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Production of Gender: A Study on Performativity in Female-To-Male Transsexuals

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Abstract

Gender identity is critical to every individual; it is self-defined and constructed by culture and society, at large. Gender identities are formed through public and private spaces. Of the two traditions of thinking (essentialist and constructionist) about sex and gender, constructionist formulations are based on ‘performance’ theory. It believes that sex and gender are viewed as not residing in an individual, but are found in interactions that are socially constructed as gendered, as opposed to essentialist tradition. Within gender theory, ‘performativity’ of gender can be traced from Beauvoir’s (1949) construction “one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one” (p.8) suggests the constructed and performative nature of gender. Butler (1999) in her theory of gender performativity also emphasizes on the constructed nature of sex and gender, and refers gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within highly rigid regulatory frame” (p.33). Within ‘performative’ theory, gender is a process, rather than something naturally possessed. To understand and explore the process of formation of gender in (FTM) transