). Some participants talked about being more effort to achieve orgasms, others referred to them as a full body experience.

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Bockting et al., (2009)	US	To provide insights on how female-to-male transsexuals attracted to men experience their identity and sexuality (including psychological challenges and psychosexual adjustments)	Not stated	Sample size: 25 Age: age range 21–46 years old Ethnicity: 21 White, 2 Native American, 1 Asian, 1 Indian Sexual orientation: This was collected as part of the study measurements not in the demographics Gender Identity: stated in the study as sex-reassigned female-to-male transsexuals	Study design: Mixed methods Sampling strategy: community organisations, listservs, snowballing (previous participants) Data collection method: Semi-structure interview, and a survey with existing validated measures and new measures (these are all clearly outlined in the study). Data analysis: Repeated-measures analysis (e.g., ANOVA, MANOVA) for the quantitative dataset, and coding for themes for the qualitative aspect (this didn't have any methodological framework but the process is outlined in the paper).	Quantitative: * Sexual attraction, fantasy, emotional attachment, self-identification were more towards men for the transsexual group after sex reassignment compared to prior. * Transsexual respondents were comfortable with tier sexual orientation at present and in the past. They also reported high level of sexual satisfaction but less extroverted (this when compared to the non-transsexual group) * The transsexual group perceived themselves less feminine when compared to the non-transsexual group. Qualitative: * For some	(-) Literature overview is limited (-) No mention of reflexivity/supervision/bracketing (-) Quantitative measures were collected at one point but using repeated measures (especially for the sexual orientation aspect). Whilst this can be helpful practically, a longitudinal study or a repeated-measures design (collecting data at T1 and T2) would have been methodologically more appropriate. (-) Language used is not inclusive/trans affirmative. However, this needs to be understood in light of the year of publication of this study, which was more than
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participants  
 attraction toward  
 men made them  
 question about  
 re-assignment  
 surgery, whilst  
 others denied  
 themselves  
 attraction to men  
 until they felt  
 more  
 comfortable in  
 their manhood.  
 \* One  
 participants  
 identified as gay  
 man and  
 transsexual and  
 found their  
 bisexuality to be  
 a point of  
 appreciation of  
 themselves.  
 \* A few  
 participants  
 talked about  
 denying to  
 themselves  
 attraction  
 towards men  
 until after re-  
 assignment  
 because of  
 various reasons  
 (e.g., feeling  
 more socially  
 accepted, gay  
 trans men  
 delaying decision  
 for surgery

10 years ago.  
 (-) Poor  
 description of  
 qualitative data  
 analysis process  
 and the  
 methodological  
 framework used  
 (-) Not clear if the  
 comparison  
 group was used  
 for the  
 qualitative data  
 analysis (as it was  
 for the  
 quantitative  
 analysis)  
 (+) Good  
 description of  
 measures used  
 (both  
 quantitative and  
 qualitative)  
 (+) Inventive use  
 of a comparison  
 group for the  
 quantitative  
 dataset.  
 (+) Good use of  
 quotes  
 throughout the  
 whole paper

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because when younger believed men were attracted to women).

\* Participants mentioned a shift in their sexual fantasies through transitioning. For instance, half participants increased their confidence in their bodies, which made them shift their fantasies.

\* Hormone therapy increased participants sexual desire and experience of sex.

\* The majority of participants were comfortable with their bodies and found partners who accepted them.

\* Participants reported success in managing in a relationship, regardless of the gender identity of their partners.

10 participants

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were in a  
committed  
relationship at  
the time of the  
interview.

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Mellman (2017)	US	To investigate the relationship experiences of transgender men. This thesis has three articles inside and only two were included in this review. To explore the relationship of 24 couples where one of the partners is a transgender men.	Sexual Script Theory (Gagnon and Simon, 1973).	Sample size: 24 couples (n = 12 with a cis gender female partner; n = 12 with a cis gender male partner) Age: Age range 21-55 years old Ethnicity: 15 White, 4 Hispanic, 3 African American, 2 Other Sexual orientation: 13 Queer, 4 Gay, 4 Straight, 3 Bisexual Gender Identity: Trans men (as collected by researchers).	Study design: Qualitative Sampling strategy: Stratified sampling, recruitment occurred through various venues. Data collection method: in person in-depth individual and dyadic interviews Data analysis: Various methods were included	* For some couples, normative scripts and how people from the outside world perceived them changed through time, also related on their identity. For other couples, using the term queer allowed them to take the pressure off from confirming to gender roles. * Couples who were following homonormative scripts were integrated in the gay community. * Some participants experienced sex with gay men as validating. * Some participants spoke about the limitations of language in describing their sexuality within the relationship, especially in the context of sexual orientation labels.	(-) Little mentioning of implications for future research (+) Good outline of interview aspects, with some questions included (+) Good acknowledgement of biases and implementation of strategies to bracket/limit researcher's assumptions (+) Good description of methodology used
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Pugliese (2013)	US	To understand impact of gender transition on a couple's sexuality and sexual relationship, where both Female-to-Male (FTM) person and female cisgender partner are interviewed.	Systems theory (e.g., White, & Klein, 2008)	Sample size: 4 couples of trans men and female cisgender partners Age: age range 24-39 years old Ethnicity: 7 White Caucasian, 1 White Caucasian and American Indian. Sexual orientation: This was not collected as a demographic measure Gender Identity: trans men. This was not specified or detailed in their gender identity description in the study.	Study design: Qualitative (thesis) Sampling strategy: Purposive sampling, recruitment through email listservs and flyers to transgender social and support groups in Washington DC Data collection method: in person interview Data analysis: Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	* Some participants mentioned a shift in sex drive (e.g., more because it's a physical need rather than emotional reason) and finding ways to cope with this (e.g., masturbation) * Some participants talked about re-discovering what is pleasurable and explore body in new ways. * Some participants talked about shifting use in language to talk about sexual acts. * Some participants talked about struggling to fit in LGBTQ+ spaces (e.g., because the way they are perceived or because they appear straight)	(-) No involvement from experts by experience/consu ltants (-) No mention of supervision/refle xivity/bracketing (+) Overall good methodology and clearly reported (e.g., recruitment procedure, data analysis, theoretical background)
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Lindley et al., (2021)	US	To explore a community of non-clinical trans masculine and non-binary people's description of their sexual experiences and their sexual satisfaction.	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; 1.65% Lesbian; 1.1% Fluid Gender Identity: 177 Trans Masculine, 181 Non-binary	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 reported how hormones and surgery increased their sexual experiences (e.g., testosterone improves orgasm intensity, and surgery body confidence).	(+) Clear methodology (e.g., data collection, recruitment, data analysis) (-) no mention of reflexivity
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### ***Synthesis method***

Considering the heterogeneity and vastity of the studies, Narrative Synthesis was a viable methodology for this review (Popay et al., 2006). This framework is to be considered a guide rather than a prescriptive procedure. Table 4 presents the steps I followed and the rationale based on Popay and colleagues' (2006) guidance.

**Table 4**

*Step-by-step overview of data synthesis (Popay et al., 2006, pp.11-22)*

Component	Aim	Technique used
1. Develop a preliminary synthesis of the dataset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To provide a description of the studies included</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First tabulation: summarized methodology used by each study and key findings related to the review research question</li></ul>
2. Explore the relationship between studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To develop a theory of change that is coherent with the dissertation's theoretical framework</li><li>• To identify point of consonance and divergence between studies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Second tabulation: key aspects of various articles were grouped together, considering the relational ontology theoretical framework</li><li>• Concept mapping</li></ul>

3. Assess the robustness of the synthesis

- To assess the trustworthiness of the synthesis based on the appraisal tools and the previous tabulation method
- Presented data synthesis to research team in textual and visual form
- Attended several supervision meetings
- Organised consultation with colleagues to discuss review process
- Reflected on the process and wrote critically of this appraisal

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### ***Study characteristics***

Overall, 30 studies were included in the review. See Table 3. Most studies were qualitative (n=28) and a small number mixed-methods (n=2). Many studies clearly stated an underlying theoretical approach used for the study (n=19). Participants varied in their ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation (when this was collected). Interestingly, across the studies, in relation to gender identity, a variety of strategies were implemented to collect this demographic, with some studies using multiple choice option, whilst others a text entry. Studies were carried out mostly in Western countries, namely, 22 in the US, two in the UK, and in the Netherlands, and one only for the following countries, i.e., Italy, Germany, Canada, and Australia. Participants sample size varied from 8 to 361.

### ***Quality assessment***

Most of the studies included had a clear aim and research question. Mostly, studies engaged with the existing literature, contextualizing their findings, with only four providing little details of relevant background, (Bockting et al., 2009; Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Doorduin & van Berlo, 2014; Engelmann et al., 2022). Four studies were dissertations (Mellman, 2017; Pugliese, 2013; Richards, 2016; Rossman, 2016), hence, were not peer-reviewed. They all had good description of their methodology but limited details for implications, except from Pugliese (2013), which was also lacking in reporting about their own positionality.

Six out of the 30 studies included had poor description of the data analysis process (Auer et al., 2014; Baker, 2018; Bockting et al., 2009; Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Schilt & Windsor, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). For example, Cook-Daniels and colleague (2010) mentioned about organizing data in themes without specifying any methodological framework. This was also the case for Schilt and Windsor (2014) and Baker (2018).

Most studies implemented either snowball or convenience sampling, with recruitment via social media or local community venues being the most popular. Only five studies used different recruitment methods. Baker (2018) used purposive sampling to better match participants to the research aims. Doorduin and van Berlo (2014) used purposive sampling to obtain maximum variation regarding some demographics. Rossman et al (2019) used maximum variation sampling, Mellman (2017) stratified sampling, and Engelmann and colleagues (2022) quota sampling.

A considerable number of the studies did not report (or if they did was in limited details) about reflexivity or the relationship between researcher and participants (Auer et al., 2014; Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Davidmann, 2014; Engelmann et al., 2022; Motter & Softas-Nall, 2021; Platt & Bolland, 2017; Pugliese, 2013; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013; Scheim et al., 2019; Schilt & Windsor, 2014; Williams et al., 2013, 2016). Nevertheless, this could be explained by wordcount limitation for journal submission.

All but eight studies included ethical approval (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Davidmann, 2014; Doorduin & van Berlo, 2014; Murchison et al., 2023; Platt & Bolland, 2017; Rossman, 2016; Rossman et al., 2019; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013). However, two studies (Murchison et al., 2023; Rossman, 2016) did not report about ethical approval but about informed consent. Similarly, Davidmann (2014) did not mention about ethical approval but described the consent process with participants and took into considerations ethical issues for the dissemination of photos. Six out of 30 studies did not clearly state the research aims, some of them because they were written as part of a larger project with a different aim (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Schilt & Windsor, 2014; Tree-McGrath et al., 2018). Regardless of these limitations, the 30 studies were included.

### **Synthesis of findings**

Considering the ontological position of this thesis, it is impossible to have a neat container (i.e., a diagram or a flowchart) of the interaction between sexuality and gender. In addition, trying to confine the relationship between sexualities and gender would be opposite to a trans affirmative stance, as transness is not understood by the author as a linear process but a creative, unpredictable, always-evolving experience. Thus, the image below is a reductionist representation for reader-ease. Moreover, it is important to highlight how this review is limited and limiting. Sexuality is not found in books but exists relationally. As Lucie Fielding stated, queer and trans individuals have always been “ingenious *when it comes to sexual and erotic expression*” (Fielding, 2021, p.93): we are “*sexy mad scientists*” (Bellwether, 2013, p.6).

To the question: *what does the literature say about how sexualities of TNB people change alongside transitioning and what is people's experience of that change?* The answer is not a simple one. Societal scripts territorialize bodies, gender configurations, and how different gendered bodies should look in a given space (e.g., body expectation for gay trans men, difficulties experienced by a trans couple that looks ‘straight’ and feeling rejected by lesbian/gay communities). Each space has a *flavour*, or in

other words, is territorialized by the machines<sup>9</sup> within a community (e.g., a traditional sports bar in a small town will look different and serve different drinks from a gay bar in a metropolis). Additionally, more-than-human aspects (e.g., GAHT, surgeries, prosthetics) during transition (and sometimes in relationship with others) can territorialize (e.g., second puberty), or de/re- territorialize the body (e.g., experiencing orgasms differently after GAHT, increased confidence, improved wellbeing, increased arousal). Based on my interpretation of the data, three aspects: Relationships, Language, and More-Than-Human Aspects aspects have a strong potential to be territorialize (i.e., limit, constrict, circumscribe), de-territorialize (i.e., open up opportunities, break from previous constraints), and re-territorialize (i.e., forming of new standards, new customs, new use of language) TNB people. This is not to say that other aspects did not have this potential but from the data, they were reported having this potential affect a higher number of times. The diagram below is a simplistic attempt to capture something that is complicated and multifaceted, as each relation has the rhizomatic potential to affect flows within assemblages.

The key aspects of this review (in a non-hierarchical order) are:

- Societal scripts
- Spaces
- Communities
- Relationships
- Language
- More-Than-Human Aspects
- Bodies

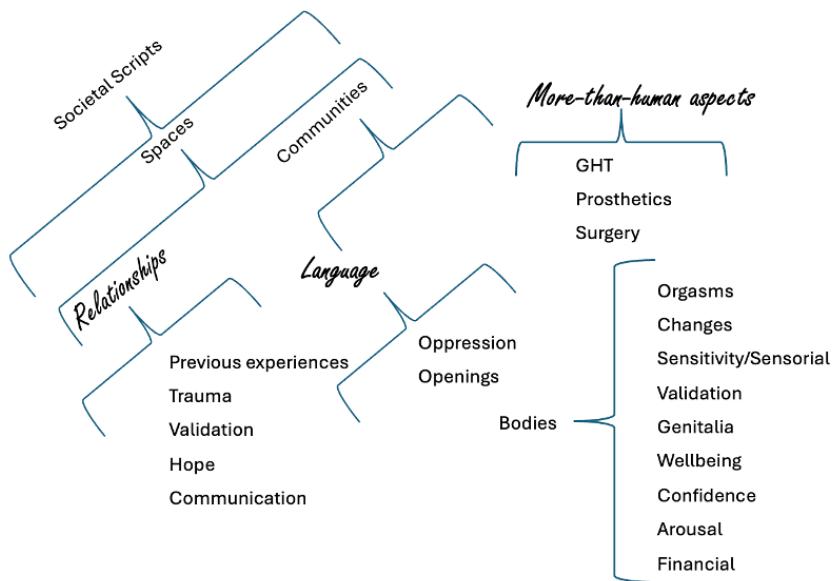
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<sup>9</sup> Another word Deleuze and Guattari used for assemblages (1984). Unstructured and dynamic arrangements of bodies (human and non-human) that are always in a relational becoming.



**Figure 4**

*Conceptual map to visually represent data synthesis of the systematic literature review*



### ***Transition***

Most of the papers spoke about the mutually influencing and unpredictable link between gender and sexualities (e.g., Baker, 2018; Nagoshi et al., 2012; Tree-McGrath et al., 2018). In some studies, participants mentioned how transition allowed them to discover other aspects of their sexualities. For example, Cook-Daniels and Munson (2015) highlighted how transitioning shaped participants' sexual arousal, and attraction. One of the participants from their study stated "*transitioning has helped me with the acceptance of my sexuality as well*" (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2015, p.160), whilst another noticed a change in their attraction to others "*once I came out as FTM, suddenly I was attracted to everyone*" (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2015, p.160). Transitioning was spoken about as a *second puberty* in some papers (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Doorduin & van Berlo, 2014;

Martin & Coolhart, 2022), especially in the context of GAHT. Some participants talked about discovering their sexual selves at a later stage “*in puberty [I avoided] it, discovering only at a relatively late age that I actually have something like sexual organs...*” (Doorduin & van Berlo, 2014, p. 663).

Bockting and colleagues (2019) researched identity and sexuality (i.e., sexual orientation, sexual satisfaction, social sex role) using a mixed-method design with 25 FtM attracted to men (i.e., bisexual or gay) who have undergone GAS. They also implemented a comparison group (n=75 of bisexual and gay men). For the quantitative data the questionnaires implemented were seven, inviting participants to rate these for past (i.e., before GAS), present, and ideal. The quantitative data demonstrated how sexual attraction, fantasy, emotional attachment, and self-identification were more towards men in the past compared to the present. Interestingly, participants rated themselves as comfortable with their sexual orientation at the time of the study, as well as in the past (i.e., rating prospectively before GAS). Thus, it appears from this study that participants did not change how comfortable they were with their sexual orientation but showed a change in some aspects of their sexualities. This might indicate that sexualities evolve in unpredictable ways with transitioning, whilst some aspects (in this case sense of comfort with one's sexual orientation) might remain stable.

Another mixed method study investigated changes in sexual orientation alongside transitioning (Auer et al., 2014). Auer and colleagues (2014) carried out a mixed-method study investigating changes in sexual orientation regarding transition-related events (e.g., GAHT, GAS), and a personal interpretation of that change. They collected data from 115 transexual people (70 MtF, and 45 FtM) who attended an outpatient endocrine clinic in Germany. Their study found that change in sexual orientation was frequent, albeit not significant (32.9 %, N = 23 of MtF, and 22.2 %, N = 10 of FtM). In reviewing their findings and the previous literature, they stated that it is not possible to demonstrate a change in sexual orientation over the course of one's life, and when this occur, it is not exclusively in the context of

transition-related events. They found how this might change due to a myriad of factors (e.g., previous experiences, social acceptance).

Sexualities were not always intertwined with gender. For instance, Nagoshi and colleagues (2012) interviewed 11 participants and in asking them if their sexual orientation defined their gender identity, almost half rejected a possible link. Similarly, in one paper exploring couples where one partner is undergoing transition, transition was referred to as *“just another life change”* (Motter & Softas-Nall, 2021, p.69).

People organize themselves around communities, often upon embracing (rigidly or loosely) a certain identity label, and they socialize in specific spaces. Thus, identifying a distinction between relationships, labels, communities, and spaces is an intellectual fabrication. Nevertheless, for reader-ease I attempted to divide them, creating an organizing system.

### ***Societal Scripts***

The relations of TNB people with other machines (e.g., spaces, people) is sometimes territorialized. In other more simplistic words, TNB people often experience the effect of prescriptive norms. These are dictated, for example, by gender norms (e.g., Bockting et al., 2009), by the assumptions of how a body should look like (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2019), or perform in specific spaces (e.g., Scheim et al., 2019), or when in relationships with others (e.g., Engelmann et al., 2022). These aspects are described more in details in the sections below. For instance, Bockting and colleagues (2019) stated how some of their participants *“expressed a desire to let go of the confines of gendered norms”* to explore *“their own transgender sexual scripts”* (Bockting et al., 2009, p. 698). One of their participants said that their parents were aware but not supportive of their trans and gay identity *“they do not understand why, after starting hormones and doing surgery, I would want to be with men”* and they *“could just hear”* their mother say *“if you were going to be attracted to men, why did you have to put me through all this”* -referring to transition (Bockting et al., 2009, p. 697). Another example comes

from Anzani and colleagues (2020), who stated how “sexuality” for TNB is “closely linked to social and gender roles ruled by society”, which “shape sexual scripts” and suggest “how to behave in sexual encounters” (Anzani et al., 2021, p.11). Some of their participants talked about trying to have sex in an heteronormative way: “*I use a strap-on to simulate heterosexual sex*” (Anzani et al., 2021, p.10).

### ***Spaces***

Gender is always becoming, performed by individuals in context (Butler, 2022). Many papers talked about how some spaces were territorialized (e.g., Scheim et al., 2019), whilst others re-territorialized (e.g., Platt & Bolland, 2017, Murchison et al., 2023). Scheim and colleagues (2019) interviewed 40 trans men navigating sexual fields with male partners. They mentioned how expectations and cultural norms differ in gay male spaces compared to queer spaces. One of their participants stated: “*I actually tend to identify more with lesbians than cisgender gay men – bisexual men, too, even – just because a lot of cisgender sexual queer men, I find that they tend to be very focused on physical bodies, and there’s this whole “ew, vagina” sort of idea.*” (Scheim et al., 2019, p. 572). Online spaces, among represented new avenues to explore relationships in a safe way, and easier to set boundaries. For instance, Murchison and colleagues (2023) interviewed 30 TNB young adults to understand how they navigated their relationships. One of the interviewees talked about Facebook as a supportive space where “*you can talk to people who can understand where you’re coming from and actually give good advice, or just listen*” (Murchison et al., 2023, p. 2171). However, other participants found online spaces, especially dating sites “*make [the participant] feel bad*” because you see “*the attention cisgender traditionally attractive abled White people get in comparison to me, a transgender fat Deaf*” (Murchison et al., 2023, p. 2161). Platt and Bolland (2017) talked about the complex issue of disclosing one’s trans identity. One of the participants spoke specifically about dating apps. Josh, 23 at first thought that “*Nobody’s even going to [...] want to be with me, because I’m a freak, basically.*” Then what helped Josh

*“change [Josh’s] mind” was that “there’s a lot of trans men on OkCupid” and started thinking “Okay, so if all these guys are all on here, then maybe I have a shot” (Platt & Bolland, 2017, p.171).*

For some participants, not only their transition had an impact on their sexual lives, but their lives (and sexual lives) had an impact on their transition. Rosenberg and colleagues (2019) interviewed 12 trans women in Australia to understand psychological and psychosexual shifts upon receiving GAHT for at least 12 months. For instance, Claire, one of their participants, stated that due to sex work “*most clients like a bit of rogering these days, they want the real thing, so sometimes I’ll stop the hormones so I can get an erection*” (Rosenberg et al., 2019, p.7). The fetishization of TNB bodies was mentioned in several papers was (e.g., Platt & Bolland, 2017; Rosenberg, Tilley, and Morgan, 2019), either in the context of dating or sex work.

### ***Communities***

TNB people transitioning have discussed the territorializing or re-territorializing affects of specific communities (and identities). For some participants, transitioning implied losing one’s community (e.g., Davidmann, 2014), whilst for others, facilitated integration (e.g., Mellman, 2017; Pugliese, 2013).

Davidmann (2014) carried out a project integrating qualitative methods and photo elicitation (n=5) to represent intimate trans relationships. Lee, one of the participants, talked about this shift from “*before*” transition, where Lee “*was a dyke and enjoyed the friendship, the strength*” and “*the sisterhood in being seen as female*”. Whereas later Lee was “*so vocal about being trans*” and did not “*fit into the trans community*” either because Lee did not “*really fit into ‘male’ and*” not “*into ‘female’ anymore*” and felt more “*in-between*” (Davidmann, 2014, p.647).

Other studies talked about similar difficulties experienced within some queer communities. For instance, Rowniak, and Chesla (2012) interviewed 12 trans men within the queer and gay community in San Francisco. They highlighted how many of their participants “*commented about the transphobia*

*within the lesbian community and the feeling among some that transmen had betrayed the community”* (Rowniak & Chesla, 2012, p.452). Some of their participants talked about understanding where their community was coming from. For instance, Jasper commented “*it’s really difficult to understand what it’s like to be a lesbian in the 80s and 90s. Which was [Jasper’s] experience*” because “*there’s so much oppression against women, and so much oppression against lesbians*” and “*you feel like you have to really tighten the boundaries of dyke-hood and you don’t want to let your ranks be diminished*” (Rowniak & Chesla, 2012, p.452). Similarly, Platt and Bolland (2017) interviewed 38 TNB people’s experiences of relationships. Amy, one of the participants stated trying to date “*a few bisexual men because I figured [...] they should feel comfortable no matter what configuration I have. But when I came out to them they said, “Oh, I can’t date you, I want to date a real woman”* (Platt & Bolland, 2017, p.169).

For other TNB participants transitioning allowed them to feel more integrated in a community. For instance, Mellman (2017) interviewed 24 couples where one of the partners was a trans gender man and the other cis gender. Mellman found that for some couples, normative scripts facilitated integration. Similarly, Pugliese (2013) interviewed 4 couples (i.e., each made of one trans gender man, and one cis gender partner) to understand the impact that transition had on sexuality and a relationship’s sexuality. Participants reported mixed experiences. For instance, “*Whitney and Andrew are married*” and experienced “*straight privilege as a result of getting married as an opposite-sex couple*” (Pugliese, 2013, p.51), with Andrew identifying as lesbian before transitioning and “*now identifies as queer but is comfortable being read publicly as straight*” (Pugliese, 2013, p.52). Nevertheless, participants from the study mostly reported experiencing “*loss*” (Pugliese, 2013, p.55) within the LGBT community. One transgender partner, who with their partner “*were pretty active in the LGBT community*”, commented on how now they “*appear very straight*” and feel that they “*have to justify [their] presence in any LGBTQ meeting or gathering*”, and are feeling “*not quite sure...where [they] fit*” (Pugliese, 2013, p.55).

### ***Relationships***

Relationships (either sexual or romantic) offered nuanced becoming amongst machines, either in terms of territorialization (e.g., imposing gendered or racial social norms) (e.g., Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Lindley et al., 2021; Murchison et al., 2023; Platt & Bolland, 2017), de-territorialization (e.g., opening up opportunities for a new sense of self for TNB people) (e.g., Bockting et al., 2009; Neubauer et al., 2023), or re-territorialization (e.g., feeling validated in the relationship, which increased TNB people feelings of belonging to a community) (e.g., Mellman, 2017; Motter & Softas-Nall, 2021; Murchison et al., 2023; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013; Williams et al., 2013).

Some papers talked about previous experiences playing a role in current participants' sexualities (e.g., Auer et al., 2014; Murchison et al., 2023). Auer and colleagues (2014) carried out a mixed-method study interviewing 115 trans individuals to explore their changes in sexual orientation alongside their transition (e.g., real-life, hormones). One of the participants said how the shift in "*sexual attraction*" was part of their "*biography*" as they "*had experienced a lot of violence through men*" (Auer et al., 2014, p.9). The authors further commented on how change in sexual orientation was not due to any transition-related aspect but more because of the individual's personal experience. Another participant (MtF) mentioned that "*sexual desire decreased [partly] with hormone treatment*" but they also "*turned away from women as sexual partners*" because they "*experienced a lot of reactions that hurt [them]*" (Auer et al., 2014, p.9). Murchison and colleagues (2023) highlighted that for "*some people dating options was limited by ableism, cissexism, racism, sexism, and/or sizeism*" (Murchison et al., 2023, p. 2161). For instance, one participant stated how previous experiences made them decide to not "*date White people anymore*" (Murchison et al., 2023, p.2171).

Some relationships (e.g., partnership or sexual) helped TNB feeling validated in their gender (e.g., Anzani et al., 2021; Mellman, 2017; Murchison et al., 2023; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013; Tree-McGrath et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2013), demonstrating how sexualities (e.g., sexual experiences,

sexual partners, relationships) can have an effect on one's experience of the self (re-territorialization).

For instance, Cheyenne, a participant from Rowniak and Chesla's study (2013), reported how "*prior to transition*" he identified as a lesbian and "*had planned to continue with women as sex partners*" but then he noticed "*gay men were cruising [him]*" and "*that must mean that I'm passing really well*". Then, "*it kinda shifted*" for him and he "*stopped dating women*" to identify "*as a gay man, and just started dating gay men*" (Rowniak & Chesla, 2012, p.455). Finding sex with men validating by trans men/trans masculine people was mentioned in other articles (e.g., Mellman, 2017; Williams et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, as above-mentioned, for other people gay relationships were not so accepting (e.g., Scheim et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2013). For instance, Schilt and Windsor (2014) explored how the sexual practices of trans men change as their embodied masculinity shifts during transitioning in a group of 74 trans men. Adam, one of the participants, commented on bottom surgery saying how "*it's not an unattractive idea*" but "*also, you know, I like what I have now. It works.*" However, it is "*a little harder to get dates because it's something to explain [...] because I date gay men, so that can be a challenge. But in terms of my own comfort level with my body, I feel pretty good about it.*" (Schilt & Windsor, 2014, p.744).

Neubauer and colleagues (2023) investigated 12 TNB people's experience of dating and relationships whilst going through social transitioning. They mentioned how resilience, and hope were important aspects for most participants, and, especially experiencing love from both themselves and their partners. Hunter, from their study, said that "*there are people out there that won't accept you*" and "*look at you like you're a disgrace, you're a freak of nature [...] but don't let those kinds of people rule your life because...there are people out there who are accepting, who will love you unconditionally, and for who you are. And...to not give up.*" (Neubauer et al., 2023, p. 373).

### ***Language***

Use of language (e.g., for attraction, body parts, within relationships) sometimes allowed for exploration and new becomings<sup>10</sup> (e.g., Davidmann, 2014; Motter, & Softas-Nall, 2021; Pugliese, 2013; Williams et al., 2013), whilst other times was limiting, shutting down opportunities (e.g., Davidmann, 2014; Platt & Bolland, 2017; Richards, 2016; Tree-McGrath et al., 2018).

Language can be experienced as limiting by TNB people because of others' restricted understanding of the nuanced interlink between gender and sexualities. Platt and Bolland (2017) discussed how some participants who have fluid sexual attraction struggled with the rigidity of labels as understood by other people. Remy, one of the participants, commented: "*the biggest challenge*" is "*trying to explain it to people, just because I'm not really a binary and straight trans\* guy.*" People asked Remy "*if you wanted to date boys, why didn't you just stay a girl?*" and I'm like 'no, that's two completely different things.'" (Platt & Bolland, 2017, p.170).

Davidmann (2014) stated on the limitations of language: "*The failure of existing terminology [...] to adequately describe the nuances of participants' self-identifications of gender and sexuality limits the ways in which selves and partnerships*" are "*understood and defined*" (Davidmann, 2014, p.650). Elen, one of the participants, who identifies as "*in between male and female*" talked about the complexity of sexuality and gender intersection within trans partners. Commenting on the relationship, Elen said "*trans lesbian works on the basis that we tend to identify largely as female—that's the simple answer*". Then, further expanded: "*when you're not fully male and not fully female, sexuality often becomes something quite fluid or hard to pin down. For example, would you say that Jenny-Anne and I are a gay*

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<sup>10</sup> An affect is another word for becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Anything can be agentic that offers a change in entity and its capacity (e.g., in practices, in social aspects). Becomings are the rhizomically and unpredictable influences within an assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2022). For novice readers, becoming is the movement, the change

*couple? Or a lesbian couple? Or some sort of funny straight couple? How do you define it? It depends on which you take as a base. If you take just our physical bodies you could say we're a gay couple. If you take our personalities and presentations we're a lesbian couple. You could say it's a straight relationship—the male bit of me is attracted to the female bit of Jenny-Anne and visa [sic] versa . . . When you're trans, what a person is far less important than who they are.”* (Davidmann, 2014, p.643).

Other times, language was a tool for self-affirmation, allowing to set boundaries, or foster healthy relationships. For instance, from Pugliese's study (2013), one trans participant commented that before coming out to their (cis) partner they were not feeling “*comfortable being in bed because the terms [their partner] used and the sexual relationship was uncomfortable.*” They further expanded “*I didn't feel like it was okay to say 'No, that's not okay' to some things because it was just...I didn't want to put myself more out there than I already was*” (Pugliese, 2013, p.63). However, coming out and using new language had benefits for the couple.

Williams and colleagues (2013) interviewed 25 trans men to explore how they use their bodies, language, and social resources in *doing* sexuality in relationship to gender. They stated how “*a loose coupling between gendered and sexualized embodiments occurred through taking on a queer identity*” (Williams et al., 2013, p.734). For instance, Richard, one of their participants who identified as “queer” and a “*trans guy*” stated “*I knew I wasn't going to be happy in any sort of stereotyped gender, but. . .I'm much more comfortable with a wider spectrum of masculine things*” (Williams et al., 2013, p.734). Another of their participants, Patrick, who identified as a “*butch lesbian*” before transition, and at first, struggled to define his sexuality, but then, used the label queer. He stated “*I'm queer because I can't wrap my head around it*” as he did not identify as a straight guy because he was still interested in women, whilst wanting to have sex with men.

Motter and Softas-Nall (2021), commented under one of their themes (i.e. Relationship Changes Connected to Transition) that an important change for people was around language and communication

as couples had to be honest, and open because of transition. For instance, this was mentioned by Madelyn who said that transition helped her to be “*really extremely open*” with her partner, whilst “*Sue and Anne discussed that honesty was a mutual process.*” (Motter, & Softas-Nall, 2021, p.63). This was observed by the authors in the relationship overall, as well as specifically in the sexual field. Another couple, Conor and Amy, mentioned that through transition “*their sexual behaviours remained consistent, they mostly changed their language for describing body parts or sexual activities*” (Motter, & Softas-Nall, 2021, p.63). Re-labelling body parts was mentioned by several other studies (e.g., Martin & Coolhart, 2022; Williams et al., 2013). For instance, Williams and colleagues (2013) found that some of their participants struggled with their genitalia, whilst others used new language for a better embodiment and alignment with their gender. Lathe commented about his vagina as a “*traitor body part*”, betraying his male identity, whilst Steven like “*other trans men, used the term from hole*” (Williams et al., 2013, p.729). Together with finding new language, some of their participants during transition discovered new ways of engaging with their bodies sexually.

### ***More-Than-Human Aspects***

Transitioning *might* include various aspects, from changes in use of language (e.g., one’s name, pronouns), to medical treatments (e.g., GAHT, surgery), with none of these aspects being considered part of a linear process. The papers included in this review considered transitioning in a variety of ways, with some including only participants taking GAHT for more than 12 months (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2019), whilst others requiring people to self-identify as trans (e.g., Williams et al., 2016). The sexualities-gender assemblage is composed by a series of machines relating to one another, such as people, language, and more-than-human aspects. This latter element in the context of transition is composed by the various technologies (i.e., hormones, surgical operation, use of prosthesis)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> It is relevant to note for the reader that other elements (e.g., spaces, language) could be considered more-than-human. The given organizing structure and language used was decided by the researcher for reader’s ease.

In most of the papers reviewed, more-than-human machines yielded creative openings (i.e., de- and re-territorialize) to re-discover (or discover anew) one's relationship with themself (e.g., Engelmann, Nicklisch & Nieder, 2022; Rossman, 2016; Rowniak & Chesla, 2012), with their bodies (e.g., Rosenberg, Tilley, & Morgan, 2019), or in relation to others (e.g., Engelmann, Nicklisch & Nieder, 2022; Lindley et al., 2021). At the same time, sometimes societal norms had a superscribing influence on one's experience norms (e.g., the assumption that hormones are significantly responsible for one's sexuality) (e.g., Rosenberg, Tilley, & Morgan, 2019; Pugliese, 2013; Rossman, 2016).

Several papers talked about a change in one's orgasm (e.g., Doorduin & van Berlo, 2014; Rosenberg et al., 2019; Rossman, 2016; Williams et al., 2016). For instance, Williams and colleagues (2016) interviewed 25 self-identifying trans women to explore their sexuality. Some of the trans women talked about a change in their orgasm. For instance, Emily said how orgasms felt not explosive but rather like a "*leaking from her penis*" and this being "*more internal non-penile orgasm*" involving the whole body. This seemed allowing a more gendered embodiment. Another participant, undergone GAS, Jane, commented on how "*orgasms since surgery [...] instead of the male mode, it's like surges. Like waves, going back and forth*" (Williams et al., 2016, p. 1673).

As mentioned, creative becomings are observable in several studies. For instance, Rosenberg and colleagues (2019) talked about how for some participants, GAHT allowed developing new erogenous zones. For instance, Ella, one of the participants said "*much more of my body were erogenous zones than there were before*" such as "*in my nipples [...] my inner thighs*" which became "*much more sensitive to sexual touch*". Finally, she said how overall "*the hormone treatment made [...] it spread out, where I feel sexual when I'm touched*" (Rosenberg et al., 2019, p.8). Engelmann and colleagues (2022) interviewed 12 TNB individuals to explore specific sexual components (i.e., good sex, sexual pleasure). One of their participants, Finn, commented: "*before [the mastectomy] I was always like, 'No, please don't, don't look'*" and wanted to leave their clothes on and "*leave the light off, and no, I don't want to*

*see all that.”* Then, “*with the surgeries the self-confidence grows as well*” (Engelmann et al., 2022, p. 1693). The authors further commented how GAS allowed participants to relax because it “*aligned their bodies more to their identities*” and “*helped participants to feel more authentic and be more confident*” (Engelmann et al., 2022, p. 1693).

On some occasions, more-than-human aspects, allowed for new becomings, whilst being re-territorialized by the existing machines within society. For instance, Rossman (2016) interviewed 8 couples (using Grounded Theory) where one of the partners was trans, to understand sex, sexuality and sexual practices of trans individuals. Sometimes the “*heteronormative way*” (Rossman, 2016, p.76) was mentioned either directly or indirectly by participants. Either this influencing their future choices or their current experiences. For instance, in the context of relationships, Garrett, a “*24, female-to-male transsexual*” stated: “*once I start using testosterone my clitoris will enlarge. So, I’m hoping to sort of be able to use that in a more heteronormative way*” (Rossman, 2016, p.76).

### ***Bodies***

Bodies are a relevant aspect in one’s transition in relation to their sexualities. Some participants of the studies struggled with some of their body parts (e.g., Richards, 2016; Platt & Bolland, 2017; Williams et al., 2013). However, sometimes TNB engaged in new gender-affirming sexual practices (e.g., Schilt & Windsor, 2014; Williams et al., 2013), or developed a better relationship with their bodies because of GAHT (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2019). Thus, the body is both re-/territorialized by norms, hormones, and relationships, as well as creatively freed by the same machines (or others).

Richards (2016) interviewed 11 TNB people and implemented the use of LEGO to understand trans people’s sexuality, using phenomenological and hermeneutic lenses. One of the participants, Scot Sam, said how he “*required a personally congruent body in order to express his sexuality*” (Richards, 2016, p. 81). Another of the participants from the study, Mr Fox, could not “*relate sexually to men*

*before becoming one himself*" so his "sexual expression" with men needed to be "*mediated through his own masculinity*" (Richards, 2016, p. 74).

In other studies, the body was creatively re-discovered. For instance, Steven, one of the participants from Williams and colleagues' study (2013) discovered anal sex during transition and this made him feel more like "*a gay man [by] taking it up the butt*" (Williams et al., 2013, p.731). The re-claiming of the anus was also the case for some trans women. In Williams and colleagues' study (2016), participants who did not receive GAS experienced anal sex that was "*seen through the lens of gendered embodiment*". Melanie, one of their participants, said how she liked being anally penetrated as "*it's the closest I can come to being female*". Carla, another participant, commented: "*[anal sex] made me feel more feminine*" (Williams et al., 2016, p. 1672).

### **Critical reflections of the review process**

Compared to previous reviews, this systematic review includes mixed methods studies, thus, providing further insights about the affects within the sexualities-gender assemblage for TNB people. In other words, it adds nuance to previous reviews. Furthermore, including non-binary people allows to expand inclusivity of participants.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Clinical implications***

Firstly, it might be helpful for professionals to be aware of the fluid, always evolving, non-linear development of TNB people's sexualities and how this might (or might not!) have an impact on their gender, relationships, and language. The importance of language, and an awareness towards the interaction between gender and sexuality was also suggested by Pipkin and colleagues (2023) in their review. For a practical framework, readers are signposted to Lucie's Fielding chapter on ethical curiosity (Fielding, 2021), a therapeutic stance composed by three aspects: dismantling entitlement, seeking permission, and treating the client in the room. Sometimes, these are offered as questions, others as

reflections for the clinicians to reflect on individually or within supervision spaces. These are not a formulaic template but rather a therapeutic stance or an adaptable framework.

Secondly, as TNB lives have historically (and continue to be) territorialized by various machines (e.g., medical system, binary gender system, normative cis-het sexual practices), it is suggested that clinicians working with this population are critically reflecting about their practice, and expand their knowledge on this field. For the former, practitioners might consider engaging in self-reflection, and ask themselves (individually, in group or in supervision): what is important for the person I have in front of me? If I have some questions or comments, who are they for? Which assumptions do I bring to this interaction? If I need to learn/challenge my thinking, how can I best achieve this? These questions were drawn from affirming practices with trans and GNC people of colour (Chang & Singh, 2016). For the latter clinical recommendation, further their knowledge, interested clinicians are invited to do this in a *fun, engaging, and respectful* way. The queer community is notoriously creative and prolific: from writing zines (Barker, 2011; Bellwether, 2013), to publishing YouTube videos (Jammidodger, 2011) or books (Roche, 2018). It is suggested that clinicians in learning maintain an open mindset, as they are not learning *all* about TNB sexualities but about *one* experience/view. I invite clinicians not in thinking of collecting knowledge (in a territorializing way) but in developing a constant, humble curiosity.

### ***Research implications***

Considering that most of the studies involved Western, white, well-educated participants, alternative recruitment, and study design are required. For instance, engaging in field or ethnographic studies within online communities or for individuals who attend TNB-inclusive sex-positive spaces could widen who are included in research. It is evident how not many studies above mention asexuality. Hence, a further exploration of this aspect is required. Additionally, most of the papers used either Grounded Theory or Thematic Analysis as data analysis strategy, and only Davidmann (2014), and Richards (2016) integrated non-verbal aspects in their studies, with the former implementing

photographs and the latter LEGO. This territorializes how sexualities for TNB people is being studied. Thus, adding more-than-human aspects (e.g., creative methodologies, walking tours) could provide richer insights, and perhaps show various flows within the machines of the sexualities-gender assemblage.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This review had several strengths. Firstly, three consultants were involved at all stages of the review through regular meetings. This added expertise and opportunities for reflection (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Secondly, including both qualitative and mixed-methods papers, significantly increased the breadth of the studies included. Thirdly, this review was presented in the context of a clearly stated theoretical background (Fox & Alldred, 2022), which adds further rigor to the process. Finally, including dissertations was both a strength and a limitation. The advantage was to include relevant data, and possibly welcoming views different from mainstream publications. However, the possible disadvantage of this was lacking a formal peer-review process- as universities across the globe have various evaluation processes.

This review comes, nonetheless, with some clear limitations, some of which are due to the time constraints, and others to the nature of the studies. Regarding the former aspect, having limited time as a researcher meant that grey literature (e.g., Reddit, YouTube) could not be included. Including these would have added relevant insights to the existing knowledge. Furthermore, most studies were from Western countries, and included predominantly white participants. Therefore, possible overshadowing the wider experiences of the TNB population. Finally, not including GNC individuals might have excluded studies with TNB people that identify as GNC or studies with indigenous populations that are GNC but do not use the term TNB. Nevertheless, GNC might include other queer identities (e.g., cis lesbian, cis gay men) who do not necessarily undergo transition or do not identify as trans. Whether to include GNC

individuals or not in studies is a controversial topic that needs addressing to reach a consensus within the research community. An alternative would be for studies to be specific about their research question. For instance, to clearly state in their recruitment: TGNC individuals *who are transitioning/transitioned*. However, it is important to note that every decision to have more stringent inclusion criteria limits the pool and the views of responding. It is a territorializing affect within the research machine.

### **Rationale for the current study**

The literature above outlined has a paucity of studies in the UK (n=2), and both were carried out 10 (Davidmann, 2014) or 8 (Richards, 2016) years ago. Additionally, considering the intricate aspect of sexualities with gender and other aspects (e.g., societal norms, communities), it is relevant and important to carry out a narrative study to understand how people present their stories through time. The element of change through time is especially important considering the rhizomic non-linear unfolding of TNB sexualities. This is better executed through the implementation of Narrative Inquiry (NI), and creative methods, using the lenses of a post-humanist framework, because it facilitates considering the *self* as a “*rhizomatic story*” (Sermijn et al., 2008, p.648) whereby non-traditional and unpredictable presentations of selfhood might emerge, bringing richness to the existing narratives.

### **Relevance for clinical practice**

Based on the World Health Organization definition (World Health Organisation, 2006), sexuality is a “*central aspect of being human*” and comprehends various aspects (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, pleasure), and is experienced through desires, fantasies, behaviours, practices and relationships. The way one engages with and explores their sexuality is influenced by a multitude of factors (e.g., secondary sex characteristics, culture, spirituality). Sexual health is defined as “*a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality*”, which requires freedom to experience “*pleasurable and safe sexual experiences*” (World Health Organisation, 2006).

Support to mental wellbeing is often offered by psychological therapies. In the UK, there are different professionals that deal with this human aspect, including Clinical Psychologists. The professional standards for this profession are set by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). In their standards they state how Clinical Psychologists must recognize the *"impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice"* (HCPC, 2023), and act in a non-discriminatory and inclusive way. Clinical Psychologists must also respond to how people's needs might be influenced by being part of a protected characteristic (HMSO, 2010). However, the HCPC has no specific guidelines for Clinical Psychologists to work with LGBTQ+ communities. The British Psychological Society (BPS) is the representative body for Clinical Psychologists in the UK. The BPS set some guidelines for Clinical Psychologists Working with Gender, Sexuality and Relationship Diversity (GSDR), which clearly outline how GSDR communities have historically been stigmatized and oppressed (BPS, 2019). This, together with the global discriminatory environment towards GSDR people might affect clients (i.e., through internalized negative attitudes towards themselves or experienced by others) as well as Clinical Psychologists. Thus, Clinical Psychologists are invited to recognize their assumptions and biases, and be aware of the existing literature. With this in mind, the current thesis contributes to the existing literature on TNB sexualities, and, as such, represents a helpful resource for Clinical Psychologists working with GSDR communities.

### **Research aim and question**

The current available scientific research on sexualities for TNB people often investigates sexual health, or sex education, with very little exploration of trans people's views of sexuality. Hence, the aim of this study is to further understand TNB people's experience of their sexualities. The research question is:

1. Have the sexualities of TNB people (aged 18-30 years old) changed alongside their gender?

### **Methods**

#### **Overview**

This chapter begins by outlining the rationale for qualitative research. This is followed by the ontological and epistemological stance adopted for the project, and the case for using NI, implementing creative methods. Then, study design, ethical considerations, and Expert by Experience (EbE) involvement are described. Subsequently, the procedure and data analysis processes are illustrated. Finally, the chapter ends with considerations for rigour and research quality.

## **Methodology**

### ***Qualitative approach***

In psychology, research can be defined as the process of telling a story, investigating a phenomenon, or trying to find a solution to an existing problem (Barker et al., 2015). Quantitative research is often positivist (i.e., there is an objective truth to be studied), and the researcher is considered bias-free. Originally, these principles belonged to hard sciences but have also been applied to social science (Becker et al., 2012). However, this modus operandi in research has been criticized as it can lead to simplistic assumptions about human experience, which is ultimately complex and multifaceted (McGrath & Johnson, 2003). Qualitative research is often favoured to quantitative research because it allows to explore complex experiences in detail with less restrictions (C. Barker et al., 2015). In addition, it is a suitable method for discovery-oriented research. A qualitative approach was selected for this thesis as sexualities are a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, with a paucity of studies carried out in the UK. Qualitative methodologies can have a variety of ontological and epistemological stances, which should be congruent with the selected Methods.

### ***Ontological and epistemological stance***

In this project, I implemented relational ontology, with queer epistemology and epistemology of ignorance.

**Relational ontology.** Relational ontology, rooted in the tradition of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is a post-humanist philosophical movement (Braidotti, 2013), whereby reality is not agentic (i.e., an

object/person causes something) but is a continuous and unpredictable relational becoming (i.e., human and non-human elements interact in an ever-evolving flow) (Potts, 2004). More specifically, this thesis is influenced by Deleuze's Spinozist ontology (Fox & Alldred, 2022). For a detailed explanation of this ontological position see the Introduction section.

A methodology using this framework must consider the complex flow of human and non-human components. This has an impact on every aspect of the research, the first being the research question. Then, the data collection method. Authors suggest that potentially any method "*open to a more-than-human sensibility*" can be used (Fox & Alldred, 2022). As such, this study implemented art-based methods (Groenewald & Essack, 2023) together with 1:1 interviews for data collection. An additional implication was using NI as data analysis process, whereby one's story was understood within a specific geographical-socio-cultural context. Hence, the analysis of the interviews considered human (e.g., relationships, bodies), and non-human (e.g., cities, neighbourhoods, historical events, internet platforms) aspects, allowing for nuanced non-hierarchical flows of reality to emerge from the data. This is in line with what is suggested in the existing literature on post-humanist approaches, whereby interviewees of qualitative projects are considered not actors but key informants, offering knowledge about a specific setting (Fox, & Alldred, 2022). Moreover, for data analysis, I did not use any pre-existing coding forcing to integrate human and non-human aspects, but I immersed myself in participants' stories and these aspects emerged regardless (e.g., mentioning of online spaces, cities). At the writing up stage, assemblages of relations were represented verbally and graphically, with relevant examples. Finally, at the dissemination stage, I commissioned a trans graphic illustrator to produce images of each individual participant's account. The artist had access to a summary of my data analysis, and the drawings are being produced at the time of this submission.

**Queer epistemology.** In NI, stories are told about one's experience and these might vary based on the listener, and the wider context. This is akin to the idea of what in queer studies is defined

*performativity*: a context-based act that is being shaped by and shapes reality (Butler, 2002). Hence, there is no central tenet and there is not a single *true* story (Chödrön, 2008). Stories between (and within) individuals connect in intricate rhizomic ways. In queer methodologies, as well as in post-humanist social research, the researcher (and their identities) cannot be divided from their research (Heckert, 2016). Thus, I attempted to acknowledge my assumptions via using reflective journalling, speaking with reflective teams, and following a thorough dana analysis plan. Additionally, I coupled queer theory with epistemology of ignorance (Tuana, 2004) for this thesis.

**Epistemology of ignorance.** Through decades of academic research that has pathologized trans sexualities (Prunas, 2019), it is evident that knowledge production is contextualized: what is considered truth is contextual, and this can shift depending on the geographical and historical period. For instance, until a few hundred years ago, little was known about the female genitalia and female pleasure (Fielding, 2021). Thus, what constitutes *knowledge* is continuously *influenced by existing power structures*. Acknowledging that this is rooted in ignorance is a political stance, as well as functioning for additional bracketing for the research process. For a detailed description of how my epistemological and ontological positions influence this research, see Table 5.

### ***Narrative analysis and creative methods***

**Narrative inquiry.** NI (Wells, 2011) is an umbrella term referring to a group of qualitative methods that focuses on the construction and interpretation of stories and how language is used in doing that. This is in line with the ontological and epistemological framework of this thesis, and the research question. See Table 8 for data analysis process. Finally, NI is more suitable than other traditional qualitative research methodologies.

In NI, there is no one single story for each individual. Stories about one's life and experiences are shaped by the content of what is being said, the context, and the relationship between the speaker and

the listener, and how these aspects shape the story that is being told. This conceptualisation is coherent with a post-humanist approach, whereby the self can be understood as a rhizomatic story (Sermijn et al., 2008). Similarly to the rhizome, where there is no central tenet but multiple entryways, the self is understood not as a static identity but as an always-evolving element/agent/thing. This view of the self for NI is also akin to the concept of gender performativity (Butler, 2002), whereby gender is enacted, performed in a given context, understood by a social group, and can change through time and across contexts (e.g., butch and dyke culture in Western countries, burrnesha in Albania, hijra in South Asia).

The research question (i.e., Have the sexualities of TNB people, aged 18-30 years old, changed alongside their gender?) was constructed with the aim to favour multiplicities to emerge. More specifically, the protagonist of the question is sexualities. This implies that people, and aspects (human, and more-than-human), can have complexities, difference, be always evolving, and shape and be shaped by the protagonist (i.e., sexualities).

Additionally, this thesis' research question focused on change through time (i.e., alongside gender). This implies temporality. NI has as a particular strength for its temporal focus, as it asks participants to reflect on their narratives over time, allowing for a rhizomic unfolding.

Finally, NI was more suitable for this research compared to other qualitative methods. More specifically, NI considers temporality, context, and multiplicities of selves to a greater degree than other methodologies. For instance, Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) looks at different themes across participants. This approach might have the drawback of omitting the intricate relationship between the self (or endless selves), the micro context (i.e., relationship, geographical spaces), and the wider context. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2017) focuses on the in-depth experiences of an individual. Although this approach could have been a suitable avenue for this project, the component of the self as multiple and rhizomatic falls short considering the IPA phenomenological understanding of

one's experiences. Finally, Grounded Theory could have been another interesting method to research this area (i.e., TNB sexualities) as it acknowledges the concrete experiences of individuals and the wider social structures and policies (Charmaz, 2006). However, through the intimate dynamic relationship between data collection and data analysis, Grounded theory's final aim is to develop an underlying theory. Therefore, this would not be suitable for this project, as the focus is not to identify an expiatory theory.

**Creative methods.** Gathering data through various means (e.g., mixed methods, creative methods) is a recommended approach to aim in capturing the flow of reality in post-humanist approaches (Fox & Alldred, 2022). Additionally, implementing creative aspects in the data collection process allows for subtle dimensions of human life to emerge. (Ayrton, 2020; Knowles & Cole, 2007). For this thesis, I invited participants to bring to the interview something to describe their experiences around sexualities. This could have been (but not restricted to) a picture, a drawing, a song, a video, a poem, or an object. I was voluntarily open with what they could bring as I acknowledge that participants might have individual preferences of expressing themselves through different mediums (Groenewald & Essack, 2023), and aiming in being more participatory in my approach. I obtained written consent to share a description of these by the participants.

**Table 5***Ontology, Epistemology, and their implications for the various stages of research*

Stage of research	Epistemology		Ontology: relational ontology
	Queer theory	Epistemology of ignorance	
Research question	Knowledge is not acquired following a hierarchical structure but through a dynamic process (like the rhizome).	Acknowledging that this study only shed light on some aspects of the sexualities for TNB people (e.g., other questions might	Being specific about the wording of the research question: <i>Have sexualities of TNB people (aged 18-30 years old) changed alongside their gender?</i> Allows to gather data from relations, and affective flows.
Methods	NI allows for various stories to be told, similarly to the rhizomic structure. NI allows one individual, but their	NI does not assume to be capturing the truth of	NI captures how people make sense of their experiences within a specific geographical-socio-political context. Therefore, it is

for an in-depth analysis of individual experiences, which can differ from one another in multiple ways. telling of a story in a given context. dynamic, non-essentialist, and it allows to participants to include more-than-human aspects.

NI allows people to tell their experiences in their own language and on their own terms, avoiding imposing frameworks.

Recruitment	Using a mixture of	I acknowledge that some	Recruitment involved human interactions (e.g., snowballing,
	measures is considered an	forms of knowledge are	existing relationships), as well as non-human-internet-based
	appropriate strategy	contextually preferred to	tools (e.g., mailing list, Instagram account). In addition, since
	(Browne & Nash, 2010).	others due to power	recruitment was carried out through different spaces, it aimed in
		structures. Thus, I	facilitating different assemblages to converge.
		discussed about my ideas	

for recruitment with supervisors, colleagues and professionals in this field. This included: social media post, email listservs, and snowballing.

Data collection	Creative methods gave people choice to either tell me their stories or draw from artistic aspects of their identities (Denton & Cain, 2023).	Acknowledging that self-awareness and knowledge production is not only language-based.	Integrating creative methods for data collection is an appropriate strategy in post-humanist approaches.
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Data analysis	As per NI, stories are told, and no one story is the same (Wells, 2011), as this can vary based on the listener and the context. This is linked with the queer concept of gender performativity (Butler, 2002).	Being a non-UK researcher from the 90s, I am aware that my views limit what I might constitute valid knowledge. Thus, in analysing the data, I listened to the interview various times and looked at various aspects. I used self-reflexivity to bracket my own life experiences, and various parts of my identity.	In the data analysis the human and non-human relations were clearly mentioned, and how these aspects are drawn in an assemblage. Acknowledging the micropolitical becomings for bodies and non-human elements.
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	Reflexivity included various methods, such as journaling, taking photos, visiting exhibitions, discussing with supervisory team	supervisors, and with EbE consultants.	
	(Treharne & Riggs, 2015).		
Writing up	Consulted with EbE and three supervisors to welcome a multiplicity of views.	Used self-reflexivity and draft checking with supervisors.	Post-humanist writings were reviewed throughout the write up and considered their implication for this stage. I represented data graphically in various sections of this thesis.
Dissemination	Findings will be summarised and submitted to research journals for publications, as well as using creative avenues (i.e., a contract	I will be open to suggestions on how to disseminate my research, as well as inquiry my own research.	The dissemination strategy is varied, and I remained flexible to suggestions from others. I perceive my findings not as essentialist but part of an ongoing phenomenon belonging to the research-assemblage.

with a trans illustrator has  
been made for this).

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## **Design of the study**

### ***EbE involvement and consultation***

Consultation with EbE started in 2022, where I had the opportunity to talk to a group of TNB young adults to discuss my research idea and have their input. Historically, psychology has been known for discriminatory practices towards behaviours that were considered not appropriate to Western and white societies (Jones, 2019). This resulted in science being done to people, instead of with people. As such, participation from TNB people was sought as an attempt in welcoming voices from the wider TNB population. Consultation with EbE started in 2022. One consultant was recruited through personal connections (e.g., attending TNB peer supportive spaces), and three via social media (e.g., Facebook social media group for this population). Aims and limits of consultation was verbally given to agreed with people. More specifically, they were informed about the content of research (i.e., sexualities), and that the aim was to inform and shape my research (i.e., that it was not a support group, and I did not hold any clinical responsibility despite being a psychologist in training). Meetings were held collectively as a group. Material was provided to them prior to each meeting. We continued to meet online as a group at each stage of research, namely: idea inception, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination. Their contribution was vital in shaping the project. For instance, for the data analysis process, they reviewed some of my interpretation, bringing more inclusive lenses. For each meeting, they were rewarded with £20 vouchers provided by the University of Hertfordshire. Moreover, I have also discussed my initial idea with various TNB writers and researchers. All this has shaped the focus of my research and opened my views at every stage. For instance, as Howitt (2024) spoke with TNB participants aged older than 30 years of age, I decided to focus on a different age group. This decision was with the hope to witness and represent different flows within the sexualities-gender assemblage. Thus, the aim was not to offer a comprehensive view of a phenomenon but to add details to it.

Additionally, it was discussed during supervision how adolescence and young adulthood can be seen as significant in identity formation and development for our sense of self, including in relation to our sexuality (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Thus, in considering the evolution of our gender identity alongside our sexualities, hearing from this age group might be of particular interest.

### ***Sampling method***

The number of participants can vary in NI, with a smaller sample size being considered suitable to allow for in-depth analysis (Wells, 2011). Considering the time frame and scope for this doctorate and the depth of analysis for each individual interview, the project aimed at interviewing between 5 and 8 people. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria are on Table 6.

### ***Ethical considerations***

**Ethical approval.** Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Hertfordshire ethics committee (Protocol number: cLMS/PGR/UH/053200). See Appendix C. In designing the study, ethical issues when working with human participants were informed by the national guidance for Clinical Psychologists (BPS, 2021), and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) guidelines (NSPCC, 2019).

**Informed consent.** Prospective participants were given a verbal outline of the process, and an information sheet about the research (Appendix D). They were asked to sign and return a consent form, which also outlined the right to withdraw (Appendix E).

**Distress.** Considering the topic and its target population, I developed a distress protocol (see Appendix F) based on my clinical experience and guided by the NSPCC guidelines recommendations- initially developed for people under 18 years old and adapted for this study with an adult population. In addition, after verbal debrief at the end of each interview, every participant was sent a debrief sheet (see Appendix G) via email.

Signs of distress were assessed through drawing on my training, knowledge and experience in working with trauma, especially online (Wild et al., 2020). Some of these can be increase in speech pace, restlessness, as well as reduced facial expression and/or reduced non-verbal communication. These can be considered a sign of distress (but should not always be pre-deterministically considered as such) only if this is a change from the participants' previous interaction style, and this change is being observed in the presence of a recent stimuli (e.g., content of conversation, remembering a specific past incident).

For instance, during one interview, I noticed feeling drawn towards holding a more therapeutic stance. This was because the participant disclosed previous challenging experiences. I navigated that via assessing the person's behaviour (as above-mentioned), and danced between questions focused on the research aspects, and strength-based statements that highlighted the participant's life-affirmative previous experiences (White & Morgan, 2006). After the interview, I asked the participant if they ever had an opportunity in a therapeutic space to talk about their past, and their wellbeing at that time. They said that they did not but did not feel the need at that stage. They stated that they were not feeling distressed after the interview. I was not sure about this statement, as they did not seem not-distressed during the interview. Nevertheless, I acknowledged my own biases as a therapist (e.g., being trained clinically based on psychiatric models that are problem-based and pathologizing, as a profession we are more prone to be seeing problems where there are none; my inclination to heal and repair). Most importantly, I also recognize and value people's agency and self-knowledge. I trusted them with what they said after the interview, in the same way that they trusted me during the interview offering me their story for this research. Research is a continuous trusting process (e.g., between supervisor and supervisee that the latter will behave ethically, between the researcher and the participant that the story being presented is experienced as such by the interviewed, between technologies, ethical processes and academic systems at large). Thus, navigating a challenging moment requires considering biases -hence why the focus on epistemology of ignorance- and trust.

In addition to trust, as a trained therapist, I am aware that safety is a fraught concept. No individual can be defined as safe, in a static and predictable manner. To use a known analogy in psychotherapy practice, therapists can be a container (Bion, 1985; Davis, 2019), where clients can experience feelings/thoughts/images that would be otherwise distressing. This is not to say that people do not have the capacity to experience distress but that one of the functions of a therapist is, in my view, to offer that space for the client to present their messy wonderfully human unprocessed selves. Aiming to be a safe container and promote wellbeing is viewed as intention rather than a fixed aspect.

**Data handling.** Data was handled in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, and according to ethics approval. Recordings and identifying information were securely stored and password-protected on the university OneDrive. These will be destroyed after completion of this degree. Anonymised transcripts will be stored for up to 10 years.

**Anonymity.** Demographic information was stored separately from transcripts and recordings. Dissemination included sharing quotes from interviews, these were anonymized, and participants could deliberately choose a preferred pseudonym for themselves and their partner(s), in case these were mentioned. None of the background information questions were mandatory.

#### **Procedure**

**Recruitment of participants.** Participants needed to be self-identifying as trans or non-binary for at least one year. One calendar year was agreed with supervisors, as it's a common way to select time through Western lenses. See Table 6 for the Inclusions and Exclusion criteria.

#### **Table 6**

##### *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria

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Aged between 18 and 30 years old	Adults who do not have the ability to understand the remit of
Self-identifying as trans or non-binary for at least one-year	the study and consent (e.g., lacking capacity according to the Mental Capacity Act 2005)
Can speak English fluently	
	Adults who are in a point of crisis. I used my clinical knowledge to assess this.

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An Instagram profile was created to share the study recruitment poster (see Appendix I). For the recruitment strategy, I shared the poster and the information of the study through social media, reaching out to charity organisations in the UK (e.g., Gendered Intelligence, TransActual), and advertised through newsletters (e.g., Transgender Professional Association for Transgender Health). It was made clear to prospective participants that they had to voluntarily contact me directly. Once they indicated that they wished to participate, I arranged an introductory meeting with them. This was in light of the recent research on fraudulent participation (Ridge et al., 2023; Woolfall, 2023). During this meeting, I asked them their reason to participate in the study, screened for eligibility, outlined the research aims and methods, answered any questions they had, and agreed a provisional date for the interview. Upon confirming participation, I sent them the information sheet and the consent form, asking them to sign and return the form to me. Finally, I upon receiving signed form, I confirmed the interview date and sent a Zoom link. Recruitment occurred between May 2022 and August 2022.

**Data collection.** Data was collected online. Before the interview, participants were sent an online questionnaire to complete regarding background information (see Appendix J). Zoom was used as platform for the interviews. See Appendix H for the interview schedule. These were transcribed by me, and data analysis was completed using password-protected Word documents and on paper (see Appendix K). For a summary of participants' demographic see Table 7.

**Table 7***Participants demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Pronouns	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual orientation	Relationship	Disability/LTC	Employment	Education	Spiritual/Faith	Living arrangement
Louise	24	she/her	24	White European	Female (trans)	Lesbian	Yes	Yes	Yes	Postgrad	No	Living with friends
Toby	22	he/him	22	White British	Male	Gray-ace	No	No	No	Undergrads	No	Living with parents
Peter	25	he/him	25	White British	Binaryish trans man	Bisexual/pan sexual	Yes in three	Yes	Yes	Professional degree/Diploma	Yes	Living with fiancée
Jack	24	he/him	24	White	Trans man	Pansexual	Yes	I have anxiety, depression and suspected ADD.	Yes	Postgrad	No	Living with partner
Minotaur	29	he/him	29	White British	Transmasculine	Bisexual	Yes	No	Yes	Postgrad	Yes	Live with a friend
Blue	24	they/them	24	White British	Non-binary	Pansexual	Yes in three	Yes	No	Postgrad	Not sure	With partner and friends
Eddie	26	they/them	26	White	Queer	Queer	Yes	No	Yes	Postgrad	Not sure	Living with a roommate + a dog + snake + cat
C	29	he/him	29	White British	Transgender male	Homosexual / Fluctuating	No	Yes	Yes	Undergrads	Not sure	Living alone in a studio flat/annex

**Analysis of the narratives.** Initially, I listened to the recordings multiple times to familiarize myself with the data. Then, I transcribed them. The data analysis followed the structure offered on Table 8.

**Study quality.** The assumptions of objectivity traditionally belonging to hard sciences do not apply to qualitative research (Yardley, 2017). As such, the quality for this study was demonstrated through four other aspects: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, impact and importance (Yardley, 2017).

**Sensitivity to context.** This aspect refers to showing an awareness of participants' perspectives, settings and meanings provided. To achieve this, I read the data several times, discussed in-depth recordings with my supervisors, and shared my analysis of data with EbE. In addition, I have engaged with academic, grey literature and social media to stay well-informed within various context.

**Commitment and rigor.** This was demonstrated by in-depth engagement with the topic, methodology and data analysis. I read extensively, employed an ontological stance (which is uncommon for Doctorates in Clinical Psychology), and attended NI workshop groups, where I regularly presented my work.

**Transparency and coherence.** To demonstrate research transparency, I have planned and followed set steps for my analysis. Moreover, the inclusion of direct quotes in the analysis is a clear reflection on how my analysis strictly links with the data. See Appendix K for an extract of the data analysis.

**Impact and importance.** This aspect refers to research being useful. I started to discuss ideas with a trans illustrator from early on in my project, and looked out for opportunities to present my study at conferences. Moreover, I constantly received positive feedback from other researchers, and EbE of the usefulness of my research, especially as it focuses on *trans joy*, challenging the current mainstream ideas about TNB bodies being pathologized and medicalized.

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity in qualitative research is rife with terms (e.g., bracketing) and practices suggesting that it is somehow possible to limit the weight of the researcher's presence in their study if they have done enough thinking, enough talking (e.g., supervision), and enough writing (e.g., reflexive journal). It often results in looking like a shopping list in the methods section, which is generally regarded as good practice for publication purposes (Lichterman, 2017; Macfarlane, 2021; Reyes, 2020). Considering the ontological stance of this thesis, I was, and currently am, part of the research-assemblage (Fox, & Alldred, 2015). Hence, I followed territorializing practices of academia: I attended supervision, I discussed my ideas and findings with peers, I talked about the research quality of my thesis, I kept a reflexive journal (see Appendix L). Whilst it is undeniably true that being NB, and polyamorous has facilitated a certain allyship and sense of camaraderie with (some of) the participants and with other researchers, it is also true that it is impossible to 'bracket myself out' from this assemblage.

Myself, my relationships, my current and past experiences were all part of this research in an ongoing flux (Folkes, 2022). They influenced every stage of this research. The social world is always shaped into the findings and knowledge production (Fox, & Alldred, 2022). Thus, parts of myself will eventually trickle down into other people's minds and will find their way (hopefully) into some NHS meetings, or academic lectures, or (not so hopefully) into some gender critical blog posts.

Aware of the epistemic territorializing imposition within the research-assemblage, I tried to flex the research assemblage to allow for new becomings in the research process. I created visual representations to be more inclusive of different learning styles. I sent drafts to non-academics to gauge if my writing is intelligible. I collaborated with a graphic illustrator for dissemination. This list is not inclusive as it cannot contain the interactions my body had within itself through these three years, and with the spaces I inhabited (e.g., the feeling of safety in University buildings, and queer bars, and tenseness in traditional British pubs or middle-class areas). Thus, reflexivity for this research was not an

attempt to bracket my assumptions but to tentatively welcome new becomings through micropolitics<sup>12</sup> of interactions with human and more-than-human elements.

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<sup>12</sup> The internal flux within assemblages of relations amongst human and non-human agent/thing/element that gives opportunity for the phenomenon to be continuously shaped and re-shaped. For example, in the research-assemblage could be the relationship a person has with their written work and/or the existing literature.

**Table 8***Step-by-step data analysis and links with epistemological and ontological stance*

Reading number	Goal	Procedure	Aspects related to my epistemology or ontology
1	Image/photo/poem	Identify theme(s) around what the person brought in.  Ideas coming from: - Experience- based approach to NI (Squire, 2008), where a narrative is defined by themes and not necessarily a structure based on time. -social life with images (Harper, 2005)	Note how the person describes what they brought in.  Use a reflective journal (memo) on my first thoughts and interpretation of what has been brought by the person, as well as my questioning around it and what opportunities opens up/closes.
	Identify initial aspects (i.e., <i>what</i> is being sad and the themes by each individual participant)	Listen to the audio recordings and make notes (memo) on key aspects/words.  Use a reflective journal on general impressions after first listening.  Comment and make note of the image/poem/etc they bring, describe, how they describe it and my initial feelings.	Relational ontology and queer theory are addressed by considering different ways of presenting people's experience (e.g., human and non-human).  Epistemology of ignorance is addressed throughout thanks to reflexivity.
2	<i>Performance of narratives</i>	Listen to the audio recordings and make notes (memo) on key aspects/words.  Use a reflective journal on general impressions after first listening.  Comment and make note of the image/poem/etc they bring, describe, how they describe it and my initial feelings.	Relational ontology is addressed by considering divergence and convergence with what participants tell me.  Epistemology of ignorance is addressed throughout thanks to reflexivity and memo writing.
		Listen and note body movements and facial expressions when speaking about certain themes  Pauses, interruptions, changes of topic (e.g., are these personal habits or societal/ethnic habits?)	Relational ontology is addressed by considering non-verbal and paraverbal communication as aspects of flow.

		Interaction between storyteller and listener Asking myself: why are certain stories told in this way? What opportunities are opened up and which aren't? Which perspectives (voices) are/aren't brought in? Are there any incongruences in the story? Why? (Loots, Coppens, & Sermijin, 2013)	Queer theory lenses here allow to appreciate how a story is being performed.
3	Focus on structure (e.g., how different parts/section are told, their position)	Reflecting if my Social GRRRAAACCEESSS (Burnham, 2012) – both visible and invisible- have influenced the narrative of the storyteller	Epistemology of ignorance is addressed throughout thanks to reflexivity and memo writing. For this part especially in noticing the interaction storyteller-listener, reflection on aspects of power and privilege between myself and the participants.
3	Identify pattern unity in the story through combining themes	<p>Possible power dynamics at play</p> <p>Read the transcripts if I notice others' voices (e.g., societal norms, parents, partners), cultural stories.</p> <p>Notice any implicit meaning in language</p> <p>Use a reflective journal on what I notice here.</p>	<p>Relational ontology is addressed by considering different voices as different aspects of flow.</p> <p>Epistemology of ignorance is addressed throughout thanks to reflexivity and memo writing.</p>

		Share main transcripts (anonymized) with researcher and identify what I noticed and what they noticed.	reflexivity and memo writing. Also, checking in with a collaborator allows for greater noticing of my biases.
4	<p>Situate the narrative within other narratives and note if there are overarching themes or not.</p> <p>Compare and contrasts themes with others from different participants.</p> <p>Note similar cases, discrepancies and where I feel a pull toward, and why</p>	<p>Relational ontology is kept in mind by noting the consequences of this territorializing aspect (i.e., of uniting stories) of the research-assemblage across individual stories.</p> <p>Queer theory lenses here are seen in how I bring together or separate different key aspects from the data.</p> <p>Epistemology of ignorance is by me noticing towards which story I notice a pull toward</p>	

## Results

In this chapter, I present the findings from the study using NI as data analysis tool. First, I described the individual narratives, then, the collective storylines.

### Individual accounts

#### ***Louise***

Louise, presented to the interview with a headset, a ponytail, and glasses. She was an eloquent speaker, sporadically making use of humor (in my view) to facilitate building that trusting relationship needed between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Louise brought for the interview the song: 'Also sprach Zarathustra', "*an adaptation of a book written by Friedrich Nietzsche, the controversial philosopher*". She added "*it's about mankind*" and the "*drive towards immortality*", and how humans try "*different approaches using religion, using science, using all sorts*" but "*there's always something holding us back*". She continued, replace immortality with "*living, the happy female life, as I would love to*" and "*the more you try the more progress you make, but there's always something holding you back, which is [...] the state of gender politics in the world right now*". Louise gave an example "*You live every day the life that you want 29 days in a month, nobody questions that*" but "*one day someone says, Sir, to you, and that just nags at you*". One way to interpret why Louise picked this song the address the study question could be to see these two aspects relationally. Humans learn about sexuality within a social environment, and through mimicry, repetition, image consumption, reading and writing (Preciado, 2022). Thus, sexuality is always in relation to others and the wider world, with gender being a key aspect of that in Western countries. In fact, Louise later commented on how "*gender sits on top of everything*", perhaps highlighting why she spoke about gender for a question that was initially about sexuality.

Louise further commented on the song being “*a strange piece*” and not wanting “*to be pessimistic*”. Later in the interview, I asked what others would think about her bringing this piece and who these people were. She commented that these would be “*other trans people*” as she had a lot of supportive friends in her network. When I asked her what was left out from the song answering the research question, she said “*the hope for a solution*” and how we can achieve this through “*change to the external politics of how everyone is seen*”. Louise came across as a strong woman, yet tired of the state of the world (e.g., being misgendered). Nevertheless, she was aware of having a good support network and that change is possible, hope is possible. Louise’s telling of her story seems an authomytology quest narrative (Frank, 2013).

In response to the research question, initially, Louise talked about realizing being trans through her sexualities. She said “*I thought I was a boy and I was attracted to girls, which I still am*” but there was still “*that kind of (hand gesture) je ne sais quoi of queer growing up*”. She kept talking about growing up in an environment where there wasn’t awareness about being trans “*it’s like you’re gay, you’re straight or you’re lesbian. If those are the only options, and I thought, okay, what am I then?*”. Then, she started questioning her gender and sexuality but she “*didn’t have the words to explain it*.” Until eventually she “*started living life as a woman*” and “*then it made a lot a lot more sense*”. Thus, suggesting that possibly Louise lacked the language or representation to pinpoint her experiences, and she managed to find the best fit for herself experientially, by *living* as a woman.

Gender and the territorializing affects of gender norms re-appeared later in the interview. Regarding the way others related to her, Louise commented on how since she has been living as a woman, “*there’s more of an assumption [from others] that I that I already want it [referring to sex]*”. At the same time, she was experiencing challenges in “*the way I approach others*” as “*lots of it is often with that thin layer of TERF paint*”. She continued offering an example “*it could be as mundane a component as [...] I really like your dress*” but “*everything is coated with that layer of Oh, my God, there’s someone*

*out there who thinks, [...] I'm a rapist, trying to pretending to be a woman, to get in your into your pants. Is the harsh truth of it" and "it's already difficult enough to find that balance between confidence and arrogance".* Here, this seems to represent the unique experiences that more widely trans women have relationally. In fact, it is reported in the literature how trans women are both fetishized (Montoya, 2023), desired, and at the same time be victims of violence (Faye, 2022).

In terms of her own relationships, Louise discussed on how not much changed over time in terms of her attraction towards others because "*whether I'm a man or a woman, if I love you, I love you, and whether I'm a man or a woman, if I want to have sex with you, then I want to have sex with you*". But as "*gender sits on top of everything*", others' attraction towards her changed, based on her gender presentation and the spaces she was in. She described how after transitioning, men approaching her were more "*aggressive and hostile*". Then, reflecting on the changes in relationships, she described how a lesbian relationship felt more equal for her, but also how this might be negatively judged in different contexts. For instance, "*if you're a woman holding hands with a woman in London nobody bats an eyelid. Travel up to the middle of nowhere, and people will think you're a witch.*" Here, Louise seemed to depict relationships almost beyond gender: an interaction between two people. However, society's narratives, and some spaces might influence one's experience, at times these spaces being limiting ("*people will think you're a witch*"), and at other times opening up opportunities ("*nobody bats an eyelid*").

### ***Jack***

For the interview, Jack was sitting on a red couch, wearing a blue hoodie, his cat occasionally popping up claiming cuddles. His responses were clear and exhaustive, spontaneously using examples. In Jack's response to the interview question, he linked gender with sexualities, as he said that "*the first thoughts of I don't think I'm a girl*" were "*at the same time enmeshed with the thought of maybe I'm also not straight entirely*". One interpretation of this, could be the intricate and rhizomatic relationship

between gender and sexuality, as it is discussed in the existing literature of TNB people, whereby people transitioning are likely to have reflected on the nature of concepts such as sexuality and gender (Hines, 2007; Nagoshi et al., 2014).

Jack seemed to me a self-reflective person, bringing examples of his thinking process and self-discovery. Expanding upon his first response, he recalled being 7 or 8 years old, in the playground the day after his birthday, where he received a gift from a pretend boyfriend. Jack felt "*nice, special and cared for*" and recalled "*thinking to myself [...] I wish I had a girlfriend I could like treat and spoil and buy meaningful gifts for.*" Then, he continued reflecting on how that was not allowed for him because "*I'm a girl, and girls don't really usually buy girls gifts*" then, he thought how "*maybe if I was their boyfriend that would work*" but soon he realized that "*Oh, but I can't be that*" and "*when you are that age you [...] can't do anything about it*". Here, I reflected on the intricate relationship between desire, imagination and agency in childhood, whereby some dreams can *come true*, whilst others are not to be explored. Thus, children sit in this difficult stage where what is allowed to be achieved or hoped for is decided by adult, and territorialized within the sexualities-gender assemblage.

Jack often mentioned the challenges between his own feelings about his sexualities and gender and the outside normative context; either that being heteronormativity, religion, or cultural. This could possibly make Jack's an authomytology quest narrative, where individuals face hardship and challenges but manage to craft a better future for their lives (Frank, 2013). One of these challenges was during his secondary school years, where he "*found no guys in [his] year or school attractive*" and was "*judged by [peers for] not having crushes*" on boys. He initially thought "*Oh, God! Maybe I'm just a lesbian*" but knew "*that's not something that's gonna go down easily. I live in Ireland. It's very religious. It's very small.*" So, he decided to "*keep it to [himself]*". It seems that he had to "*put it [his feelings] to the side*" several times, until his mental health affected "*his schooling*" because he had "*been shoving things down for so long*". This seems to reflect the existing literature on vulnerability-in-resistance (McBride &

Neary, 2021), whereby trans and gender-diverse folks are marginalized by cis normative policies and curricula (McBride & Schubotz, 2017) but they can find opportunities to resist such territorializing forces through education and activism, two aspects that Jack talked about in his narrative.

In terms of his relationships with others, he mentioned how he found it difficult dealing with cis-gay men as it was “*very awkward and complicated*” because you “*either you'll have some strange people very interested, because you're the best of both worlds or some people are so disgusted by it*” which makes it hard to find people who are “*not creepy, but also trustworthy*.” It seems that there are binary expectations (of how bodies should be and behave), which made Jack felt othered by cis gay men. At the time of the interview, Jack was in a 5-years old relationship with a non-binary person. Again, Jack spoke about gender norms and how these impacted relationships. He compared his relationship with his partner where they were “*always [...] updating our priorities together and understanding each other's needs*” and are “*constantly in better communication*” to his partner's parents relationship. He talked about how they are “*heading into retirement*” and “*don't seem to have the same goals and shared priorities*” so “*they don't know how to spend time with each other*”. Jack linked this to his transition which allowed him to feel stronger, question society's pre-imposed rules, and be a better communicator. Jack stated how “*cis- people are at inherent disadvantage*” because they don't have to “*be open [...] to be able to be honest with each other, to be able to set boundaries, to be able to keep to them*” and this being “*something that's inherent in your transition*” because “*things change on a daily basis, [such as] how you feel about yourself*”. One explanation for this could be that the “*inherent*” self-reflection TNB people are doing, allows them to question mainstream relationship roles and be more communicative about one's needs.

When Jack spoke about being trans, it was linked to his sexuality, and relationship style. Regarding sexuality, Jack said he always knew he was pansexual and was always interested in polyamory and how “[*I*] feel like being pansexual and polyamorous is kind of like two lines of the same page for me”.

He further said how “*Being trans and poly is also I guess a special connection*” as there is “*no shame, there is no guilt.*” He linked this to community building as he has “*a lot of time and energy and care to give to people*” and within the trans community “*we can help each other and get up because there's nobody else is going to do this for us.*” Support was an aspect that kept reoccurring in the interview. For instance, Jack mentioned about his first time trying out male pronouns with his partner. His partner said how could have been “*better [trying the male set of pronouns rather] than sticking something that you know doesn't*” and when they eventually tried them, Jack “*burst into tears*” from “*relief, like frustration and fear, because they did feel right*”. Jack further said how this increased his confidence and his “*relationship was much, much stronger, and I felt better*”. Support was not mentioned in the context of his relationship but came also in the form of mutual aid within (i.e., for and from) his community. For instance, he talked about when in the past he put the “*'Go Fund Me' for my top surgery*” and then gave a recent example of him supporting a trans person he knows that “*had to quit their job and hasn't eaten for two weeks*” and how Jack gave them money for food vouchers and his old air fryer to “*get them up on their feet and to get them fed and healthy*”. This seemed to me to support the vulnerability-in-resistance theory, and highlights Jack’s story as an authomytology quest narrative.

### ***Eddie***

Eddie, short brown hair and a black sweater with a print *feel good club*, was a careful narrator. They comfortably paused to reflect before responding to my questions. They were also one of my latest interviewees, hence, I had learnt to let the silence sink in to welcome offerings from participants. Their first response to my question was a “*summary/poem*” or an “*abstract poem*”, as they called it.

Eddie’s poem started remembering their “*first kiss*”, when they were 10 years old, with a trans woman and how “*she now lives in New Zealand*”, with whom they are still friends. The poem talked about their relationships (i.e., “*everyone who I have kissed is now trans*”) and reflected on sexuality more broadly. At the end of the poem, Eddie asked themselves “*How am I supposed to understand my*

*sexuality when nobody is who they were when we kissed?*”. In the poem, they responded to their own question “*I love not having an answer*” but “*sometimes the world tells me to look for one*” and they “*lift up logs and rocks, but all [they] find are beetles and worms and that's good enough for [them]*.” Perhaps the question in the poem refers the mainstream question often asked to people with diverse genders and sexualities: when did you really know? (Alabanza, 2023) Their use of the words “*lift up logs and rocks*” implied effort in having to find an answer for the rhizomatic phenomenon of sexualities that is satisfactory for people – and perhaps oneself. All that Eddie found were “*beetles and worms*”. These words evoked in me something that is disgusting, but these are also animals who are often found in groups. Perhaps referring to how gender and sexual diverse folks are perceived by society (disgusting, odd), but also referring to coming together in community (hide together under a rock), which is something that Eddie referred later (“*I feel more comfortable in queer spaces compared to Cis het normative spaces*”).

Later in the interview, Eddie described their upbringing, unconventional from most families, as they were “*actively encouraged to be queer*” and never “*worried about what*” their “*parents would think*”. For them there was never a big coming out moment, as it was often depicted in wider societal narratives (Plummer, 2002). Eddie commented on how they “*always knew*” they were “*queer*”, adding “*it was never a big, jarring moment to find out that [they are] queer*”. This made me reflect on how perhaps Eddie’s accepting parents offered a relational opportunity (micropolitics) to diverge from mainstream territorializing heteronormative affects and allowed them to feel free and explore their gender and sexualities (Fuller & Riggs, 2018). They commented on how they did not believe in “*putting sexuality and labels onto someone else*” and neither onto themselves, as labels can be “*limiting to the human experience*”. It seems that Eddie’s story presented a manifesto quest narrative (Frank, 2013), whereby there is a self-discovery together with a call for political action. Eddie said that as they had “*discovered [their] own gender and sexuality [...] that's just become more and more vague*” to the point

that if asked, they “*will say I'm queer*”. Here, the rejection of labels and the preference for a broad descriptor (i.e., *queer*) might be a word that employs multiple experiences. Some branches of philosophy and the sciences have for long tried to put taxonomies on the social world, but this seemed to be an insufficient and limiting aspect for Eddie. TNB people are often fetishized, stigmatized and overall othered. In my view (and experience), this territorializing affects also disabled people. Indeed, the need for liberation, and a rejection for taxonomies to classify humans (de-territorialization) is seen in disability studies (Adler-Bolton & Vierkant, 2022), in mental health (Handerer et al., 2022; Kinderman et al., 2013, 2017), in sociology research (Cordoba, 2023), and in (some) queer communities.

Eddie also voiced the difficulties in dating in a world that is dictated by heteronormative standards and its impositions on bodies. They defined this as “*frustrating*” and “*anxiety provoking*”, requiring “*a lot of mental work*”. Eddie said that “*without breasts*” they “*would be a lot happier*” but as they were attracted to “*cis gender men*” and the societal discourse is that men like breasts, they might not have received that same “*validation*”. This fear of rejection given by the materiality of bodies in society was also reflected in Eddie’s thinking about dating people with breasts, as seeing breasts would be an additional reminder of their own, triggering further dysphoria. This, then, translated in Eddie dating mostly queer folks, “*people with flat chests*” and “*penises*”, and engaging in queer spaces. These spaces seem to provide environments where expectations around bodies and what they can and should do were abandoned. This rupture from standards and exploring creativity are moments of de- and re-territorialization at a relational level that is often encountered in the trans community. The freedom granted in queer spaces for Eddie was also mentioned early in the interview when they talked about their family allowing a healthy exploration of their gender.

In terms of relationships, Eddie spoke about boundaries, and mutuality. They spoke about an ex-cis partner and about how they had the resilience to “*sacrifice sort of a three-year relationship*” with someone who “*didn't understand*” their transness. After that break-up, despite being painful, they could

“appreciate the experience” as they were able to affirm what they felt about themself, especially their gender identity and, since then, started dating as a trans person. This setting of boundaries in relationships allowed Eddie to know and explore themself better as there were “*certain things about sexuality and sex*” that “*also come into play*”, which translated in some “*non negotiables*” around their transness. At the time of the interview, Eddie was dating a DJ who had themself explored their gender. When their partner said they were going to “*stick a they in my pronouns*” Eddie said how “*there was no surprise*” and it felt like a “*sort of a mutual understanding between the two*” of them and almost felt a “*natural progression*” for their partner. Interestingly, Eddie implied a directionality in this as “*my identity hasn't been impacted by their identity, but their identity has been impacted by my identity*.” This made me reflect on how when in a couple one of the partners is transitioning, this might raise questions about their own sexual identity and label used, sometimes bringing conflicts and rupture (Twist et al., 2017; Mellman, 2017), whilst other times bringing nuance and growth.

## C

C presented as a smiley young person. He wore a vest, showing a tattoo on his left upper shoulder. He was a chatty, but shy at first, narrator. Chuckles were punctuations in our conversation, sometimes they felt like a full stop, prompting me to ask questions, other times these invited me in the chuckling as a moment of connection.

C answered the opening question saying how he first came out as bisexual but then he “*didn't quite feel like it*”, and “*after realizing [he] was trans, [he] realized [he] was more on the gay side*”. When I asked him if he noticed a shift in his sexualities, he said how he “*didn't really notice a shift in*” his “*sexuality*” but “*it was more of a shift in gender because*” he “*always dated men but found women attractive*”. Interestingly, C presented a narrative that is different from those described thus far, whereby he did not see a link between gender and his sexualities through transition.

He said how since top surgery (two years ago), he was able to be more “*confident*” and “*ask for what*” he wanted, whilst before he “*could only take what*” he “*could get*”. His past resigned attitude might be reflecting internalized transphobia he might have experienced in the gay community, where there are (sometimes) normative expectations on how a body should look (Mellman, 2017). In addition, his increased confidence, reminded me of the literature on sexual habitus (Schilt, & Windsor, 2014), whereby a change in one’s body allows people to break the pre-disposed roles that one has in society because of their anatomical predisposition at birth. This confidence, also manifested in changes in sexual acts for C. He said how “*in gay terminology*” he always saw himself as a “*bottom*” but, at the time of the interview, he had a friend with benefit (FWB) that was willing to experiment with. C started to see himself able to “*take a bit more charge*” and is more “*versatile*”. One way to understand this change could be that his FWB, and the life stage where C was at, granted him safety to explore his sexualities outside roles and habits he previously had. Nevertheless, C showed a certain ascription to the gay lineage. For instance, he said how he still called himself “*gay because it’s easier*”. Perhaps the use of the descriptive label “*gay*” helped C to manage the complexity of the sexualities-gender assemblage, rather than fully capturing his sexualities.

This tentative exploration outside the gay culture was also shown by the object he showed me that symbolized the shift in his sexualities alongside transitioning. Originally, C did not bring any objects, as he said it was “*quite difficult to represent*” with just one thing or piece of art. Then, when he was talking about his recent break up, I noticed a fallen angel tattoo on his shoulder, and I asked him about it. From there, he started telling me about his other tattoos and eventually he identified the object in his room: a sparkly top. C commented on how he “*never worn a crop top in [his] life*” and it was the first time he bought “*women’s clothing since [he] came out as trans*”. C commented on how it represented him feeling more “*comfortable*” with his sexualities and with himself. He further added that “*it kind of screams Gay*” but “*doesn’t really represent the fact that*” he is “*open to everybody else*”. His description

of the item made me think of the limits of language, and descriptors, and the territorializing affects of the binary gendered world.

C presented a narrative quest (Frank, 2013), centered around self-discovery and healing. Linguistically, the word *confidence* appeared six times in the interview. At one point, he was talking about the psychological process he had to do to unlearn the gender stereotypes that parental upbringing taught him –especially being socialized as female. He commented how he had been “*in counselling a lot*”, then, he added “*getting there*”. Thus, it seems that through self-development he had been trying to undo society’s normative impositions and with time and effort, make steps towards a place (“*there*”) that is more aligned to what he envisioned for himself. C seemed to be navigating the Western heteronormative social regime we inhabit, and having to do significant unlearning of “*parental stuff which I think everyone of this kind of generation has had to do. (chuckling)*”. This was reflected by his way of telling his story. I perceived as if C was speaking to a broad audience like part of a research project or a documentary.

At the time of the interview, C was “*staying off dating*” as in the past he was picking up “*other people's hobbies*”, and taking on “*a mothering role*” and “*worn*” himself out for people “*who wouldn't do the same back*”. He stated how he preferred being more “*equal in a relationship*”, and he was trying to discover himself more through hobbies and “*maybe meet someone that way*”. Various past relationships influenced the way he felt about himself. For instance, in his most recent relationship with a cis man, “*he [the boyfriend] saw*” C “*as a man*”, “*where*” his ex, “*saw*” him “*as another trans guy*.” However, this is not something C elaborated further. Later, C stated how with the cis ex partner there was a lot of “*blockey stuff*,” and societal expectations, such as “*if you're a man you gotta do that*”, and how since “*coming out that relationship*” he “*realized*” he was “*a lot*” *camper* than he thought he was. Here, I think that ascribing to a specific social category (e.g., trans, man, gay), which can provide a certain degree of safety and filtering of their members, allows some behaviors whilst polices others

(Barker, 2016). Thus, it seems that C felt uncomfortable in belonging to either groups he was belonging, or made to belong to, and was trying to find his own path in terms of relationship and sexuality.

C was one of the oldest participants I interviewed. He was 29 years old, which is an age where in Western countries is expected that people perform certain acts (e.g., marriage, buying a house). However, at the time of the interview, he was “*dating himself*” and “*get to know*” himself “*a bit*”. This stepping outside norms made me think of chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010) and about queer time. As queer people often craft their lives on a different timeline compared to the cis heterosexual standards. This, in my view, reinforces my interpretation of C’s story as a quest narrative, trying to find his own answers and way of living, without a well-trodden path, as it is often the case for us TNB people.

### ***Blue***

Blue presented at the interview with a short haircut, dungarees with rainbows, a white t-shirt, and round aviator glasses. They used hand gestures when speaking, and there were natural pauses in the conversation that seemed to allow for reflection. This was the longest interview. They responded extensively to my questions, requiring little input from my end. They were eloquent in their use of language, and used metaphors, analogies and examples to further explain some concepts. They were regularly self-monitoring if they replied to the question asked and reminded themselves to not go off topic. Initially, I felt disoriented listening to their story. They also commented at one point “*this is so abstract, so I hope that you can get something good out of this.*” In the re-reading of the transcripts and the writing of this section, I could gain clarity. This made me think about the limitations of one-time interviews to develop a mutual understanding of language.

Blue had an online presence as a writer. Some of the expressions and words that they used online and with me were the same, showing a well-rehearsed story. This (i.e., having a

well-rehearsed story) to me spoke about TNB folks being asked about their gender, and having to present a coherent unfaultable story. Often TNB folks are asked when they *really knew* about their gender, as if there was a universal *aha!* moment that legitimizes TNB experience to a cis audience (Alabanza, 2023).

In re-watching the recordings, I noticed that there was a foot coming off a blanket that was resting on their bed behind them. This implied that possibly someone was in the room with them. Whilst this might have influenced how Blue's story was being told, I reflected on the fact that everything could potentially influence the telling of a story. In line with my epistemology position, there is not one absolute story but many realities concomitantly happening, all equally valid. In addition, this aspect could reflect the material reality of queer lives, with many people living outside the family home, with their found families (Donovan et al., 2003), and where personal space available is often limited.

Blue described their sexualities as "*adaptable*" as they "*don't know where it's going to go next, and that is interesting and exciting to look forward to*". Blue brought the concept of water as an element for the interview. One of their first partners was a trans man. It was a "*very asexual*" relationship, as they "*didn't have any intimate sexual contact*", and in that period Blue was "*hanging out with him*" and his "*masculine friends*." Blue described how in this period their sexualities was something that they "*used to joke about*", being focused on "*self-gratification*". I did not fully understand what that meant. Perhaps Blue was implying that being in an asexual relationship, Blue was satisfying their sexual needs through self-pleasure. Blue compared that relationship to their current relationship with a trans woman who has "*lovely long hair*", "*wears dresses a lot, who likes feeling very cute*", and was very "*whimsical*". Blue

highlighted that “*neither of these two contexts were better than the other*”. They attributed the shift in their sexualities from self-gratification to self-awareness and embodiment due to “*personal growth*”, “*the environment*” they were immersed in and how that enabled certain behaviors, and “*people*” they were engaging with. They mentioned about doing their Masters and writing a thesis on “*Everybody's Talking About Jamie*”, which is a “*queer musical*”, and that they were engaging in “*talking therapy*” where they could “*unpack so much*”. All this made me perceive their story as an authomytology quest narrative (Frank, 2013).

They mentioned how they lead with their “*gender first*”, whilst their sexualities came “*late to the party*”. They explained this further saying how by knowing themself more, they were able to be more in the present, and be more compassionate with themself, including their gender identity. So, if before they were adopting the “*most boring kinds of masculinity you can imagine*”, and were “*very attracted to masculinity*”. Then, through therapy, the environment, and self-compassion they were able to apply this to their sexualities too. Blue, then, mentioned something that I felt pulled towards, that to me spoke about representation. They talked about “*queer men out there who have incredible fashion, taste, and look amazing*”. This seemed to have allowed Blue to not ascribe to strict gender norms of Western society, and create their own reality of gender, and, as a by-product, of their sexualities.

At the time of the interview, Blue described themself as “*queer*” both in their sexualities and their relationships. However, Blue mentioned how at the beginning of their journey they were “*AFAB*” and they “*could only imagine*” themself “*dating women*”. They further commented on how they haven’t “*fully unpacked that*”. This aspect seemed reflecting the ever-changing nature of gender and sexualities for them. This might also highlight fluid always-

becoming territorializing (i.e., initially only dating women), and de/re-territorializing (i.e., now identifying as pansexual) affects of the sexualities-gender assemblage Blue was navigating.

Blue described their sexualities and polyamory as "*twin stars that have collided and come apart again, and they collide it and come apart again*". I believed this explained that these aspects have influenced one another but not as closely linked as, for example, gender and sexualities for them.

Blue mentioned how they "*always knew*" they were "*polyamorous*". They commented on their polyamory not being like "*everyone says*" about "*being greedy*" or being "*a little bit of a whore (chuckling)*" but because Blue has "*a lot of love to give, and want to receive*". This reframing spoke to me about the internal work Blue, as most if not all queers, had to do to challenge heteronormative narratives and craft their own reframing of their experiences.

### ***Minotaur***

Minotaur's look stood out: dyed hair and a septum piercing. He attended the interview with a light-creamed top and wore a headset. He is a performer, and a poet who writes "*a lot of religion*". During the interview, I felt he brought these identities to the interview, I was his audience, and he was entertaining me, helping me with my research, supporting his community. He mostly looked straight at the camera, except for when he was reflecting on my questions. The interview moved from personal accounts, to humor, to reflections on political issues, to being educational. In reviewing the transcripts, I wondered if the use of humor and educational commentary was him entertaining me, his artistic persona, or a psychological defense mechanism- or maybe all of them together.

To the interview, he brought two poems, "*boy*", a love poem about gender, and "*it's like this*", a poem he wrote to describe polyamory to people. To me, the former talked about how kink and safety in his relationships allowed him to fully lean in into his transness. Minotaur said during the interview how

realizing he was a trans man “*went along with kink stuff*” as his partner “*started calling*” him “*Minotaur in the bedroom*”. In “*boy*”, the poem, gendered professions are mentioned: “*boy as in the headmaster, as in the officer*”. Then, questioning his gender arrived in the poem “*as in No sir, wasn’t I, sir*”. Then, sexuality came into play, “*the sudden drag of his tongue across the clitoris*”, and this allowed for the “*costume [...] coming off*”; “*love*” allowing him to “*feel seen*”. It seems that exploring sexuality safely allowed Minotaur to find avenues for self-discovery and embrace his trans masculinities.

The other poem, “*it’s like this*” described the intricacies of being polyamorous. It opened with “*Two of your lovers stand before you*”, setting the scene, then it described the dynamics between the relationship(s) and external observers: “*your mother would prefer the one on the right*”. The last paragraph depicted the protagonist “*standing in a coliseum watching all of your previous lovers fight to the death*”, with the crowd asking to “*decide the winner*” but then “*you raise your hand to your crown of laurels, take it from your head and set it down*”. To me, this signifies abandoning the struggle of jealousy and choice (i.e., laurel wreath off and “*set it down*”), where no competition amongst lovers is needed. Interestingly, Minotaur later in the interview described his relationships as “*complicated*”, “*free-form*” and “*nebulous*”, referring also to Kitchen Table Polyamory (KTP), where every person that is part of a relationship (partners and metamours) talk to each other openly. The word “*complicated*” might refer to being outside the mainstream: when one does not have a script for relationships, it becomes more complicated. Equally, it can be “*nebulous*”, perhaps difficult to label and accurately describe. It seems that mainstream society expects competition between lovers (territorializing affect), which was reflected in the image of the *coliseum* offered by Minotaur: a public open space, giving a sense of being watched. However, Minotaur seemed to abandon this position that was put on him (de-territorializing), and welcomed a different paradigm (re-territorializing through micropolitics relations).

Minotaur presented a quest narrative (Frank, 1995), trying to better understand himself in various social contexts (e.g., school, university), and to integrate aspects of his identity (e.g., religion, class) and background throughout his journey.

In telling his story, Minotaur reported conversations he had in the past, welcoming me into intimate moments of everyday life. He talked about growing up in a “*strongly working class*” town in the “*North-West of England*” and there being no exposure to queerness. He said how he first came across the term bisexual when speaking with a friend “*Oh, what's that?*” *I said. “It's not gay? What's bisexual?*” *And she said “it's being attracted to both men and women”, and I was like “Oh, cool! There's a word for that?! Same! And then we were the only two openly queer people.*” This made me think about the struggle that queer people face in conservative environments, where lack of representation and rigid views dampen exploration. This territorializing of his sexualities continued in his telling of his story. At school people “*assumed*” that Minotaur “*was straight*” and that the “*bisexual thing was like a phase*”. The wording use *thing* could imply an othering from heteronormativity, and it being a *phase* something being less valid than something that is fixed, static. At university, and during his masters, Minotaur was able to explore more with his sexualities, and gender.

At the time of the interview, Minotaur still identified as “*bisexual*” but also commented on how his sexuality was “*constantly evolving*”. He also commented on how his attraction was different based on others people’s gender, and this being related to “*sexual trauma*” as his “*abuser was a woman*”. He outlined a difference in his relating to others, specifying how attraction towards women for him “*builds over time*”, whilst towards men is more immediate and “*fleeting*”. It seems that previous relational experiences Minotaur had influenced how he perceived attraction. This reminded me about the intricate affects existing between interpersonal relationships and sexualities (Murchison et al., 2023), whereby one’s past and wider narratives influence one’s views, but future explorations are always open, “*constantly evolving*”, as Minotaur said.

Finally, Minotaur commented on how being in relationship with others was also related to “choice”. He clarified how he did not believe in “*love at first sight*”, but it is more “*something that you grow and tempt to*”. He linked this with his Christo-pagan religiosity and polyamory. He did not expand on this, but my interpretation of it was that love is a commitment, as it is the case for religious traditions, and something people need to work on and communicate about. Interestingly, the emphasis on commitment had been highlighted by previous writers when talking about love. For instance, as bell hooks stated love is “*a combination of trust, commitment, care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility*” (hooks, 2000, P. 54).

### **Peter**

Peter, dyed mullet, and black retro squared glasses, was a generous and precise narrator. His responses addressed each of my questions thoroughly, offering examples to explain concepts further (e.g., the environments and activities in sex-positive parties and his experiences in such spaces). He also reported conversations he had with people, and his own internal dialogue.

When responding, there was a part of him monitoring the conversation (e.g., “*sorry, I am going all over the place [...] but this isn’t a therapy session. So, let’s move on to the next one*”). These comments made me reflect on how he might have perceived me as an audience, and the effect of my interaction style with him. With him trying to stay on track for each question, made me think that perhaps I was being too bound to the interview guide, and I should have talked less, giving him more space. Perhaps for him, the opening up meant that he was feeling safe in speaking with me, and the self-monitoring (i.e., “*this isn’t a therapy session*”) a reminder that he was doing an interview and the expectations and boundaries between these two spaces (i.e., therapy, and research) are different.

The item Peter brought to the session was a pair of nipple covers, commenting on how as his “*transition has progressed medically*” he became more “*experimental*” with his sexuality. Perhaps, feeling more comfortable in his own skin, allowed him to engage relationally with others more freely

and with more confidence. Peter identified himself as a “*binaryish trans man*”. He expanded upon this saying that he did not feel like a trans man but with “*terms and conditions apply*”, as he “*mostly feels like a binary man but sometimes not*”. This made me think about the complexities of gender experiences in a Western binary world. If the mainstream existing taxonomies are man and woman, then, a transition towards one of these (e.g., trans man), might not meet all the requirement of one category (e.g., man). Thus, new words are required to express the varieties of human experience for people who do not fit neatly in existing categories (Mackay, 2024).

Peter also commented on the challenges in having a trans body within a binary context, especially in relationship with others. He said how, when engaging in online spaces pre-medical transitioning he felt apologetical about his body. For example, he talked about being on Grindr and thinking “*Oh, sorry I still have all my boobs, and I'm still hairless, and you know I still look like a woman and all that*”. Then, after starting testosterone and engaging in trans-affirmative spaces, where “*there's bodies that look like*” his, Peter's confidence grew. He added, commenting about these spaces how, “*I'm not the only fat, hairy, who still has their boobs, or has a vagina, or whatever*” and that “*is really lovely*”. This made me think about power of representation for gender-expansive folks in navigating a binary world. Thus, it seems that Peter was creating his own path, making his a quest narrative (Frank, 1995).

Peter offered ample description of the spaces he engaged in, from “*naked meadows so where you can just be naked*” to “*fuck boxes*”, which are “*kind of like glory holes for AFAB people*”, to “*bi-camp*”, which is a “*camping trip/festival for the local bisexual community*”. With all these rich descriptions, I felt that Peter welcomed me into his sexual universe. His openness and willingness to share about all this perhaps spoke about the political power that sex-positive parties have as geographical spaces (Bazzaroni, 2019), where diverse bodies can meet and reconfigure a new ordinary, outside the constraints of heteronormativity. Peter used the word “*lovely*” to describe these spaces, which to me communicated to me a sense of care, and acceptance that he might have felt.

In terms of relationships, Peter said how he had always been aware of polyamory, but explored this after being with his current fiancé, Tien, a trans woman. They “*explored verbally*” the idea during sex and then progressively engaged more with it. At the time of the interview, he was now in four relationships, with each of them bringing him something different. Tien and he had been together for four years and was described as an “*old, very deep love*”, where they “*hope to get married*” and “*have children*”. Alex is a “*non-binary agender person*” and they had been together “*just under a year*”. Peter described this relationship as “*good*” and it being “*always fun*” because they ended up “*staying up late watching movies, eating pizza, having a drink, party*”. However, Peter also acknowledged how he was sometimes “*annoyed*” at them, and how he would never imagine living with them, as they are quite “*chaotic*” and “*very adolescent*” in their lifestyle. Then, Peter talked about Daisy, a “*non-binary trans girl*” who “*lives in Scotland*” and it’s an “*online thing*”, and any plans to meet up had not materialize yet. Peter commented on how they have a good “*kink dynamic*” where they can “*explore kinks that we wouldn't explore with other people*”. However, through talking about Daisy in the interview, Peter reflected on how sometimes plans to talk fell through and he was noticing the relationship “*starting to fizzle out*”. He, then, commenting how he felt the “*sensible thing to do is to talk about it. See if it's worth salvaging it.*” Finally, Peter talked about Oisin, an older cis man and most recent partner, they had been together just over six weeks. Peter described this relationship as an “*intense romance*”, feeling almost like “*weird sitcom where the young, wild younger person like rocks, this posh boy upside down*”. Peter talked about Oisin at length. Peter said how at first, he was “*committed*” to the idea of Trans4Trans (T4T also t4t) but has changed his approached because “*Oisin has taught*” him “*that not all cis are horrible*” because “*he is so loving and gentle and so good with transness and dysphoria*” that sometimes he felt he was “*talking with a trans person*”. Peter continued adding how this experience allowed him to feel “*more open to dating cis people [...] because there are good ones*”.

Hearing Peter's overview of his relationships made me reflect on the fluidity of polyamory, and the infinite opportunities that can arise when connecting with others, making the distinction between cis and TNB people disappear (i.e., when talking about Oisin). Nevertheless, Peter commented on how he hoped to get married and have children in the future. I wondered how much of society's expectation of family played a role in this. Perhaps, this highlights the natural rhizomatic complexity of our social world, whereby sometimes we align to society's scripts (territorialization), and at other times we create a different, unique alternative, queering normative expectations (de/re-territorialization), and all this being changeable with time.

### ***Toby***

At the interview, Toby wore a light cream-colored polo shirt, rectangular shaped glasses and a headset. During our meeting, he mostly looked at various directions in the room, perhaps to facilitate the thinking process, and sometimes at the camera. He was sitting on an office chair, occasionally moving from side to side.

Toby used colloquial language (e.g., “*sort of*”, “*you know*”) to responded to the questions I asked, albeit a few times the scope that I had for my questions did not match the content of his responses. For instance, I kept finding myself pulled towards the transitioning narrative, instead of the change in his sexualities. The object that he brought too was a pair of football boots, representing a key moment in his transition. From early in the interview, he told me how, since he “*realized*” he is trans, he “*switched off quite a lot*” as he did not “*fancy like using a body that doesn't represent*” him “*on the inside*”. During the interview, I found it difficult to navigate the various identities I hold (clinician, researcher, trans person) and my personal tendencies. I believe the reason for this was that I felt a strong pull to care for Toby, and struggled to maintain solely a researcher's perspective. This was reflected in my questioning style, as I used reflective statements numerous times, and often preferred transitioning questions compared to sexualities ones.

Toby spoke about how he liked “guys so much”, he “realized” he “was one”, linking sexual attraction with gender identity. This *realizing* was something other participants talked about (e.g., Peter), and something I experienced too when I *realized* I am NB. I saw this realization mostly happening in relational contexts: when people have access to representation, or access to the language to describe themselves.

Overall, Toby’s story made me think of a chaos narrative (Frank, 2013) as he was anticipating getting better after a period of hardship. At the time of the interview, Toby was waiting, his sexual life put on hold. For instance, he said how he was waiting “*to see what testosterone actually does*” and “*see what happens from there*”. Hoping that a body that represented him from the inside might be “*a bit more pleasurable*” to engage in sexual acts. Later in the interview, I asked him what he noticed when he felt attracted to others. Toby responded that he mostly noticed attraction towards people from the movies and thought “*they look cute but not really, you know, I bet have a massive stick, or whatever*”. This comment startled me, leading me to be more curious about this expectation about gendered body parts. Toby responded about how sex education (in Year 9) and previous partners influenced this perception. I perceived his narrative of waiting, related to heteronormative standards, where sex is associated with penetrative acts and influenced by Christian teachings, and reproductive expectations of our evolutionary heritage. Toby seems to be navigating this territorialization affect with rigid expectations of sex and bodies. Aware of alternative sexual practices, I challenged his view asking if he had thought of having relationships that “*can exist even without the sexual acts*” but he responded saying that “*sex is a big thing in relationships*”. The use of the word “*big*” implied for me something difficult to change, an obstacle, and generalizing this expectation to any “*relationships*” seemed to me a closing remark, stating what perhaps for him was not possible at this stage.

At the time of the interview, Toby was not in any relationship. He had two relationships in the past, the first one when he was 19 years old and the following one three years after that. The first guy

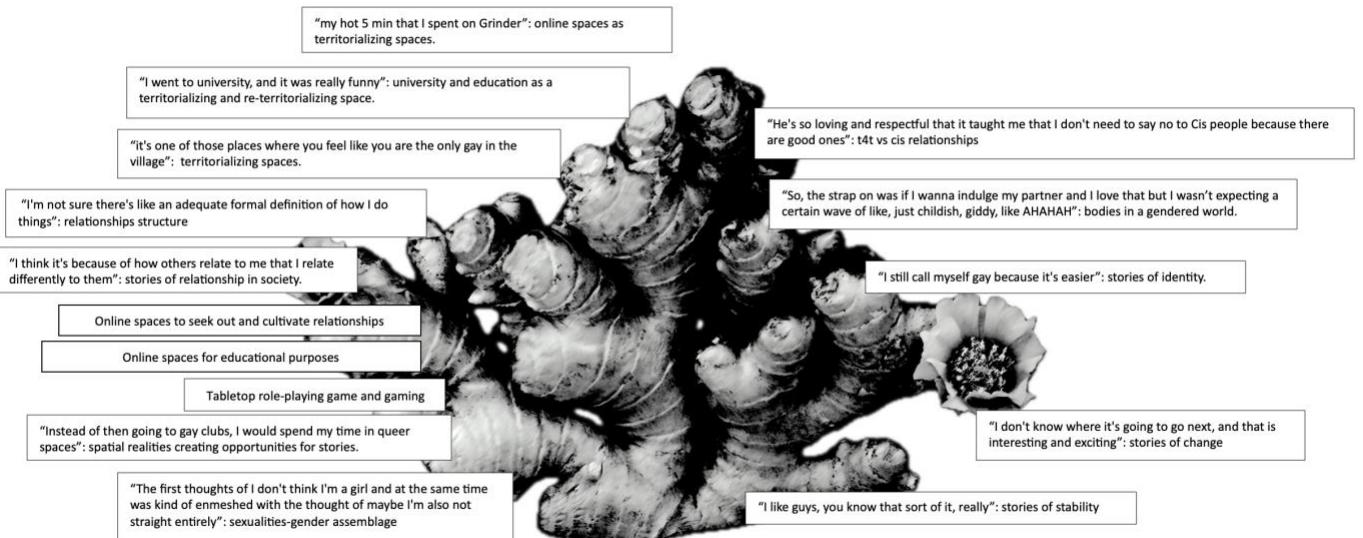
was a long-distance FWB, where “*every so often sex happened*” and they played videogames together but then, after realizing it (i.e., being intimate) triggered dysphoria for him, they decided to end the romantic relationship and remain friends. The second relationship was with a person who afterward revealed to be a “*chaser: [...] someone who, specifically goes after trans people either trans masc or trans fem*”. Toby noticed the person kept pushing to go over his place early in their relationship. Then, he came to know that this person was contacting “*femme and early transition pre- hormones trans guys in the [university LGBTQ+ ] society*”. This was when he decided to break up with him. Toby reflected on how he did not want to think about being intimate with others or having relationships but rather focusing on his studies and his career. Nevertheless, he remained hopeful. At the end of the interview, he said that he would like to focus on “*adulthood*” rather than “*playing the field*”, by which he meant a having a “*long-term*” relationship based on “*respect*”, having a family, and children- for which he was waiting for “*fertility preservation*”. His word choice evoked in me images of heteronormative narratives, a possible idealized (territorialized) futures that are being *painted* to us all, whereby there is an expectation of what a person should be doing to be considered *adult*. This often refers to entering the labor force, owning a house, having a stable long-term relationship, having children. This desire to comply with heteronormativity and capitalism might also present an opportunity to find safety, especially for a person that inhabits a marginalized body.

### **Collective storylines**

In this chapter, I presented the individual narratives grouped together. Aspects of divergence and similarities among stories were highlighted and complemented with relevant research and theory. Overall, the narratives did not organize around a hierarchical structure as several aspects were interwoven in one another. A visual representation is below. See Figure 5.

### **Figure 5**

*Visual representation of Collective Storylines*



***“The first thoughts of I don’t think I’m a girl and at the same time was kind of enmeshed with the thought of maybe I’m also not straight entirely”: sexualities-gender assemblage***<sup>13</sup>

In line with my ontological viewpoint, reality is understood as having a flat hierarchy, whereby any phenomena (e.g., bodies, objects, emotions) participates dynamically in forming an assemblage, which is a constant relating between these elements. It is possible to see the intricate web of this assemblage through the participants’ stories. For example, for some being trans was “enmeshed” with the thought of not being “straight entirely” (Jack); whilst for others it was “more the shift of gender rather than the shift of sexuality” that they noticed (C). Thus, different ebbs and flows within this assemblage. Below I offer examples from some of the participants.

For some participants there was a realization of a certain “*je ne sais quoi*” (Louise) of being queer, and eventually they found the words to describe their experiences. For instance, Louise spoke about there being “*something off, something different*”, and how initially she thought that maybe “*I just*

<sup>13</sup> Despite this not being the custom in how to use sub-headings in NI, I put quotes from participants of my study first to favour their voice.

*like theatre, and I hate football, and I am a bit gay and that was that*" but then it was not until she started to live "*life as a woman*" that "*it made a lot a lot more sense*" to her. Similarly, C, said he first "*came out as bisexual*" but he also felt how "*it just didn't quite feel like it fit*", thus, expressing how it didn't encapsulate everything he was feeling. Then, after "*realizing*" he "*was trans*", he "*realized*" being "*more on the gay side*". It seems that overall, C did not change in his sexualities (it's more "*the person rather than the parts*") but, nevertheless, continued to use sexualities labels ("*I still call myself gay because it's easier*").

Most participants mentioned about their gender in relation to their sexualities. Blue spoke about how they went "*forward in [their] life with gender first*". They further specified that when "*in queer spaces*" they entered them "*as a trans and non-binary person, not as a queer [as in sexuality] person*". Louise said how "*gender defines every aspect of your life*" and "*sits on top of everything*", from the "*foods that lead to body changes*", with different body expectations for men and women, to how people relate to each other. More specifically, she spoke about how after she started living as a woman other people related differently to her (i.e., from men being "*lovely to [her]*" before transitioning, to being "*much more aggressive and hostile*" when presenting as a woman), and, as a result, she began to "*relate differently to them*". Thus, for her it seems that gender and how that was perceived by others influenced human interactions. Peter mentioned that the more "*comfortable*" he felt "*with [his] sexuality*", the more "*comfortable with [his] gender*" he became. He linked this to being exposed to other's "*bodies that look like you*" and how that "*is really great*" and validating. Minotaur said how his partner "*started calling [him] Minotaur in the bedroom*" and that "*went along with kink stuff*" because he "*knew how to construct a scene*" and "*kink gave [him] a script in which to explore something safely*". Thus, for Minotaur, it seems that sexual exploration, was an avenue to further consolidate his trans identity. Similarly, Toby realized he is a guy through his sexualities. He talked about how he "*liked guys so much*" he "*realized [he] was one*". He also said how through "*doing research*" and "*support[ing]*" a

“*trans feminine*” friend, he realized how “*quite a lot of that does apply to [him] as well*”. Thus, it seems that the sexual attraction, together with having access to information, allowed him to find the right words to describe his experiences.

Eddie presented a different story from everyone else. They talked about their first kiss, with someone who is a trans woman and with whom they were still friends. They said how in “[*Eddie’s*] house [*they*] didn’t have ideas of masculinity and femininity put on to [*them*]” and they could play with “whatever toys [*they*] wanted to” so they could “explore gender at quite a young age in that way”. It seems that this freedom allowed them to move beyond binary gender limitations. They also said how as they had “*discovered [their] own gender and sexuality*” it had “*become more and more vague*” to the point that if asked, they “*will say I’m queer*” (for both). Nevertheless, they still talked about how “*it’s really difficult to navigate sex when there’s so many conditions*” and “*society is only really showing you that there’s one way to be sexy*” (referring to breasts and having a feminine figure). It seems that Eddie explored their gender freely from a young age, and that allowed them to move beyond labels, but nevertheless being affected by society’s standards of binary gendered beauty.

***“I don’t know where it’s going to go next, and that is interesting and exciting”: stories of change***

Most of the participants reported being somehow aware of their sexual orientation from early on in their lives. Nevertheless, for some of them there were changes and these were influenced by the spatial realities they were living in (e.g., university), and the social interactions (e.g., with friends, with therapists) or relationships they had (e.g., with cis people, other trans folks).

***“I think it’s because of how others relate to me that I relate differently to them”: bodies and relationships***

The sexualities-gender assemblage has aspects of territorialization de- and re-territorialization. These flows of affect are often observable at the individual level (e.g., in relationships, during social encounters). In addition, humans interact with others through our bodies, and bodies are central to

trans lives. Only certain bodies can be perceived as desirable within a given socio-cultural landscape, thus, receiving a certain *erotic privilege* (Fielding, 2021). This privilege in Western countries is generally for those who conform to one of the following characteristics: being white, able-bodied, athletic, and between the ages of 18-35 (Fielding, 2021). Stepping outside of this norm might imply not being desirable, and as such, being erased, objectified, or fetishized. Various participants commented on how their bodies were perceived by others, across various contexts, the impact it had on them, and how they perceived their own bodies. It has also been found that modifying one's body has an impact on how one might feel within their body and how they are perceived by society (Schilt & Windsor, 2014).

Participants in this study talked about navigating relational interactions, sometimes referring to their bodies, other times referring to previous experiences in relationships, or to societal gaze.

Louise commented about her experience of inhabiting a trans female body within this socio-political context. She said how she was aware that when she made a positive remark to someone it can often be perceived "*with that thin layer of TERF paint*". She further added that they might "*think I'm a rapist, pretending to be a woman, to get into your pants*". In "*asking people to have sex*" there was that "*constant fear*" of being "*too explicit*" or "*too confident*". Her thinking seems to reflect a social narrative (Colopy, 2023) that is often put on trans women. Here, it seems that inhabiting a female (trans) body in this socio-cultural context might have made Louise feel apprehensive in making positive remarks due to what others might have thought. This social narrative has at the relational level two paradoxically opposite functions with one single consequence: marginalising. One function of this social narrative is to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony (i.e., limiting women's freedom), for example in approaching others or moving freely in the social world. The other function is keeping the strong divide between trans and cis people (i.e., she is reminded that she is trans). On one hand, Louise is limited in her choice, like women under patriarchy are, on the other hand, she is yet reminded that she is not only a woman but a

trans woman. Two opposite functions with the consequence of bringing fear and constricting one's freedom.

C talked about previous relationships in the context of setting boundaries. He commented on how one of his ex-partners was "*sending messages to other men*" and "*saying things about [C's] biological anatomy*". The relationship ended and he said how he is now able to "*ask for what [he] wants*" in relationships because he "*gained confidence through some failed relationships, and as [his] transitions progressed*". Jack spoke about how increased confidence in his own body allowed him to be more explorative with his relationships. He said how "*since [his] top surgery*" he started "*exploring the polyamory side of [his] relationship*". Peter was another participant that mentioned about relationship, bodies and confidence. He said how seeing other people like him in different contexts increased his confidence and his willingness to explore with his sexualities. He talked about "*going to sex parties*", where he could have "*anonymous sex through [...] fuck boxes*<sup>14</sup>". He also mentioned other spaces, such as a festival for bisexual people where there were "*naked meadows, where you can just be naked and have your lunch amongst other naked people*". There, Peter could see other people like him (i.e., "*I'm not the only fat, hairy, [one] who still has their boobs, or has a vagina, or whatever*"), which helped him to feel more confident about himself ("*if he can be confident, I can be confident*"). Peter linked being more comfortable with his sexualities, with a consequent increased easiness in being in his own body. As a result, this increased confidence, helped him to feel freer to "*explore [his] sexuality and play with more people*". Thus, it seems that representation of people that he felt similar to, gave him a sense of validation, de- and re- territorializing his body relationally. This seems to align with existing theories on body image, whereby instead of adapting to existing standards of normality, a new ordinary for marginalized bodies can be established (Meleo-Erwin, 2012).

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<sup>14</sup> It's a box where genitalia are exposed, and someone (anonymous) can fuck the person. If you are familiar to glory holes, they are similar but for people with female secondary sex characteristics.

Other participants talked about their bodies in relationships, and also referring to future opportunities. For instance, Eddie commented on how “*without breasts*” they “*would be a lot happier*” but as they liked cis-gender men, they “*worry that they [men] won't be attracted to [Eddie] anymore*”. Eddie continued saying that “*during sex*” they “*don't want to look at them [breasts]*”. Thus, their breasts were a “*reminder*” of their “*body*” that seemed being read by men in a gendered way. They also talked about their frustration as they would have liked to “*experience dating women*” but also noticed a “*really big mental barrier*” because having a body with breasts would be another reminder of their own body. Thus, Eddie seemed navigating a binary world and their body in relation to it via compromising. They commented on how it was “*difficult to navigate sex when there's so many conditions that a person has to meet*”.

Minotaur when talking about his gender, said how he is “*not a very masculine man*”, and about his desires if he “*was more comfortable*” in his body. For example, he said that if he “*had access to top surgery and testosterone*” he would be “*happier having longer hair and wear[ing] dresses*”. He also talked about his body in relation to sexual acts. He talked about experiencing the “*gender euphoria wearing a strap- on for the first time*”, which was a surprise because he was “*mostly a bottom*” and instead noticed “*a certain wave of like, just just childish, giddy, like, AHAHAH*”.

**“*He's so loving and respectful that it taught me that I don't need to say no to Cis people because there are good ones*”:** *t4t vs cis relationships*

t4t is an acronym that emerged in the last 20 years to signify relationships that trans people have with other trans people. Nowadays, the term is widely used in the popular culture, and online (Vink, 2023). A couple of participants (Jack and Peter) talked about t4t relationships, whilst others spoke about their relationships with people of various genders.

Jack stated that trying to date cis people felt “*very awkward and complicated*”, whereby he was either othered “[you are] like a woman, and they think that you don't belong in the gay male spaces” or

fetishized. In the interview he also talked about meeting with another trans person and feeling “*that instant connection*” where it “*isn't' going to be complicated*” and “*if there's anything that goes wrong. We'll just say and it's chill*”. He further said how “*being trans and poly is [...] a special connection*” because “*there is no shame, there's no guilt*” and “*we need to help each other [...] because there's nobody else is going to do this for us*”. In his words, I could perceive a preference for interacting with other trans people, and a wish to create a community and mutual aid. It could possibly be that the territorializing affects that created the divide between trans and cis bodies, and the interactions Jack had with cis folks made him feel othered, perhaps not safe, and drove a desire to turn towards people where “*it's chill*”, thus, other trans people.

Peter said how he had “*always [been] exclusively t4t*”, and that if he was messaging cis men on Grindr, he would either “*feel almost guilty for it [...] or they [would] do something transphobic*”. He said how he was so committed to t4t that he “*thought about tattooing t4t on [his] arm*”. However, he said in the interview how he had recently met an older cis bisexual man [Oisin], and how he was “*loving and gentle and so good with transness and dysphoria to the point where I forget he is cisgender, [and] I feel I am talking with a trans person*”. Thus, from this positive interaction, Peter seemed to review his initial preference for t4t “[Oisin] made me more open to dating cis people, and told me that every so often the right one comes along”. It seems that relationships can disrupt hegemonic discourse and new creative becomings can emerge.

Other participants did not specifically mention about t4t relationships but talked about a familiarity and a closeness with other queer/trans folks. Eddie, in the poem they brought to the interview, stated how “*everyone who I have kissed is now trans*”, and spoke at length about not feeling seen in their gender by “*cisgender men*” who would think “*this is a lady that I use they/them pronouns for*”. Minotaur talked about how his partner recently came out as non-binary and how “*it's running joke*

*the among [his] group of friends that [he] encounters cis-men and go: Hmm! Have you considered that maybe you are queer?"*

The rest of the participants mentioned gender in the context of their relationships or when dating. Blue said how their previous partner was a trans guy, and at the time of the interview their partner was a trans woman, and they would be "*dating anything but men [...] but that, I know is probably something that will change*". Thus, demonstrating openness. C said how with the "*progression [of his] transition*", he realized that he "*is interested in people and it's more about the person rather than the parts*" but he still called himself "*gay because it's easier*".

Louise discussed about her experiences in a different way. She stated that her attraction had not changed, as she always dated both men and women. She said how when she "*was presenting as a man [...] gay men, [...] bisexual men, [...] pansexual men [...] were lovely to [her]*". She said how they could be "*overly horny*" but she would not feel at risk, whilst now she said that men approaching her are "*borderline aggressive*". She stated that the difference comes from "*the way*" the interaction was being seen "*by the other person, [and] by society at large*" that creates a difference. She commented how "*it's because of how others relate to me that I relate differently to them*".

Thus, it seems that different interactions might influence people's sense of safety and dating preferences. For some people, these rules did not have exceptions (e.g., Jack), whilst for others, like Peter, there were exceptions and "*every so often the right one comes along*". Blue, sat in the middle of them, knowing their preferences but also acknowledging how these might change. Louise seemed to be observing her relational interactions from the outside, acknowledging the territorializing homogenic affects that have a consequence on her and her relationships. Ultimately, it seems the only rule is that there is no rule. Trans people might feel more comfortable with other trans people for their shared experience, but there were exceptions, and it all depends on the relationships we had and have, and the wider societal narratives.

***"I'm not sure there's like an adequate formal definition of how I do things": relationships structure***

When speaking about sexualities, addressing people's relationships structure is also relevant.

Whilst this wasn't a question I specifically asked in the pre-interview questionnaire or during the interview, it was an aspect mentioned by everyone but three participants (Eddie, Toby, and C).

For instance, Louise mentioned that she was "*in one polyamorous relationship with a non-binary person*". Peter talked about each relationship he was in, describing them as "*different planets*" where "*they [each] will have a different flavour*", and "*objectives*". Jack talked about "*being trans and poly as a special connection*", where it was possible to create a community feeling. In a similar fashion, Blue linked "*polyamory*" and "*sexuality*" and described them as "*twin stars that have collided and come apart again*" and "*collide and come apart again*". Blue further added how their "*polyamory is anarchistic*", who they were "*attracted it to its very lesbian and [their] polyamory [is] like family*". Minotaur too talked about "*relationship anarchy*". He said how "*it most closely resembles a combination KTP, which is where everyone talks to each other*". He further commented on how he often visited his partner, and his metamour is "*one of [Minotaur's] best friends*" and "*sometimes [we] have sex*", and their relationship is "*as important*" as other relationships he has with other partners. He said how it's "*complicated, free form, and nebulous*". Interestingly, within the participants there were some aspects of conforming to normativity (e.g., Peter wanted to get married in the future, and Toby focusing on "*adulthood*" instead of "*playing the field*"), and some aspects of breaking from these (e.g., Minotaur who is in a polyamorous relationship resembling KTP).

***"I like guys, you know that sort of it, really": stories of stability***

For Toby, realizing that he was trans was presented in the interview linked with his sexualities "*I like guys so much, I sort of realized I was one*", and proximity to other trans individuals. Toby spoke about being 16 or 17 years old and supporting a trans feminine friend going through transition and doing research to help her realized that "*quite a lot of that does apply to me as well*". Thus, it seems that

for him, sexual attraction towards men and having access to information helped him to come out as trans. In terms of sexualities and relationships, Toby said how he wanted to “*see what testosterone actually does to down there*” as he did not “*really fancy like using a body that doesn't represent*” him “*on the inside*”. Other participants mentioned about stability in sexualities too (e.g., Louise always liked both men and women). Thus, it seems that aspects of stability (and change) weave between participants and within participants in a creative unpredictable flow.

***“I still call myself gay because it's easier”: stories of identity and labels***

Just a few people spoke explicitly and at length about their sexual identity. Even if not ascribing fully to particular terms (as they almost all spoke about being open or exploring with their sexuality), C, Louise, Peter and Eddie presented a narrative that referred to a specific identity. For instance, C spoke about specific behaviours and used terms that fall into the gay identity (e.g., “*obviously, I'm quite camp*”). Louise, stated in the questionnaire that she identified as “*lesbian*” and was in a relationship with a “*non-binary*” person, and identified with the “*lesbian label*”. She further commented on this saying how a “*lesbian relationship*” felt “*a lot more equal*”. Thus, the use of this term perhaps signified not only who she was most attracted to but also the type (i.e., *how to*) of relationships she prefers. Peter said how he was “*attracted to all genders*” and sometimes he used the term “*pansexual, if [he] wants to emphasize that*”. For instance, when speaking with the “*average person who's got a very basic understanding of gender and sexuality*” but it was not a term he “*overly identif[ies]*” with. He also said how he “*prefer[s] the term bisexual*” as it was the term that he used first when “*exploring [his] sexuality*” and because it “*has its own culture, its own community, its own history, that*” he did not “*want to erase*”. Thus, it seems that for him the word was an acknowledgment of the legacy of bisexuality. Eddie said how as they have “*discovered*” their “*own gender and sexuality*”, it all “*just become more and more vague*”, to the point that if asked about either of them “*I'll say I'm queer*”. Eddie stated how they “*don't believe in putting sexuality and labels onto someone else*” but neither onto them. In their interview, they

talked about the use of labels “*not change to ourselves but change to the external politics of how everyone is seen*”. Historically, the word *queer* was used as a slur against the LGBTQIA+ community but from the 80s it started to be reclaimed and used more by activists and re-entered popular culture (Worthen, 2023). It seems that Eddie, by rejecting any other label and choosing *queer*, was taking a political stance as well as reclaiming the word to describe their gender and sexualities as something that is “*not tangible*” and that “*doesn’t exist, and also has never really existed*”. Thus, it seems that labels were having various functions for participants, such as defining their identity (e.g., C) or their sexual orientation, being in respect of the history of a community (e.g., Peter), or for political reasons.

***“Instead of then going to gay clubs, I would spend my time in queer spaces”: spatial realities creating opportunities for stories***

Many participants talked about spatial<sup>15</sup> aspects that were related to their story.

***“it’s one of those places where you feel like you are the only gay in the village”: territorializing spaces***

Small towns and specific geographical areas were often described by participants as limiting or making them feel othered. Toby, Louise, Minotaur, Jack and spoke about this aspect.

Toby stopped dating until receiving GAHT because wanted a body that represented him more on how he felt on the inside. However, he also stated how, at the time of the interview, he was “*back home*” where “*it’s really difficult*” because “*it’s one of those places where you feel you are the only gay in the village*”. His use of the term *those places* implies that he is aware of other spaces, and perhaps assumed a shared knowledge with me that in small villages there are not many gay people. Similarly,

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<sup>15</sup> I use the words *spatial* and *space* to signify material spaces (e.g., towns, bars), as well as social spaces (e.g., attending university), and online spaces (e.g., dating apps, online gaming). I grouped in the text spaces into territorializing and de-territorializing spaces. However, it is worth mentioning that any given geographical or online space has the potential to be affected by both of these.

Louise talked about “*the middle of nowhere*” and this unspecific place might be a reality existing potentially in any country, again, suggesting a shared knowledge of her experiences. She spoke of how, for instance, if a heterosexual couple walks “*down the street holding hands, nobody bats an eyelid*” but if you are two women holding hands, in “*London nobody bats an eyelid. Travel up to the middle of nowhere, and people will think you're a witch*”. This othering and lack of representation might contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness for people in the LGBTQIA+ community (Hobson, 2017; Hulkko, 2018).

Jack spoke specifically about Ireland and religion. He said that, throughout his transition, there was a period where he noticed “*sexual*” and “*romantic feelings*” for people who were femme-presenting. He said how he thought at the time “*Oh, God! Maybe I'm just a lesbian*” and then thought about his environment and reflected how that was not “*gonna go down easily*” as he lived in Ireland and “*it's very religious. It's very small*”. The descriptive words used for Ireland (*religious; small*) are perhaps suggesting a constriction in one's expression of their sexualities.

Minotaur linked the geographical area with the class aspect. He referred to it as a “*working class*” town and not “*the most tolerant place in the world*”. He spoke about coming across “*queerness online*” but he could only find the word bisexual thanks “*to one of the girls that*” he “*had around*” who “*came out*” as bisexual, and they were the only “*two openly queer people*” in their “*entire year*”. He spoke about how they both experienced “*homophobic bullying*” from “*students, but also from the staff*”.

Similarly, Eddie, linked class with spatial geography in their narrative but they also commented on some LGBTQIA+ identities. They described their university city as “*middle and upper class*”, and not “*a very queer friendly city*” but rather “*gay-friendly city at most*”. They drew a difference between queer and the “*stereotypical cis-gender gay man*” who tries to fight for rights that “*fit into a hetero-normative*” framework, such as “*gay marriage voting, living together [...] but nothing then challenges that system*”. Thus, there, Eddie felt that their “*perception wasn't being challenged*”.

***"If you're a woman holding hands with a woman then in London nobody bats an eyelid": cities as de-territorializing spaces***

Louise and Eddie both mentioned bigger UK cities for their open-mindedness. Louise said that if a lesbian couple walks in London "*nobody bats an eyelid*", as if to suggest that queerness is something that is seen often and not a rarity- compared to small towns. Eddie, from Bath, moved to Manchester for their Masters studies they were "*heavily involved into queer spaces*", with other "*queer people*" and felt their "*sexuality pushed [them] into those queer spaces and [their] gender*". From their account, it seems that Eddie noticed a pull towards certain spatial realities that challenged and expanded their thinking.

***"I went to university, and it was really funny": university and education as a territorializing and re-territorializing space***

Some people mentioned the period of going to university being an important moment of change. Blue said how they had "*one other person in [their] cohort that also used they/them pronouns*" and experiencing people being respectful of their pronouns made them "*feel more comfortable*" and "*resulted in a lot more femininity being brought into [their] expression*" and their "*sexuality was able to be a lot more compassionate*" in the way they "*thought about it, and how [they] talked about it*". Minotaur, instead, seemed finding university settings limiting. When talking about his period before transitioning, mentioned how at "*university, it was really funny*" because whilst "*friends at school assumed*" he was "*straight*", at university "*everybody assumed that [he] was a lesbian that wasn't prepared to admit it*". Jack talked about university as a place where he met "*people*" and "*they are the reason [why he] decided to try out new pronouns and try new names, and where [he] met [his] current partner*".

As it can be seen, university was mostly a positive experience for people, except from Minotaur. Findings from interviews seemed to reflect a similar general country-wide phenomenon. Stonewall

charity surveyed 522 university students in 2018 and found that one in five lesbian, gay and bi students had experienced homophobia (Stonewall, 2018). Since then, government has launched a LGBT Action Plan (Government Equalities Office, 2018b) to support these groups, trying to address homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. Interestingly, Minotaur attended university in 2017, thus, it might be that the LGBTQ+IA supportive campaigns were not yet implemented. Nevertheless, participants seemed to be finding university a space to learn and experiment (socially), where there was positive representation and support from peers.

#### ***“My hot 5 min that I spent on Grinder”: online spaces***

Online spaces can offer people access to information, as well as opportunities to meet other people. Interestingly, my interview schedule did not include questions about the online space but most of participants spoke about it.

#### ***Online spaces for educational purposes***

Four out of eight participants mentioned online access as an educational tool for themselves or others. Jack said how he found out about “*non-binary people and trans people online*” and how that “*makes sense*” to him and helped him to feel connected with others. Minotaur said how he came across “*the idea of queerness online*” before coming out, and later in the interview he mentioned how during his Master's degree the terminology about “*being non-binary has emerged off the Internet*”. Toby said how he found his trans-inclusive “*football team on social media*”. C talked about how he is “*part of some support groups on Facebook*” where he “*provided people support*” and also “*made some friends through there*”. Further he also talked about the internet as a place of “*misinformation*” where, for example, his “*mum Googled a lot*”, which prompted him to take an active role, i.e., “*if [someone] wants to know anything and I know about it, I'll walk [them] through it*”.

#### ***Online spaces to seek out and cultivate relationships***

Minotaur spontaneously mentioned about his “*hot 5 min that [he] spent on Grindr*”. He talked about downloading the dating app to “*to see what that was like*” and after introducing himself as a trans man, “*the messages [he] got fell into 2 categories: [...] I've always wanted to fuck a chick with the dick or [...] show me the forbidden hole*”. Thus, for Minotaur it was a territorializing space, othering, objectifying and fetishizing trans bodies. Jack said how on dating apps “*it's hard to find people that are not creepy, but also trustworthy*” and said how “*spending time on dating apps*” has “*definitely impacted how [he] feels about [his] sexuality and [his] relationship as well*”. Whilst he didn't give any explicit examples, he hinted at a certain need to set boundaries to find the right people for him. Toby talked about online spaces where you might “*find someone*” and felt that being trans “*it's a conversation you have to have*”. Then, he continued saying how “*it's not something I want to worry [about] straight away*”. Overall, it seems that participants found engaging in online dating challenging for various aspects.

C presented a different experience as he had “*one boyfriend from Grindr*” and another “*boyfriend from Tinder*”. Thus, it seems that online dating apps can vary widely. Due to the fact these apps are location based, it could be that some geographic areas offer more re-territorializing opportunities. It could also be that it depends on how people present themselves and what they reported to me. For instance, C could have had transphobic experiences via these apps but he did not report them to me because sometimes you need to “*hold your head up high*” and “*a lot of the time you just need to let it roll off your back*”- two expressions that he mentioned later on in the interview when speaking about the advice that he gave to younger trans folks, such as his “*nephew [who] is trans*” and “*came out as trans only a few months ago*”.

One participant, Peter, talked about his use of online spaces to cultivate his relationship. He said how with one of his partners that they “*haven't actually met in person*”, they “*have a really good kink dynamic like over voice note and text*”, where they “*explore kinks that we wouldn't explore with other people*”.

### **Tabletop role-playing game and gaming**

Blue and Minotaur talked spontaneously about gaming. They both commented on this at the end of the interview, when I offered space for anything else they wanted to add, perhaps signifying an important element to their identity ("*felt like it was worth mentioning*"- Blue)

Blue mentioned how they "*play a lot of D&D*" and, whilst characters building allowed them to explore genders and their "*own biases*" and "*self-projection*", the "*sexuality of any characters*" that they played was "*as undefinable as me*". Minotaur said how he came out during covid lockdown, and it was "*really awful*" not seeing his partner. Therefore, to stay in touch with his community he set up a "*Blood Bowl*" (online game), where people could game but also chat on Discord and many went and talked with him about their gender or sexualities. He commented on how he was the first amongst his friends to not be cis and heterosexual but by the end of the lockdown most of his friends came out as gay, bisexual, non-binary or trans. Thus, Minotaur seemed to refer to this online space as a safe space to support people and allow for exploration. Connecting and sharing experiences for people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community had a significant meaning especially during the pandemic period (Van Evera, 2022).

### **Discussion**

Through this project I have read extensively (scientific and grey literature), spoke with professionals and fellow TNB people, listened to podcasts and watched YouTube videos, and reflected on my profession, both in solitude and with loved ones. My thinking expanded beyond the results of this study and expanded to embrace wishes and hopes to improve the field of Clinical Psychology more widely. Furthermore, the epistemology and methodology adopted in this thesis also have potential research and clinical implications. Thus, the section below is divided in two main sub-section: discussion and implications in light of the existing scientific literature and my research project (i.e., titled Findings

informed Discussion), and discussion and wider recommendations (i.e., titled Discussion and Wider Recommendations).

### **Findings informed Discussion**

The initial research question was the following: Have the sexualities of TNB people (aged 18-30 years old) changed alongside their gender? The main two aspects that stood out were: Relationships, and Spaces.

#### ***Relationships***

Through the findings of my study, alongside engaging with relevant literature, I have observed that people's sexualities are a complex phenomenon, influenced by a myriad of factors. Based on the current study, it seems that one's sexualities are developed in relation to others and/or oneself. For instance, Louise spoke of how, being a female, the way men related to her influenced how she was relating to them as a result. Furthermore, inevitably sexualities were not only constructed interpersonally, but also with non-human elements (e.g., sexual garments, fuck boxes, phones, strap-ons) too. For instance, Peter talked about nipple covers, and his online relationship where they never met, but they had a "*really good kink dynamic over voice note and text*". Minotaur talked about the gender euphoria experienced when using a strap-on. Moreover, all this is being influenced by historical and societal habits -such as marriage, monogamy, co-habitation (M. J. Barker, 2012). Participants seemed to carve their own way of relating to themselves and with others in this socio-cultural context. Sometimes, ascribing to traditional norms (e.g., Toby talked about "*adulthood*" in opposition to "*playing the field*"), other times, creating something new (e.g., Minotaur describing the relationship with his metamour said "*it's complicated. It's kind of free form. It's quite nebulous.*"). The importance of relationships was also significant in the literature review. For instance, Anzani and colleagues (2021) found from their research how relational factors can help TNB people feel more comfortable during sexual activities. They also suggested how it may be important for clinicians working with this population to help them and their partner to work on

communication skills (e.g., to talk about sexual preferences, boundaries setting) (Anzani et al., 2021).

Promoting communication, in particular honesty, was also recommended in other studies to promote sexual satisfaction, especially for couples (and other relationship structures) where one person is transitioning (Marshall et al., 2020; Martin & Coolhart, 2022). Rossman (2019) also suggested that clinicians should be aware of dynamics of ENM relationships, and kink practices.

**Clinical recommendations.** Considering results from my study and the existing literature, it is recommended that Clinical Psychologists working with TNB people are comfortable in thinking beyond the individual. Clinical Psychologists could achieve this by discussing relationships with clients, offering them space to talk about relationships aspects in the context of developing open communication and boundaries setting. For example, the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology could provide specific training, borrowing strategies from family therapy (Edwards et al., 2019). For instance, Edwards and colleagues (2019) in their paper, developed an ecological framework for transgender inclusive therapy. The relevance of their model to the results of this thesis is considering multiple aspects when thinking about psychological interventions. More specifically, amongst in their framework, they include how therapists working with TNB clients might think considering the sociocultural identities their clients hold and their relationships, and help their clients fostering connection with their community, as well as act as offering advocacy when needed.

In the context of transition, working with relationships is especially important (Motter & Softas-Nall, 2021). Anecdotally, I have been informed how working with couples/partners it's not the norm in gender services in the UK. This research points to the urgent need for all UK gender services to offer couples therapy and psychosexual therapy as options for TNB people.

Engagement in kink/BDSM practices, and having alternative relationship structures (e.g., ENM) was mentioned in several articles in the literature review (Bockting et al., 2009; Platt & Bolland, 2017; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013; Tree-McGrath et al., 2018). In addition, polyamory was mentioned by five out

of eight participants, and kink practice by two of them (Peter, and Minotaur). For the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, it is imperative that trainee Clinical Psychologists have basic awareness of a broad range of sexualities as these appear to be significant for TNB people. This is of uttermost importance as traditionally diversity training remains an add-on in training and in core course material, and overall knowledge remains skewed towards white European frameworks (Calia & Kanceljak, 2023; Daiches, 2010; Daiches & Smith, 2012). Thus, courses in Clinical Psychology are encouraged to have diversity wedded within their training (The British Psychological Society, 2019). For instance, in the UK, Pink Therapy is the largest independent organization working with gender and sexually diverse individuals. It is advisable for course directors and faculty members to consider selecting training relevant to clinical practice from Pink Therapy, and possibly discuss endorsement for the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology-as it is something being offered. Training for Clinical Psychologists should also integrate elements of self-awareness, cultivated by regular reflective practice spaces, specifically integrating aspects on gender and sexuality. This is especially important as clinicians are trained practicing within territorializing affects of various assemblages (e.g., academia, scientific method, whiteness).

**Research recommendations.** Firstly, studies within psychology could explore with various methods aligned with this thesis' theoretical framework (Fox & Alldred, 2022), such as mixed-methods design, or qualitative studies that are respondent-led, embodied methodologies (Howitt, 2024), art-based, or ethnographic observations. Especially regarding the latter, considering the relational aspect of research itself, this could foster trust (with participants) and facilitate interdisciplinary co-production (with other disciplines), it is advisable for psychologists to collaborate with researchers doing ethnographic or field research. This would allow for a richer understanding of gender and sexualities, as well as being appropriate from a post-humanist perspective.

Secondly, considering the findings of the current study and the existing literature on TNB relationships (Auer et al., 2014; Motter & Softas-Nall, 2021; Platt & Bolland, 2017), longitudinal studies

could represent interesting options for future research. More specifically, a longitudinal study using NI, creative methods, and relational ontology exploring TNB participants' sexualities would allow to offer nuanced insights of these changes. Thirdly, as most of the participants were polyamorous, and some engaged in kink/BDSM practices, it would be interesting to survey the TNB population to investigate the prevalence of kink/BDSM and their relationship practices. Finally, in light of the existing literature on psychological aspects of kink practices (Easton, 2007; Sprott et al., 2021; Vivid et al., 2020) and my findings, a qualitative study exploring the experience of kink/BDSM within this population could expand our understanding of such practices in a non-pathologizing way.

### ***Spaces***

Sexualities were also influenced by spaces (e.g., cities, universities, online) for the participants. For instance, Eddie spoke about Manchester being queerer compared to Oxford, and them preferring the former as it could challenge their thinking and foster a greater sense of community. Peter talked about sex-positive spaces which improved his confidence and facilitated him exploring his sexualities. Minotaur mentioned about gaming and Discord as supportive online spaces, and various participants talked about online dating (with mostly having negative experiences, except from C). From the literature review, some participants of the studies talked about their experiences of LGB social spaces as trans people (Rowniak & Chesla, 2013; Scheim et al., 2019), and other participants mentioned online spaces, in the context of dating and social support (Murchison et al., 2023; Platt & Bolland, 2017). Thus, it seems that spaces (either online or in person) are an important aspect for TNB people, where they can meet other people and explore aspects of themselves. Community was also another element mentioned by some of the participants. For instance, Jack spoke about mutual aid and referred to polyamory as a way to bolster this social support. Minotaur, Blue and Eddie also all spoke about social support and the importance of queer spaces. Anecdotally, I also observed this during my placement at a CAMHS service, where LGBTQIA+ young people were surveyed about the support they received and what they wished

could improve. They spoke about wanting to have more social time with people from their communities (e.g., group activities, art groups). Taking all these results together, the clinical and research recommendations for this aspect are outlined below.

**Clinical recommendations.** In terms of implications for future clinical practice, Clinical Psychologists could work in liaison with charities or third-sector organizations (e.g., London Friend, Spectra), some of which already offer counselling and support group for the community. Alternatively, for rural areas, Clinical Psychologists could facilitate setting up social spaces where TNB people can connect – this is relevant not only in terms of sexualities but for an overall sense of acceptance and wellbeing. This is in line with other recommendations from the literature whereby setting up community support spaces was suggested to reduce sense of isolation (Marshall et al., 2020).

**Research recommendations.** Future research should consider both rural and urban setting to understand TNB people's experiences in different geographic spaces, as it was also recommended in other research (Bockting et al., 2009; Gunby & Butler, 2023; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013). This would help to show the nuances of different flows within various relational machines. For instance, it seems from what was reported by participants that rural areas were more territorializing, but this might not always be the case (e.g., a rural area can have pockets that offers creative becomings). Thus, space could be considered much more, researched more and potentially expand our knowledge and understanding of this aspect for TNB people.

### **Discussion and Wider Recommendations**

Clinical Psychology has a dark history. For example, there is documentation of the discipline justifying the eugenics movement (Pilgrim, 2008), developing interrogation techniques (Harper, 2004; Patel, 2003), and framing structural failings of unemployment as individual psychological deficits (Friedli & Stearn, 2015). Recently, in Clinical Psychology, there has been an increased awareness and interest in researching marginalized communities. In observing such changes, I wondered: what is the aim of such

research? The aim of Clinical Psychology, and mental health support more widely I would argue, is to promote one's wellbeing. In the UK, this has mostly been understood as providing assessments and clinical interventions (NHS Health Careers, 2023). Is the aim of such research to adapt existing interventions to help TNB population to cope with mental health challenges and improve their wellbeing? If that is the case, how do we ensure *appropriate* interventions if Clinical Psychology training lacks depth in diversity teaching? It is self-evident that we must know *who* we want to offer our service to before knowing *what* to offer them. We need granularity and depth in our research and training. But how do we do this if we are constricted in our research methodologies, our clinical approaches, and in our professional training (territorializing) habits? In a Western culture of growing 'wokeness'<sup>16</sup> (Matthew, 2021), are our standard textbooks appropriate? In thinking, I reflected on a reading I did during my Masters studies. For instance, the framing of negative emotional experiences as 'depression' and treating it with medication, can undermine other contextual challenges. This can be observed in the re-telling of a case by the psychiatrist Simon Sobo (2009)

I successfully treated a woman for depression with Prozac. Three years later she was again depressed and I suggested Prozac. "Are you kidding?" She answered. While on Prozac she put all

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<sup>16</sup> Here, the term is both used in a literal way (i.e., being aware of social justice and inequalities), and in a pejorative way (i.e., militarised inclusivity, often used by people with conservative views). I believe that we are in an historical period in Western countries where both conservative and liberal people can recognise that we are a diverse society, and there are structural inequalities that affect both parties. I argue, in the point later, that considering this awareness of the context, we are not training professionals appropriately.

of her misgivings aside and married a man she knew was unsuitable. When she was off of it she realized what a horrible decision she had made (Sobo, 2009, para 37)<sup>17</sup>.

Although Sobo's blog post points out the drawbacks of using the hypothesis of 'chemical imbalances' to explain mental health challenges, in my view, it also clearly speaks about patriarchy. Within this patriarchal paradigm (we are still living in), women (traditionally) ought to be quiet and take less space (both with their words and their bodies, such as when walking, sitting or on public transports). In the example above, it is observable a de-territorializing flow for the female client (i.e., "Are you kidding?"), that appeared necessary to improve her wellbeing. I could not have offered such interpretation if I did not read some feminist textbooks, and my observations would have been limited to clinical, individual aspects. Thus, in my view, learning widely beyond Clinical Psychology is of uttermost importance. Having this in mind, training and research in Clinical Psychology (although I suppose this might apply to other medical professions too), must have readings and resources discussing social issues (Ahmed, 2017; Chapman, 2023; Fanon, 1963; Freire, 2020).

Below I offer some ethical and radical recommendations. I highlight how these needs to be ethical because we hold clinical responsibilities, and radical because via manipulating the machines in the research assemblage it is possible to offer new avenues for social discovery and social knowledge (Fox & Alldred, 2022).

### ***Therapeutic stance: don't be a phallus***<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I am purposefully bringing an example from years ago to demonstrate the rhizomatic aspect of researching, as mentioned at the start of this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Here, I refer to Preciado's comment on the phallus in his Countersexual Manifesto (Preciado, 2018). The phallus is the "*phantasmic and political hypostasis of the penis within heteronormative patriarchal culture*". Or in other words, is a symbol that states how a few body centimeters became to be "*males' hegemonic somatopolitical position*". As a by-product a "*(flaccid) penis is not yet masculine enough*", and "*only the erect, ejaculating penis, as a productive and reproductive organ, can claim to be phallic*"

TNB (similarly to disabled and non-normative bodies) have always been questioned, fetishized or speculated upon, as reported by participants in the current study. For instance, the genital curiosity towards TNB bodies (Latham, 2016; Vidal-Ortiz, 2002), or the phenomenon of the trans broken elbow syndrome (Wall, Patev, & Benotsch, 2023). Marginalized bodies come in our clinical spaces after years (and generations) of being prodded, judged, stigmatized. Thus, our questions need to be carefully crafted, with an awareness that we 'might fuck up', because "*we will all fuck up*" (Fielding, 2021, p.55). In this section, I report and synthesize to Lucie Fielding's chapter (2021) on Ethical Curiosity, a therapeutic stance composed by three aspects: dismantling entitlement, seeking permission, and treating the client in the room<sup>19</sup>. The interested reader is signposted to their work. Below, I offer some reflections inspired by their writing. These are not a formulaic template but rather a therapeutic stance or an adaptable framework. Clinicians might consider implementing these individually and/or within group supervision. When referring to 'we', in the section below, I refer to clinicians.

***Dismantling entitlement.*** Curiosity is not inherently a bad thing (quite the opposite!). We should strive to develop awareness of curiosity when working with (Gender, Sexuality, and Relationship Diverse) GSRD folks. Awareness and curiosity are also recommended by our professional national guidance (BPS, 2019). However, we should not be instructed by our clients about their communities, but we should independently learn about them, and university courses should devote some of their teaching time to this. In the clinical room, we should, instead, take each clinical encounter as a unique moment to

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(Preciado, 2018, p. 63). Thus, when I say 'don't be a phallus', I mean 'don't continue imposing the hegemonic normative stance in research (e.g., by waiting for participants to come to you), be creative, disrupt the norm to generate new knowledge.'

<sup>19</sup> I abstain from offering a new way of working clinically (i.e., re-inventing the wheel), as it is a territorializing practice in the capitalist system. Instead, I highlight and showcase the work of existing TNB writers who have proposed interesting practices, and deserve attention.

be curious about facets of the person's identity that are *meaningful to them*, their stories and the stories people have told about them. Such questions should be driven by clinical reasoning, and to do this, clinicians might consider asking themselves reflective questions such as: who is this question/statement I am about to offer for? Why do I need such information? Does it have clinical relevance based on the agreed therapeutic goals? Is this question tainted by dominant (territorializing) narratives? (e.g., when a client says that they identify with a specific GI, asking them 'What kind of GI are you or would you like to be?' Instead of assuming we know their experience because of the label they use). Supervision, and peer supervision is of uttermost importance to understand one's bias.

**Seeking permission.** This aspect (i.e., consent, asking permission) as explained here is borrowed from sexual education and BDSM/kink practices (e.g., Moon, 2015), whereby consent is not a one-time thing but it is an *ongoing* practice, where involved parties mutually agree on a practice and can withdraw consent at any time. Furthermore, aftercare is another aspect related to BDSM/kink practices that should also be (and, generally, in good practice is already) implemented when working clinically. Thus, to simplify, consent occurs:

- Before asking a question (e.g., I wonder if I can ask you more about X. How would that sound?)
- During an activity/when a client is responding to the question or reflecting out loud (e.g., How are you experiencing talking to me about X? What are you noticing?)
- After the practice (aftercare; e.g., Looking back to before I asked this question, did you notice any change?).

It is important to highlight how this is not a one-size-fits all, and clinicians should keep in mind the therapeutic goals, their biases, their theoretical background, and the intention beyond each question.

**Working with the client in the room.** Some of our TNB clients' concerns are not related to their sexuality or GI. Clinical Psychologists are trained to draw theoretical connections from a client's background to their current existing difficulties. However, sometimes these might be territorializing (at best), or harmful (at worst). For example, asexuality has (and still is) being considered a symptom of past traumatic experiences and, thus, treated instead of being considered as an identity and addressed with openness and curiosity (van Dyk, 2023; Anzani et al., 2021). Thus, clinicians are invited to hold their theorizing and hypothesizing lightly and use supervision to reflect on their assumptions and possible counter-transference material.

***Research tradition in Clinical Psychology: don't be a phallus (take two).***

Participants from my research study, and more broadly, participants within the literature I reviewed (Pipkin et al., 2023; Rossman, 2016, 2016) were mostly Western, white, and well-educated. Future research should include a more geographically varied, and ethnically diverse population. Similarly to the suggestions above, this might imply doing research in clinical psychology differently. For instance, especially for recruitment, one option could be implementing indigenous field worker sampling (IFS), whereby investigators are selected from the local community and are trained in relevant research aspects (e.g., research aim, interview process) (Power, 2013). This approach might allow prospective participants to feel more comfortable in disclosing their experiences to their peers (Rosenberg & Tilley, 2021), compared to Trainee Clinical Psychologists. For instance, if I had the knowledge and the time resources to implement IFS for my study, this approach might have facilitated gathering views from more trans feminine, trans females and/or have a more ethnically diverse population.

Another recommendation for research, which has been mentioned in the literature is to engage in community participatory action research (Motter & Softas-Nall, 2021; Tebbe & Budge, 2016). Framing

participants as co-producers of knowledge could open new opportunities for learning (Vincent, 2018).

This approach would also be consistent with this thesis' theoretical framework, as via manipulating the machines in the research assemblage it is possible to offer new avenues for social discovery and social knowledge (Fox & Alldred, 2022).

Finally, as stated by Platt & Bolland (2017), future research should use a strength-based non-pathological framework. This is especially important considering the history of TNB lives (Heyam, 2022; Mackay, 2024; Morgan, 2014) and the current climate in the UK, whereby conservative ideas are limiting young TNB's lives (Cass, 2024; Department for Education, 2024; Department of Health and Social Care, 2024), and more broadly TNB lives around the world (Butler, 2024). Offering alternative lenses in research is especially important in this context. We (TNB and allies), as Judith Butler mentioned in a recent interview, need to "*compel*" and "*produce a counter imaginary*" where "*interdependency*" on this planet is possible -even when we do not agree (LSE, 2024), as this research aimed to do.

#### ***Reflections on the use of relational ontology within Clinical Psychology.***

Implementing a post-humanist approach within the discipline of Clinical Psychology has allowed me to be more critical and generative in my thinking. I believe that this philosophical framework could be a significant contribution to the field moving forward. Below, I offer some reflections and suggestions for future practice<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> It is to note that relational ontology has a long philosophical tradition. Thus, expert readers in the field might consider my suggestions as limiting because I am selecting only some aspects of this framework (e.g., territorialization/de-/re-) and not others (e.g., molar, molecular forces).

**Clinical implications.** Clinically, systemic theories (Dallos & Draper, 2015), and overall formulation practices (Johnstone & Dallos, 2013) in the UK have provided the opportunity to identify elements of oppression within a given context (e.g., society, country, family) to one's presenting mental health problems. To illustrate this, I offer my reflection of a client I worked with long before the start of my doctorate, eight years ago, to then make connections to today's socio-political context.

I remember working with a woman, a mother of two children and a wife, refugee from Syria, that was living with her family in a one-bedroom hotel accommodation. Before moving, she was a keen seamstress that enjoyed her job and regular customers were visiting her at the shop. Around the same time she was referred to mental health services by her General Practitioner, she had also come to know that her mother was diagnosed with late-stage cancer. The client presented with symptoms of anxiety and depression. In speaking with her, and thanks to the interpreter, I wondered if the problems were 'her mental health symptoms' or if her suffering was because she was deprived of agency (being a refugee not allowed or having the resources to work), privacy (in terms of accommodation), and about to face a future loss, and an overall uncertain future.

I reflected about the various systems of oppression she might be experiencing, such as patriarchy, racism, and state-policing, to name a few. Noticing these systems as agentic (i.e., something/someone is the cause/co-occurring cause of a phenomenon) left me hopeless, especially after our sessions. I felt limited. In writing this thesis, I felt that relational ontology could help us as a profession, especially when working alongside people in extremely painful situations. Upon reflection, there is nothing else I would have done differently, but the concepts of territorialization, de-territorialization, and re-territorialization as flows of reality can allow us to stretch and flex our ways of working. For instance, in the above-mentioned example, reflecting using the Social GGRRRAAACCEESSS (Burnham, 2018) was a territorializing practice. Clinical practice had moved from 1980s personality, individual-focused approaches to consider the wider system, but that framework was still a limitation, it confined me in

how I *should* think about a case within a given context. Every framework is helpful as well as limiting. This is why territorialization and de-/re- are not stages but constant multiple flows. Thus, I started to think: how is mental health conceptualized globally? And, because of that, what are our duties as clinicians? What is the territorializing history of our profession? What are its confines and customs? What is being said in our professional standards (e.g., (HCPC, 2023)) that aim in promoting ethical practice? What do they allow and what do they leave out?

The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state that allows us to cope with the stressors of life, and “*underpins*” our ability “*make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in*” (World Health Organization, 2022). Thus, mental health and mental *wellbeing* is strictly linked with *agency* (individually and collectively).

In the last two decades, research has emerged highlighting the impact of wider factors on one’s wellbeing. For example, research has shown that mental health is partly *socially determined* (e.g., poverty and forms of discrimination) (Jones, 2019). These social determinants have a short-term impact, as well as long term, and through generations (e.g., epigenetics). One example of this are from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) studies (e.g., Anda et al., 2008; Dong et al., 2004), whereby children who experienced maltreatment (e.g., neglect, poverty, discrimination, parental loss) might be more at risk of long term health conditions, such as COPD (Anda et al., 2008), cancer (e.g., Brown et al., 2013; Kelly-Irving et al., 2013), fibromyalgia (e.g. Olivieri et al., 2012).

I started to reflect what do our professional standard say about our duties: what are our ethical obligations? Is there any mentioning of psychologists engaging with social determinants? Our professional standards are extensive. As reviewing them it is not the aim of this thesis, I will only include some parts. In our professional standards (HCPC, 2023) it is stated that Clinical Psychologists should “*promote and protect the service user’s interests at all times*” (HCPC, 2023; p.7). It continues, saying that psychologists should “*use their skills, knowledge and experience, and the information available to them*,

*to make informed decisions and/or take action where necessary*” (HCPC, 2023; p.8). On a similar tone, the National Health Service values mention about “*commitment to quality of care*” and “*improving lives*” (NHS, 2009, para 5).

However, if mental health is affected by social determinants, and we have to “*promote service user’s interests at all times*” (HCPC, 2023; p.7), and improve lives (NHS, 2009) with the “*knowledge, experience, and information*” (HCPC, 2023; p.8) available to us, then, in my view, we are falling short in promoting wellbeing and good mental health. The knowledge, experience, and information available to me as a trainee Clinical Psychologist made me reflect that perhaps a de (and re)-territorializing practice would be to provide protected time to Clinical Psychologists for social justice duties. Going back to the example above, my client’s agency was significantly constricted, and, I could have devoted some of my NHS paid time to act to ameliorate refugees’ social determinants. For instance, by advocating or commenting publicly (e.g., collaboratively writing letters or pitching news articles) on some aspects of our social sphere. This action could be valuable now as ever consider the hostile climate towards marginalized communities in the UK. More specifically, referring to the right-wing protests that have occurred in the UK (Al-jazeera, 2024). As a Clinical Psychologist, this phenomenon is not surprising (albeit concerning and saddening), considering the anti-immigration rhetoric that has populated UK politics, from Brexit, to the Rwanda scheme (Conservatives, 2024) to the Labour government policy on borders to “*return*” people who do not have immigration rights (2024). Again, as Trainee Clinical Psychologists, we are taught a variety of models, from behavioural approaches, to systemic and psychodynamic. Most of these models could highlight how these messages (e.g., Brexit, Rwanda, sending people ‘back’ to their countries) can contribute to a feeling of ‘us versus them’. Thus, I wonder if Clinical Psychology could consider introducing de-/re-territorializing ethos and practices in their training and day-to-day work.

Above, I offered a reflection of one of the possible implementations of relational ontology as a framework to *step back* from current practices and create new becomings. I consider it important to note again that any framework offers something new and is limiting at the same time. Thus, relational ontology and its implementations are re-territorializing and limiting. I believe that relational ontology does not offer a final solution but a new becoming for clinical practice.

### **Research Implications**

Science has one significant aspect in common with art: they both are practices (with defined methods for inquiry) to make sense of reality (Oxman, 2016). Other ways for trying to understand reality are religion, and philosophy, amongst others. Each of these (e.g., science, art, religion, and philosophy) have ways of carrying out (i.e., methods/practices) the process of *knowing*. For example, for a Buddhist, it can be meditative practice, whilst for a scientist can be using a specific methodology (e.g., interviews, clinical trials, etc). Thus, the practice of scientific inquiry is territorializing. There are some clear boundaries for science, dictated by its Western historical roots (Harding, 1994).

Similarly to the previous section, relational ontology, and more specifically the concept of research assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2015a), has allowed me to *step out* from the ‘noise’ of this (territorializing) scientific practice and reflect more critically and widely. Especially the concept of flow, and integrating more-than-human aspects have been incredibly helpful for my development. I offer a couple of examples of how relational ontology has given me the opportunity to be more creative and critical for this project. Then, I offer some reflective points for future researchers interested in this approach.

Publishing scientific articles is part of the research assemblage (including laptops, reviewers, digital platforms, etc, etc). Whilst co-writing a book chapter, me and some collaborators encountered an

obstacle: the wordcount. This was a limiting factor for us to meaningfully integrate the full dataset of eight participants, methodology and discussion section. Thus, we were discussing if it was more appropriate to reduce the number of words for each section (including participants' accounts), or to include only four participants. I include below the email I sent:

*"More broadly, I feel we need to take a step back and discuss about the context. The chapter is based on relational ontology, which recognizes territorializing (re/de-). This means that this (using relational ontology) is how I feel we should operate- this statement is clearly a territorializing flow of the research assemblage dictated by the meaning of ontology and me being the first author. What does imply using this framework? 1. Recognize what are the various forces within the research assemblage; 2. Decide what to do next. Writing a book chapter (or any paper for that matter) requires to adhere to some rules, the territorializing customs of the research assemblage. Now, this means 6000 word count for us. Using Narrative Inquiry (NI) ethically and with integrity would mean using the whole dataset. This too is territorializing. In the history of research, we have always witnessed re-territorializing moments, either with qualitative research, the feminist movement or even in drug research when they now are researching the so-called 'street drugs' (e.g., ketamine). I am saying this because if we respect the NI territorializing customs, then using the whole dataset would be ok. We also have a chance to make this very argument in the chapter (about territorializing) and re-territorialize NI because we want more space for people's voices. Then, of course we could (and I would be keen) to write a second and a third publication (maybe one with the other 4 participants or altogether and another one with the collective storylines). The data is there. In research I have seen it all. I have seen people publishing using part of their dataset in qualitative, mixed methods, and quantitative research. (Of course, the question is, where did they publish? What is the impact factor of the journal? But this is not the conversation we are having here)". (S.Voi, personal communication, July, 19, 2024).*

As it can be seen, the relational ontology framework can provide an opening, can allow to step outside research habits, and think more broadly (whilst still being within a research assemblage).

The second example is in how relational ontology helped me reflect on dissemination. One of the main aims of research is to uncover one of the multiple flows of reality. I believe it is ethically important to share this knowledge with others in a digestible way. This is especially true nowadays that our attention is in constant competition (e.g., mobiles, emails, 24/7 news, social media, television). For instance, for this thesis, I am collaborating with an illustrator to represent individual participants and their stories. In the future, I am interested in offering re-territorializing practices for dissemination, such as podcasts, infographics, and travelling physical zines.

As I found the post-humanist approach a refreshing (re-territorializing) framework, I am interested in leaving a gift to future researchers, and early career academics interested in using this approach for social inquiry. I would invite them to consider this as a (flexible) vade mecum they can refer to, and to be consulted in conjunction with key papers that have helped me for this project (Fox & Alldred, 2015a, 2015b, 2022; Sermijn et al., 2008). These are included below in a numbered list covering key aspects of research. Each aspect is territorializing, and, therefore, researchers are invited to reflect on ways to interrogate such questions:

1. Thinking phase: a territorializing direction. Here is where it all starts. Some useful questions can

be:

- a. Do I have to write a submission for a research grant? Or am I writing a thesis (e.g., undergraduates, masters, doctorate)?
- b. What would I like to research?
- c. Is co-production possible? (Arnstein, 1969)

2. Aims and audience. Some points for reflection are as follows:

- a. What am I trying to achieve with this project? (e.g., hoping an impact at a policy-making level might need to acknowledge the over-reliance in quantitatively measuring in Western countries, thus, a helpful study design can be using mixed-method study design)
- b. Who is my intended audience?
- c. Considering that writing is a way of communicating within a relationship (either self-to-self or self-to-others), and writing itself is relational (Gergen, 2007), what is the language and tone I shall aim to use to speak to them?
- d. How can I frame the research question to include more-than-human aspects, and to acknowledge the multiplicity of realities (and flows)? For this part might be helpful to refer to an existing toolkit (Fox & Alldred, 2022)

3. De/re-territorializing reflections for methodology. This step should be done before submitting to the ethical review board, in case is required. The data analysis procedure should respect what has been included in ethics application or what was decided before starting data collection, as this is a territorializing research practice- unless the researcher wishes to re-territorialize science, perhaps ascribing to already known ideas (Feyerabend, 2020). Some reflective questions to help the reader at this stage are given below:

- a. What are the current (territorializing) methods used to understand/observe a flow of an assemblage (and its machines)? (e.g., if these are mostly qualitative interviews, can something else build on or add to uncover other flows of that reality? For instance, letter writing, or interviewing also a friend/family member/loved one). It can be helpful to go back to the first steps of this guide in an iterative way.
- b. Can research show another flow of what we call reality? Here, it might be helpful to think about scientific *knowledge* not as colonial accumulation (e.g., collecting,

remembering, cataloguing) but rather as *attending to* (i.e., moving our attention to a phenomenon). Thus, thinking of knowledge in this way, can we *unveil* or *attend to* aspects from the past (e.g., archives, internet), the present (e.g., integrating YouTube, Reddit, Social Media production), or an imaginative future.

- c. What are the ways I can make my methodologies speak to more-than-human approaches? It is recommended to check the literature mentioned at the start of this sub-section.

4. Results and discussion. At this stage, it is helpful to keep engaging with more-than-human and non-hierarchical ways of thinking and knowing (or attending). Some suggestions are as follows:

- a. What more-than-human aspects can help me think through this?
- b. Would engagement with digital more-than-human aspect help? (e.g., after writing one's results, these could be entered to new artificial intelligence models, such as Open AI, and Anthropic, to ask for a summary or engage in a conversation with these models about the long term effect of their research; alternatively, these tools could also be used as supervisor add-ons by the researcher to reflect on one's feelings, ideas, and biases about the research).
- c. Would engagement with artistic endeavour offer new insights? (e.g., painting one's project, mind mapping, visiting an exhibition about a topic adjacent to one's research, or something completely different). For this point, it might help to divide in consumer and producer of art- even if the producer-consumer relationship has changed in the artistic world in last few decades (Matarasso, 2017).
- d. Would alteration of space help? (e.g., change of environment, going for a walk and talking about one's project to a friend or alone out loud; alternatively, presenting results at a conference or a team meeting offers opportunities for further reflection)

5. Dissemination: make digestible the indigestible. Some reflective questions are as follows:

- a. What are the legitimate claims I can do based on what I have gathered and what are own's reflections/speculations? Is it socially ethical to disseminate both?
- b. Who is my target audience? And what might be the device they use to consume information? (e.g., computers, mobiles, radio)
- c. How much to they have available?
- d. With this research results, am I trying to open new ways of thinking and practices of being? Or I am I trying to provide support/comfort/hope/solidarity?
- e. Does the message need to be distilled and divided into parts? Or can it be presented as a whole?
- f. How can I take into account different ways of learning? (e.g., walking tours with dissemination, leaflets, videos, podcasts)

### **Study strengths and limitations**

This study has several strengths. Firstly, integrating creative methods with qualitative interviews created the condition for *intimate* encounters and allowed for additional *nuances* from participants and their responses. For instance, Louise (as online audio sharing wasn't working) played a piano sitting next to her, and Minotaur shared two of his unpublished poems. Additionally, using art-based methods is in line with this thesis' ontological stance (Fox & Alldred, 2022). Secondly, EbEs were involved at every step of this research (except for the systematic literature review). Thirdly, the systematic literature review included consultation with three collaborators at all stages, increasing reflexivity, richness and rigour throughout (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Fourth, in the UK there is a paucity of studies in this area (Davidmann, 2014; Richards, 2016), especially in relation to bringing the temporality that NI allows, and adopting an affirming, non-pathologizing perspective. Finally, participants had a diverse array of gender

identities, and sexualities, both in terms of orientation and practices. Thus, this current research provides valuable insights.

Nevertheless, there are also limitations to hold in mind. These include demographics of participants, recruitment strategy, research methodology, and interview format. All participants identified as white, and were well-educated. These demographic skews are often observed in psychological research (e.g., Williamson et al., 2022; Garcini et al., 2023). Thus, leaving experiences of People from the Global Majority, and other marginalized groups unheard. In addition, it is important to reflect on how only one trans woman joined the study. This issue was raised and discussed as a limitation during a meeting with EbE. In that instance, we reflected on how perhaps the hostile environment worldwide and in the UK (e.g., gender critical views, government conservative regulations, rate of crime against TNB people) might have made trans women and trans feminine people less likely to join –perhaps because of concerns around confidentiality, their story being put at risk of scrutiny from the media, or being pathologized/fetishized. These aspects bring to the second limitation: the recruitment strategy. Whilst generalizability of results is not a relevant focus for qualitative research, it is nevertheless important to have a variety of demographically diverse participants to offer a more nuanced perspective of a given investigated topic and allow for transferability. Some populations are often described as *hard-to-reach* (Shaghaghi, Bhopal, & Sheikh, 2011). I argue that if attempts were made to make people feel safer in telling their stories, and different methods were implemented, marginalized participants would not be labelled as *hard-to-reach*. For instance, queer spaces in London have great diversity of their attendees, thus, recruitment through queer pubs and bars, and using IFS could allow for greater ethnic diversity.

Finally, whilst the narrative interview format allowed for a person to freely tell their story it did not ask explicitly about other aspects of sexualities (e.g., ongoing and past relationship structures,

interviewing partners). Having additional interviews with participants might have been a strategy to address this issue, but as discussed, this might also be a fruitful avenue for ongoing research.

### **Conclusions**

Thanks to this research project, I have been gifted with the opportunity to speak with some participants from my community, and to read research on a topic I care about. I am part of the research assemblage; thus, I have shaped and simultaneously have been shaped by this project. Research is not a *“transparent process that simply ‘reproduces’ events in its findings”* (Fox & Alldred, 2022, p.9). A person from a different background would have immersed themselves with the data in a different way and, as a result, produced different recommendations. I wish this thesis will contribute a small amount in creating a more accepting world.

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### Appendix A: Glossary

Term	Definition
Ace	<p><i>"An umbrella term used specifically to describe a lack of, varying, or occasional experiences of sexual attraction. This encompasses asexual people as well as those who identify as grey-sexual."</i> (Stonewall, 2024, para 4)</p>
AFAB/ AMAB	<p>Assigned Female at Birth: A term used to describe individuals who were assigned female at birth by medical professionals because of their primary sex characteristics (e.g., visible sexual organs), regardless of their current gender identity.</p>
	<p>Assigned Male at Birth: A term used to describe individuals who were assigned male at birth by medical professionals because of their primary sex characteristics (e.g., visible sexual organs), regardless of their current gender identity.</p>
Affects	<p>Affects are the non-hierarchical multiple <i>influences</i> (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)</p>

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	ethics application processes, standards for publication.
Assemblage	An always-in-flux/always-becoming, relational, and non-hierarchical unpredictable <i>phenomenon</i> comprised of a myriad of existing agents. Also defined as " <i>machines that link affects together to produce or do something</i> " (Fox & Alldred, 2014; p. 5). For instance, the research-assemblage itself.
Becomings	An affect is another word for <i>becomings</i> (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Anything can be agentic that offers a change in entity and its capacity (e.g., in practices, in social aspects). Becomings are the rhizomically and unpredictable <i>influences</i> within an assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2022). For novice readers, becoming is the movement, the change. See also Affects.
Bisexual	Refers to individuals who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender.
Bottom	In sexual context, refers to a person who typically takes a receptive or submissive role during sexual activities.

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Camp	A style or individual tendency characterized by non-normative fashion, mannerisms, and theatricality, often associated with the queer community. For each person this can imply different types of behaviours and mannerisms. Generally, camp steps outside the monochromatic heteronormative standards in society.
Chaser	A person who is specifically attracted to trans individuals. This is often rooted in a fetishization and objectification of trans people.
Crossdressing	A person (generally used by AMAB) who wears fashion garments/uses aesthetic practices (e.g., make up) different from the sex they were assigned at birth.
Ethical Non-Monogamy (ENM)	Also called Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM). It's a way to structure relationships that does not follow monogamous couple tradition.
Fisting	A practice consisting of a person putting their hand into a person's body orifice/hole.
Friend with benefit	Abbreviated as FWB, refers to a friendship or acquaintanceship where both parties engage in sexual activities without the traditionally expected

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monogamous commitment of a romantic

relationship.

Flow (of affect) The always-evolving forces withing 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).

The *action*

Gay A term often used to describe a man who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other men, but can be more broadly applied to individuals attracted to the same gender.

Gender Refers to the embodied senses of self. This is influenced by biopsychosocial, inter and intra-personal aspects. This is different from (biological) sex. Gender, as a whole, is made of multiple aspects, such as identity, expression, social roles and cultural stereotypes and narratives.

Gender Critical *“Believing that sex is a fact of biology that cannot be changed, and doubting the idea of gender identity”*. (Cambridge University Press, 2024, para 1) Often this involves holding hostile views and behaviours towards TNB and gender non-conforming people.

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Sometimes people use the terms Radical Feminist and TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) interchangeably, but they are quite different, and have different histories (Mackay, 2024). Both are schools of thought, but there are significant differences. The term TERF originally appeared because not all Radical Feminists agree on trans inclusion/exclusion. As this is a complex theoretical and historical topic, interested readers are invited to consult Mackay (2024). For the purpose of this thesis, it's important for the reader to know that there has been a hostility towards trans women, and this has been historical. Nowadays, people might conflate the terms such as gender critical and TERF.

Gender Identity Refers to one's sense of gender (i.e., how do they see and perceive themselves). This can align or not to the way people express their gender through mannerism, style or fashion (i.e., gender expression).

Gender Identity Clinic/Gender Dysphoria Clinic (GIC/GDC) A facility or organization that provides support, counselling, and medical services for individuals exploring or questioning their gender.

Gender Expression Ones' expression of gender to the outside world. This does not have to necessarily match one's Gender Identity.

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Gray/greysexual	<p><i>"This is an umbrella term which describes people who experience attraction occasionally, rarely, or only under certain conditions"</i> (Stonewall, 2024, para 29)</p>
Grindr	<p>A social network phone application for gay, bi, trans, and queer people.</p>
Heterosexual	<p>Refers to men and women who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender.</p>
Heteronormativity	<p>The assumption that people in society behave and follow norms that assume hetero assumptions (e.g., asking a man what he did during the weekend with his girlfriend, wedding cards being tailored for heterosexual couples) and influences traditionally habits (e.g., monogamy, co-habitation).</p>
Homosexual	<p>Refers to individuals who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. This is considered to be an out of date, and offensive term to some people.</p>
Hormone Replacement Therapy or Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy	<p>Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy (GAHT) is a form of hormone therapy, whereby sex hormones and/or other hormone medication are administered</p>

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	to people (often TNB or gender non- conforming) for the purpose of modifying second sex characteristics.
Kitchen Table Polyamory (KTP)	Abbreviated as KTP, describes a polyamorous relationship style where all partners are familiar or friendly with each other, creating a close-knit network.
Kink	Sexual practices that fall outside the traditional convention of sexual behaviour.
Lesbian	Generally, refers to women who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women. It can also refer to a woman or a non-binary person being attracted to another woman or a non-binary person.
Machine	Another word Deleuze and Guattari used for assemblages (1984). Unstructured and dynamic arrangements of bodies (human and non-human) that are always in a relational becoming.
Metamour	In polyamorous relationships, is the partner of one's partner.
Micropolitics	The internal flux within assemblages of relations amongst human and non-human agent/thing/element that gives opportunity for the phenomenon to be continuously shaped and re-shaped. For

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	example, in the research-assemblage could be the relationship a person has with their written work and/or the existing literature.
Monogamy	A relationship style involving commitment and exclusivity (sexually and other) between two partners, refraining from engaging romantically or sexually with others outside the relationship.
Multiamory	Also called Polyamory. It involves having or being open to having multiple loving, romantic, or sexual relationships concurrently with the consent of all involved parties.
Muffing	<i>“A term coined by Mira Bellwether to describe a sex act that involves invaginating a person’s testicles to thereby penetrate the inguinal canal(s).”</i> (Fielding, 2021. p. 204)
No-sex sex	Practices that don’t require acts/behaviours that are traditionally considered sex. Sex in this specific context refers to acts such as oral sex or penetrative sex.
Pansexual	Refers to individuals who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people regardless of their gender identity or biological sex.
Passing	When an individual is visually perceived by the heteronormative culture as a member of their self-

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	identified gender rather than being recognized as trans. This recognition is often based on physical appearance, mannerisms, or behaviours aligned with societal expectations for that gender. This is a controversial term as some trans people use it for themselves in a positive way, whilst others find it offensive as it can imply that someone is pretending or not being themselves in some way.
Play	Another term for sex. This can involve practices such as BDSM, kink.
Performativity	The enactment of who we are through a set of behaviours. This term has since been adopted by gender studies to specify this enactment in the context of gender. Thus, gender performativity is not something we are but something we constantly make and re-make.
Queer	Initially used as a derogatory term towards people from the LGBTQIA+ community, nowadays, some people use this term to define their identity or sexual orientation (often) with the intended purpose to reject labels in defining one's attraction and sexuality.

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Relational Anarchy	A style of relationship whereby people do not have a hierarchy of relationships, rejecting Western traditions about couple life.
Relational Ontology	An ontological stance/worldview whereby reality is constantly changing and influenced by the dynamic interplay of relationships between human and more-than-human aspects. For the research assemblage the implication is to not consider the researcher producing a thesis but as part of the whole system and relations that is influenced and influences at the same time in an unpredictable way.
Rhizome	A subterranean root that grows horizontally from its nodes and doesn't have a set structure, unlike trees. For example, the ginger root. This image is often used in post-humanist and queer theory to symbolize the unpredictable and non-hierarchical interplay of different elements.
Second sex characteristics	An organism's characteristics that traditionally appear through puberty, such as hair growth, change in voice
Sexual attraction	The feeling of being drawn to someone in a sexual manner, often involving physical, emotional, and psychological aspects.

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Sexual orientation	Describes an individual's enduring physical, romantic, or emotional attraction to a group of others based on their gender. It is, often categorized as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.
Sexualities	The diverse range of aspects, such as sexual attraction, sexual orientation, sexual behaviours, desire, and relationships
Solo Polyamory	Considering oneself as their primary partner, whilst also having the opportunity to cultivate intimate and meaningful connections with others.
Territorializing (de/re- territorializing)	Territorializing: 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).
	De-territorializing: the expanding or disrupting aspect of an assemblage. For the research-assemblage, including practices outside this (e.g., including creative and non-traditional methods for knowledge creation and dissemination).
	Re-territorializing: the re-creation of a set of aggregating/limiting aspect of an assemblage. For

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	the research-assemblage, the re-creation of a set of standards/customs (e.g., creative methods research within academia).
Testosterone	(T) is a hormone used in gender-affirming therapy to develop traditionally male second-sex characteristics like facial hair, voice deepening, muscle growth, and body fat redistribution for individuals undergoing a masculinizing transition.
Top	In sexual context, refers to a person who typically takes a dominant or penetrative role during sexual activities.
Trans	Being trans means not identifying with one's assigned gender at birth.
Transition	Transitioning is any fluid (i.e., not based on predetermined 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.
TGNC	Trans and Gender Non-Conforming
T4T	Trans4Trans (also t4t). Originally, emerged online from trans people trying to meet other trans people, nowadays it can also mean a framework for solidarity within these communities. In this thesis, it's used as the

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former: relationships that TNB people have

with other TNB people.

Versatile

In sexual context, refers to a person who is

comfortable and open to assuming either the top or

bottom role during sexual activities.

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**Appendix B: Quality Assessment Outcome for studies included in the literature review**

Author, year and title	Sensitivity To Context						Commitment and Rigor						Transparency and Coherence				Impact and Importance					
	Relevant	Review of Discusse	Stated People	SU	Description Describe	Description Recruitmen	Verbatim Participa	In depth Discusse	Supervision Used	Credibility Account	Data Achieve	Distributio	Aim/Meth Method	Interview Informat	Interview Question	Account of Achieved	Reflexivity Writing	Clarity of Method	Limitations Discusse	Clinical Research	Theoretical Findings	Journal
Lindley et al., (2021)	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	0	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	5.1	
Cook- Daniels & Munson (2015)	1	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	1	3.4

Tree-	3	0	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	0	2	1	3	3	2	1	3	3	3	2	2	4.6
McGrath et al., (2018)																									
Neubauer et al., (2023)	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	1.1	
Pugliese (2013)	3	1	0	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	3	3	4	2	1	3	3	3	3	N/A	
Murchison et al., (2023)	3	3	1	2	3	2	3	1	2	3	2	3	0	2	3	1	0	3	2	3	3	1	2	3	2.8
Schilt & Windsor (2014)	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	2.6	



Ross et al.,	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	3	3	0	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	0	2.5
(2024)																									
Richards	4	4	0	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	2	1	0	4	4	0	0	3	4	3	4	3	2	N/A	
(2016)																									The sis
Williams et al., (2016)	3	3	0	2	4	1	0	1	3	3	0	2	0	3	4	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3.8
Platt & Bolland (2017)	3	2	0	1	2	1	2	1	3	3	2	3	0	2	3	2	3	2	1	3	2	2	2	0	3.4
Davidmann (2014)	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	4	4	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	2.6
Engelmann et al., (2022)	1	0	3	1	3	3	0	1	3	1	0	1	3	4	1	3	4	1	2	4	3	4	0	3.8	

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
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
Rowniak & Chesla, (2013)	2	0	0	3	1	3	3	0	3	2	0	0	1	3	3	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	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

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

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## Appendix C: Ethical approval



### HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

**TO** Sandro Voi  
**CC** Lizette Nolte  
**FROM** Dr Rebecca Knight, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Vice Chair  
**DATE** 11/05/2023

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Protocol number: **CLMS/PGR/UH/05320**

Title of study: Trans and non-binary people's experience of their sexualities alongside their gender.

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

**Dr Jos Twist as second supervisor**  
**Consultation with Experts by Experience at various times throughout the process**

**Conditions of approval specific to your study:**

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the following conditions being seen and approved by the supervisor as addressed prior to recruitment and data collection:

- This application has been approved on the condition that you reconsider the timing of deleting the video recordings;**
- Data should be made anonymous wherever and whenever possible, therefore the committee asks that the videos are deleted as soon as they have been transcribed, rather than waiting for the degree to be awarded.**
- Please make amendments to your application and resubmit for your file.**

**General conditions of approval:**

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

**Permissions:** Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

**External communications:** Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

**Invasive procedures:** If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

**Submission:** Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

**Validity:**

This approval is valid:

From: 11/05/2023

To: 31/10/2024

**Please note:**

**Failure to comply with the conditions of approval will be considered a breach of protocol and may result in disciplinary action which could include academic penalties.**

Additional documentation requested as a condition of this approval protocol may be submitted via your supervisor to the Ethics Clerks as it becomes available. All documentation relating to this study, including the information/documents noted in the conditions above, must be available for your supervisor at the time of submitting your work so that they are able to confirm that you have complied with this protocol.

**Should you amend any aspect of your research or wish to apply for an extension to your study you will need your supervisor's approval (if you are a student) and must complete and submit form EC2.**

Approval applies specifically to the research study/methodology and timings as detailed in your Form EC1A. In cases where the amendments to the original study are deemed to be substantial, a new Form EC1A may need to be completed prior to the study being undertaken.

**Failure to report adverse circumstance/s may be considered misconduct.**

Should adverse circumstances arise during this study such as physical reaction/harm, mental/emotional harm, intrusion of privacy or breach of confidentiality this must be reported to the approving Committee immediately.

## Appendix D: Information Sheet



### UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

### ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

#### FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

##### 1 Title of study

Trans and non-binary adults (aged 18-30) experience of their sexualities and relationships alongside their gender.

##### 2 Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand about the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University’s regulation, UPR RE01, ‘Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants’ can be accessed via this link:

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<https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs>  
(after accessing this website, scroll down to Letter S where you will find the regulation)

Thank you for reading this.

##### 3 What is the purpose of this study?

Currently there is little research on trans and non-binary people sexualities (not intended only as sex but more widely, comprehending other aspects of sexuality). Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate this aspect to increase the awareness of clinicians and hopefully improve services for trans and non-binary people.

##### 4 Do I have to take part?

Not necessarily. Participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, after reading this information sheet, you will need to sign a consent form. Then, if you decide to withdraw at some stage during the study, you can do so without needing to provide any explanation. You can withdraw up until the write up time for this thesis. Withdrawal does not impact any treatment you receive (if relevant).

5 **Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?**

To participate you must be between the age of 18 and 30 years old, identifying as trans, or non-binary for at least one year, speak fluent English, and you must be able to understand the remit of this research.

6 **How long will my part in the study take?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be invited to attend an interview which can last from 1 to 3 hours. We will have time for breaks too if you need a comfort break during the session.

7 **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, we will arrange a short video conference meeting for 10 to 15 minutes, where we can discuss your eligibility for the study and I can answer any questions you might have. Once this is confirmed, we can decide a date and time for the interview itself which can last from 1 to 2 hours. I will be responsive to your needs. The interview will be online through video conferencing, and there will be flexibility for you to select a time that suits you best. You will be compensated for your time. If you have any accessibility needs, please let me know.

You are invited to bring and share with me during the interview something that best describes your thoughts and/or experiences around sexualities. This could be a picture\*, a drawing, song lyrics or a song, a video, a poem, or an object. Whether you decide to bring something with you or not, it's completely up to you and will not change the way you are treated. You have the power to decide if I can include or omit this from the final write up – see Consent Form. As the topic of the research is about sexualities, I want to make clear from the start that we are not necessarily going to talk about genitalia! If this is something that you want to talk about, I will welcome that. However, the focus of my research is broader, as I am interested in sexualities. Thus, I will welcome anything you feel like sharing with me.

\* If you take pictures of others, make sure you have their written consent. If you wish to take pictures of public places, make sure you avoid people's faces or properties without their written consent.

8 **What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?**

The interview might touch on topics that could be distressing to you as we will be speaking about relationships, sexual attraction, relationship style and relationship roles. In case you become too distressed, let me know, we can interrupt the interview, and we can discuss about future steps. There are also some helplines and support numbers I can signpost you to in case you need them.

9 **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

By joining the study, you will be contributing to the scientific evidence, and possibly help future clinicians and service providers when working with trans and non-binary people.

**10 How will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Everything you share will be kept anonymously and confidentially and only for research purposes. Data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act 2018. Interview audio and/or video recordings will be stored on the University OneDrive system and I will be using passwords to protect the document. Recordings will be destroyed until my Viva exam. I and/or an transcription service will transcribe interviews into anonymized transcripts. They will not contain identifiable information. Also, if I use a transcription service, this will not have access to any of your identifiable information and will sign a confidentiality agreement.

**11 What will happen to the data collected within this study?**

Everything you share will be kept anonymously and confidentially and only for research purposes. Data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act 2018. Interview video recordings will be stored on the University OneDrive system and I will be using passwords to protect the document. This will be stored electronically until completion of the study (likely September 2024). I might use a transcription service; however, the services will not have access to any of your identifiable information and will sign a confidentiality agreement. A supervision group (comprised of four researchers) will help me to look at the anonymised transcripts. This is to help me limit my bias when I am reading the transcripts. Some quotes from what you share with me will be used for dissemination on scientific journals and/or social media or artistic format (e.g., books, stories), but I will make sure that they will remain anonymous so you will not be identifiable.

The only reason that might take me to break confidentiality is if you or someone near to you is at immediate risk. If that is the case, we will discuss what is the best way forward together.

**13 Will the data be required for use in further studies?**

All identifiable information will not be used for anything further and will be destroyed once I received my Doctorate degree. The anonymized transcripts might be used for future publications and projects.

**14 Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been reviewed by:

The University of Hertfordshire Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority

The UH protocol number is *cLMS/PGR/UH/05320*

15 **Factors that might put others at risk**

Please note that if, during the study, any medical conditions or non-medical circumstances such as unlawful activity become apparent that might or had put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities and, under such circumstances, you will be withdrawn from the study.

16 **Who can I contact if I have any questions?**

If you have any concerns about the study or aspects of it, you can contact me on [s.voi@herts.ac.uk](mailto:s.voi@herts.ac.uk) or my supervisor Dr Lizette Notle ([l.nolte@herts.ac.uk](mailto:l.nolte@herts.ac.uk)).

**Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:**

Secretary and Registrar  
University of Hertfordshire  
College Lane  
Hatfield  
Herts  
AL10 9AB

**Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.**

**University of Hertfordshire**  Ethics Committee

**UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE**

**ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS  
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)**

**FORM EC3  
CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**

I, the undersigned [*please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS*]

.....  
of [*please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address*]

.....  
hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled [*insert name of study here*]

**Trans and non-binary adults (aged 18-30) experience of their sexualities and relationships alongside their gender.**

**(UH Protocol number cLMS/PGR/UH/05320)**

1) I confirm that I read the Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) and I understood what participating involves.

Yes  No

2) I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time up until data is being transcribed for writing the thesis.

Yes  No

3) I understand that the interview will be video recorded.

Yes  No

4) I understand that my data will be stored confidentially, according to the Data Protection Act 2018, and extracts from what I said will be used anonymously for scientific and dissemination purposes.

Yes  No

5) If I share any photo/video/creative element prior to/at the time of the interview, these can be included in the final thesis write up.

Yes  No

6) Contact details were provided to me in case I have further questions

Yes  No

7) Would you like to be involved after your interview to review key themes in discussion of the findings?

Yes  No

8) I agree to take part in the study

Yes  No

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

Signature of (principal) investigator... .....

Date.....

Name of (principal) investigator [*in BLOCK CAPITALS please*]

.....

### Appendix F: Distress Protocol

Possible distress	How to mitigate harm
Individuals can find participating in research stressful, especially if they experience trauma related to the interview questions.	People will be aware of the remit of the research when signing the consent form. At the time of the interview, I will also ask them what they think is the focus of the research. We will also agree on how to interrupt the interview in case it's needed because the interviewee looks significantly distressed.
Calls might be abruptly interrupted	If calls are interrupted because of connection issues, I will try to send another invite via video conferencing through email.
Individuals can find it distressing if topics are unexpected.	The interview is fairly structured as it starts with a general question and follows on from this by expanding on several aspects of which the participant is aware. In addition, if people want a copy of the guiding questions, I will send one over prior to the interview.
Individuals might be concerned about confidentiality.	They will be informed about the remit of the research, how data will be stored, and who will be part of the research team.
	At the start of the interview, I will also check with them if they are alone in the room and/or it feels safe to speak, considering where they are, including asking about the likelihood of interruptions.

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When discussing some topics, people might have hidden or suppressed feelings or memories that might arise.	I will make use of my clinical skills of noticing non-verbal communication and ask them how are they feeling. I will be aware of signs of distress, if this was to arise. In line with the literature on trauma, I will also ask at the end of the interview what is the date and what are they going to do for the rest of the day after our call so to bring them back in the present moment.
While this will not be the focus of the interview and will not be directly asked about, and though it is unlikely, individuals might spontaneously disclose different type of risk to themselves or from others. I am including this list below to show that thought was given to possible risks and risk prevention:	In any of those circumstances I will draw on my clinical experience as a trainee clinical psychologist and will behave as follow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Check how they are feeling, and if there is any current self-harm</li> <li>b. Check the extent of self-harm/how did they get injured and if it requires medical attention</li> <li>c. Check when were last these thoughts for them and if they are present in these days</li> <li>d. Check the extent of present suicidal thoughts: how do they feel when they have these thoughts? How often do they come up? What do they do when they have them? What are the strategies to try to cope with them? Are they seeing any mental health practitioner for their mental health?</li> <li>e. offer emotional support, and ask who is available to offer support. I will encourage them to</li> </ul>

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e. Present plans of suicide	contact their GP or next of kin. In case they prefer and I have their consent, I can contact them on their behalf.
f. Past physical or verbal abuse from others	f. provide them guidance and encouragement to contact GP and signpost them to debrief sheet for emotional support.
g. Past sexual abuse from others	h. As above, check details and ask if they feel capable and able to disclose this to me/local authorities
h. Current physical verbal or sexual abuse from others	

Individuals might disclose other people that are / have been at risk of harm, e.g., family members or friends. I will ask further details, if appropriate. I will signpost to relevant services. I will contact my supervisor for guidance.

Individuals may be concerned about what they have shared. Individuals have the right to withdraw as explained in the information sheet.

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**Appendix G: debrief sheet**

Thank you for taking part in the study. Your input will help clinicians and future services working with trans and non-binary people. As you might be aware from signing the informed consent form, you are entitled to withdraw from the study before the write-up.

If participating in the study caused you distress, I would invite you to reach out to sources of comfort that you are familiar with, such as a friend, a family member, or healthcare worker. Please find below some suggestions:

**Your GP**

**NHS 111**

**Samaritans 116 123**

24/7 free and confidential helpline. [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Midline Trans 0300 330 5468**

Friday evenings 8pm-11pm

Free and confidential service for trans and non-binary folks. Calls are handled by trained volunteers.

### Appendix H: Interview guide

Opening Question: I would like to know more about your sexuality and your relationship(s), and what was the journey alongside your transition. When speaking about sexuality, I mean this in a broader term, not uniquely related to sexual acts, but anything you might think of related to this aspect. I would like to hear more about your experiences, and how in different moments you were able to discover more about your needs with others and with yourself. We could start with a question but feel free to start from where you prefer if that doesn't suit you. What did you notice in terms of your sexuality when you were/as you are transitioning?

If this interview guide is being sent to you prior to our meeting, you have the option to share with me during the interview something that best describes your thoughts and/or experiences around sexualities. This could be a picture, a drawing, song lyrics or a song, a video, a poem, or an object.

Main area	Prompts (optionals)
Questions from elicitation	Tell me about X (e.g., poem, picture)
around sexualities	How does it relate to the question around sexualities?
	How does/did your sexualities developed alongside your gender
	transitioning? Is this captured by what you brought? If yes, in which
	way? If no, what is missing/why?
	Why did you pick this image/picture etc.?
	When did you chose it?
	What stood out?
	(if photo) Was this picture staged, or freely taken?

Do you have any other pictures/objects/poems etc that you would like to share?

Are there aspects of sexualities that are difficult to capture or respond to with photos?

Why?

How would others feel about what you brought to the session? Who are these 'others' you have in mind?

## What is sex for you?

Sensuality, sexuality, eroticism. Are all these terms different or similar to you? Please explain

Have your sexualities changed alongside your transition? (if yes/no,  
would you like to tell me more about it)

What do you notice happening when you feel attractive/attracted to?

And where in your body/how do you notice this attraction?

Has this changed over time? (if yes/no, would you like to tell me more about it)

Imagine you are about to go out and you feel really attractive, what would you notice? (e.g., clothing, way of walking, way of carrying yourself, memories)

Do you recall of any instances where you had to hold off from disclosing your sexuality? Or where you felt forced to disclose your sexuality to others? (either online or in person) And has this changed over time since you transitioned/started transitioning?

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Relationship(s) Are you in a relationship? If yes, without identifying them, can you say a bit more about the person(s) and your relationship? If yes, how did you meet your partner(s) and can you tell me more about them? [Please note you will not be asked to identify your partner]

How do you describe your relationship(s)?

Have your relationship(s) changed or stayed the same in the context of transition? (either social or hormonal/medical) if yes, in what way?

Spaces/geography/location How you interact with your queerness/transness in given spaces and that how changes during the transition?

Desire How you experience desire towards the world? (e.g., what do you notice being attracted to, pulled towards)

How the world experience desire towards you?

---

**Appendix I: Recruitment poster and information shared on social media**

## **Looking for research participants: 18-30y old trans and non-binary folks**

**Research question:** *How trans and non-binary young people come to understand their sexuality, relationship style, and relationship roles alongside their gender?*

### **What do you have to do if you decide to join?**

You will be asked some questions about relationship and sexuality. It will last around 90 minutes.

### **Who is the researcher?**

Hi, you can call me Sandro or Sandra. I am a non-binary person doing a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at University of Hertfordshire. If you are interested in the project, before the interview there will be an opportunity to introduce ourselves.

### **What will happen to the information shared?**

Some of the things you said -without mentioning any identifiable information (e.g., name) - will be used for the thesis and in scientific publications.

### **Who can join?**

Folks who have been self-identifying themselves as trans or non-binary for at least one year. Participants need to be between 18-30 years old.

### **Do you want to know more?**

Email me on [s.voi@herts.ac.uk](mailto:s.voi@herts.ac.uk) or you can find me on IG @trans\_and\_nb\_research



This project has received ethical approval from the University of hertfordshire Ethics Committee. Protocol number: XXXXX



***Why are there no  
older posts?  
In research, we are  
asked by  
universities and  
ethical committee to  
separate our  
personal and  
professional life***

**Why are there no  
information about  
you (the  
researcher)?**

**In research, we are  
often asked this too,  
to not include  
information about  
ourselves. However,  
if you are interested  
in research, reach  
out via DM and we  
can have a  
discussion and I can  
introduce myself.**

### **Appendix J: Background information**

Before starting the interview, it would be helpful if you could respond to these demographics. There is no pressure in completing them totally, if you do not wish so.

What is your name?

What is your age?

How would you define your ethnicity?

How do you identify your gender at present?

What is your sexual orientation? (can be left blank!)

Are you currently in a relationship? (can be left blank!)

Do you identify yourself as being disabled and/or having a long-term health condition?

Are you in employment?

What is your highest degree of education

- GCSE
- Professional degree/Diploma
- Undergraduate studies
- Postgraduate studies
- Doctoral level studies
- Other

Do you have any religious, faith, spiritual identity or beliefs?

What is your current living arrangement (e.g., living with friends, living alone)?

Do you have any accommodation/accessibility needs for the interview?

Is there anything else you think I should know?

For the write up of my thesis, I will anonymize the participants' details. Which pseudonym would you prefer for your interview?

Is there any information (that you have provided above) that you would prefer me to omit from my thesis write-up? (if yes, please specify)

## Appendix K: data analysis extract

Key themes: (Non cis & personhood)  
 EXPLOITATION & IMPORTANCE OF SPACE  
 & REPRESENTATION TO PUBLIC &  
 VALIDATED, PARTNER AS SAFE  
 STARING POINT TO DATING / INTERACTIVITY  
 BOUNDARIES

What was brought in: Nipple cover

Age: 25 I DIDN'T HAVE INITIAL FEELINGS  
 ABOUT IT, ALMOST CAME UP WITH  
 A GLOVE AS I DONT DO THE  
 ETHNICITY: White British  
 GENDER: Binaryish trans man

Sexual orientation: Bisexual/pansexual

Relationship (current): Yes - I am in three!

Disability/LTC: Yes WIDEN PERSPECTIVE OF EXPLOITATION  
 Employment: Yes CONFIDENT (3:00) SAY  
 AS I SUPPORT PARTNER &  
 SUPPORT DREAM

Higher degree of education: Professional degree/Diploma

Religious beliefs: Yes

Living arrangements: Living with my fiancee

Accommodations for interview: no

Pseudonym: Peter

Anything to omit: Living with my fiancee AS NARRATOR

FORCED TO DISCLOSE HIS SEXUALITY WITH HIS MUM & DAD & DATING WEBSITES WITH GAY THEM

WHY DID HE PICK THE OBJECT TO HIM BEFORE THE CALL?

ACROSS PARTICIPANTS:

- TUT/CIS & FEARS 30:15
- PERCEIVED FROM OTHERS - AWARE OF POLY LIKE JACK, ALUNNAR
- LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION ↑  
 LIKE SALK (3:5:30)
- PARTNER EXPLORE GUY JACK
- FLUIDITY OF GENDER
- EXPLORATION WITH MORE CONFIDENCE.
- EXPLOSION OF PREVIOUS PTH (34:30)

HIM: DYED MULLET, ~~ROSE BEADS~~  
 GLOVE, GLOVES, BLUE SPORT T-SHIRT

ME: SHAVED HEAD, LEOPARD PRINT TURTLE NECK

PERFORMANCE:

POWER DYNAMICS AT PULY: EDUCATION, BODY & SOCIETY ('SKINNY WHITE PEOPLE', 'SKINNY WHITE ABLE-BODIED WHITE PEOPLE'), I DISCOURSED THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AS IN 'I ASK THE (P.10) QUESTIONS YOU REBOND'. SHOULD HAVE WAIVED MORE

(ENLIGHTENED ACADEMIC)

USED EXAMPLES (E.G. FACULTY AT BY -CAMP, ~~ASIAN~~ GENDER)

- INTERNAL DIALOGUES HEAD THROUGHOUT  
 - INTERNAL MONITOR WHEN DIGGING (P.3) OR TO CHECK IN (P.3)

VOICES: A POLARIZING FOR BODY (P.3) IN BINARY (IS WORK - STUDYING P11)  
 9TH (P.3) HE HAD IN MIND - NOTES (2) (P.15)  
 TRANS APPARENT VOICES THROUGHOUT (P.11)  
 ADOLESCENT 3:30 (P.16)

HE AS A NARRATOR: ACADEMIC, POWER DIFFERENCE, SPACE TO EXPLORE (44:00) ('ISN'T A THERAPY SESSION'), PLEASANT TO DISCUSS ABOUT HIS DESIRE FOR STABILITY AND CHANGING WITHIN WORK

◆ OWN: NOT ALL CULTURES ARE HORRIBLE

IMPLICIT LANGUAGE & ABOUT MY MUM EXTRA

IDENTITIES BROUGHT UP: CULI, IRISH, STATE OF, TRANS, KURT

EXPLORATION (P.4:00)  
 AND BLUES AIDS ARE WITH BE OPEN AND  
 MINOR SAD DON'T KNOW WHERE  
 GO NEXT

SPACES: LUNG, SKY PARTIES,  
 DATING APPS

INT'L RND MONITOR  
WHDN 01.02.11

3

polyamorous and it's been...oh, and then right about this...sorry I'm going over the place...so around about the time that I moved in with Tien. A week before I had started my medical transition in terms of like taking testosterone. And then, yeah, sort of like the deeper where I went into my medical transition happened to correlate with the more my sex life was open up. So, like at the moment I've got 4 partners. I've got...a [inaudible- maybe message coming up on the phone] coming up from one of my partners. I've got Tien is my fiancé, Alex who is a non-binary agender person, Daisy who's a non-binary transgirl, and Oisin who we just agreed to be in a relationship yesterday and he's a cisgender bi-man. And yeah. So like, I said, I've come from like, having vanilla sex to sort of like I've got. I've started going to, I have gone into one and I will be going again, sex parties, where I had anonymous sex through they're called fuck boxes. It's kind of like glory holes for AFAB people so you put your lower half in, and somebody of the comes in and [inaudible] kinda thing. I've had a lot of group sex yeah. And it's just, I think it's not all because of my medical transition. It's because of like exploring polyamory but probably I think the more I've been comfortable with my sexuality, no more comfortable with my gender, and how my body is, the more I've been more able to explore my sexuality and play with more people.

Sandro: Yeah, yeah.

Peter: if that makes any sense. And I hope this isn't too much detail.

Sandro: No. Honestly, it's really.. first of all, it's really interesting. And secondly. I need the details, because it really helps me to understand you and your experience. And how everything changed.

EXPLORE  
ON THE  
BACK OF  
HANDS  
PUT DOWN

00:05:30.440 --> 00:05:34.360

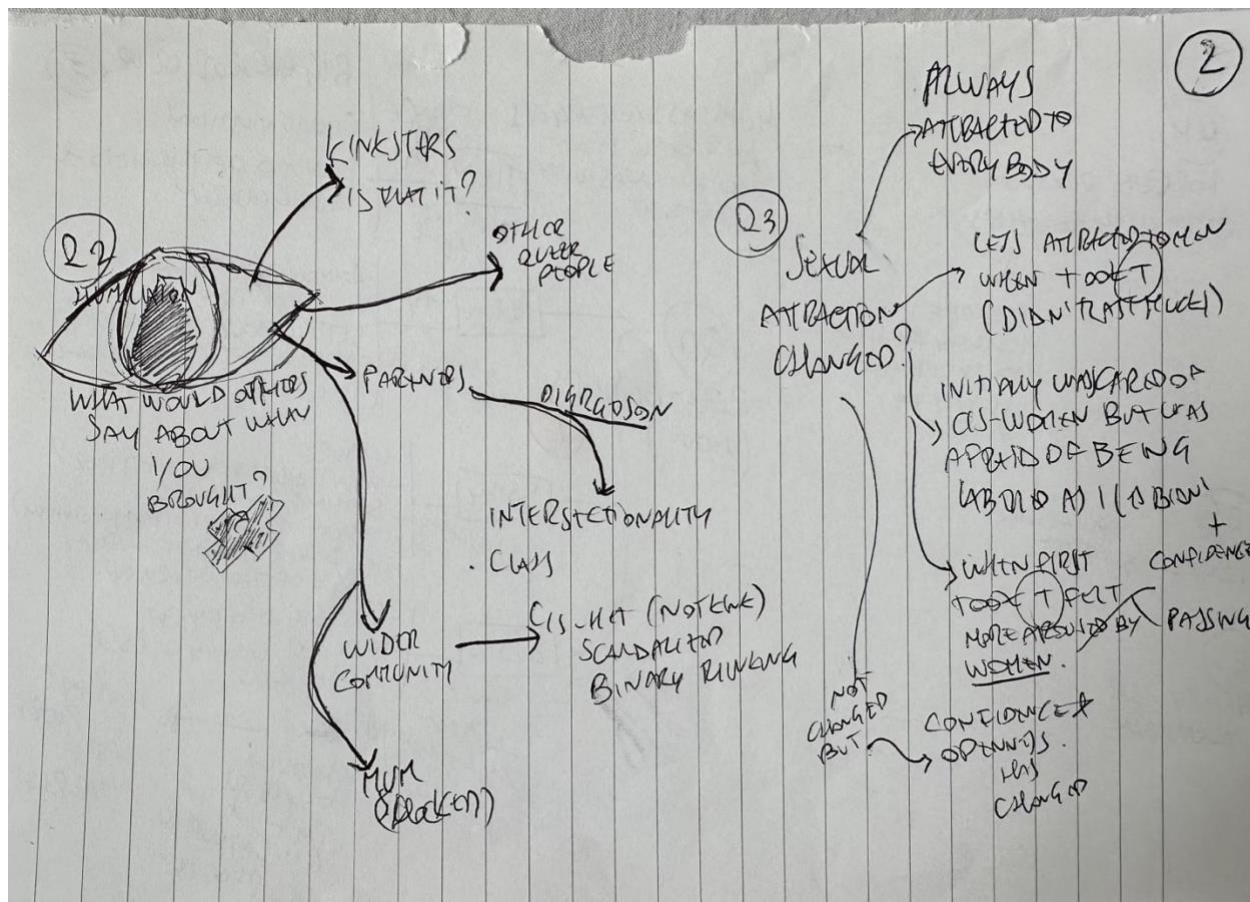
Peter: Yeah, yeah. Thank you.

Sandro: So it seems that from a perspective of like, the more confidence you got, as you said, the more then you were able to explore and experiment.

00:05:45.140 --> 00:06:50.950

Peter: Yes, and I feel like I don't have to apologize for my body as much more, I mean, I shouldn't have never. I should never have had to apologize for my body anyway. But pre-transition, pre-medical transition when I was like in Grinder, I felt I had to be like "Oh, sorry I ha! I still have all my boobs, and I'm still hairless, and you know I still look like a woman and all that whereas now I'm very much sort of like yeah, I've got hairy boobs and the beard and the vagina you just kind of if you don't like it. You don't have to sleep with me kinda thing, you know, and I think a an example of that is the fact that at the at the sex party it was a trans-centered. But you didn't have to be friends. It's just it was trans-focus. I was walking around in these with my boobs out in leather like well, fake leather like trousers, and you could see I was trans I was like, you know, like, make no apology for it, like, yeah.

00:06:51.370 --> 00:06:59.589



## 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

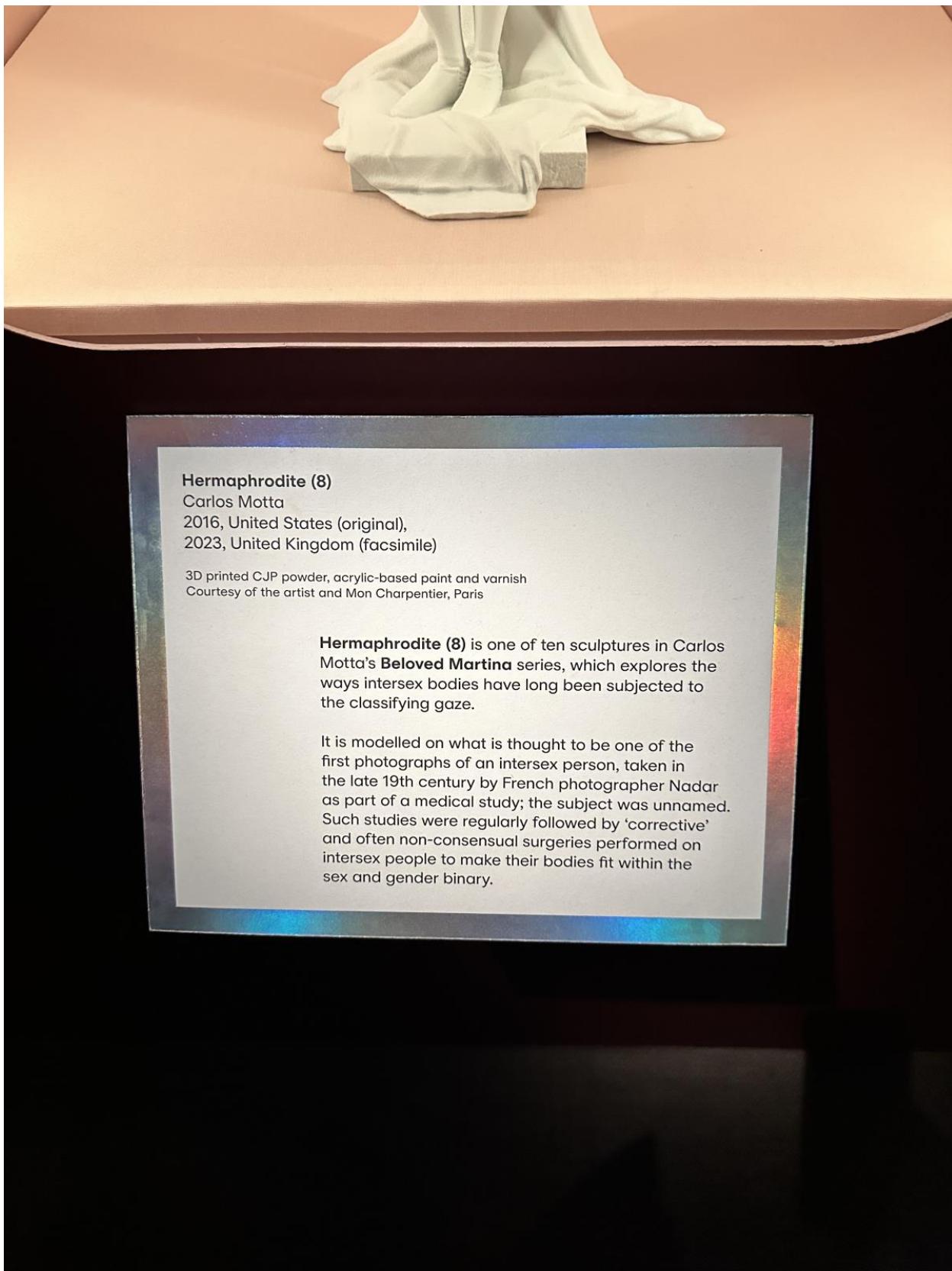
What if relationship longevity is not the answer? What happens during a breakup and afterward? After 1 month, 1 year, 10 years? Maybe the ending of the relationship is a positive thing. Is longevity another normative assumption? A friend, a professor in anthropology (not sure why this detail is important 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 rewrite 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.





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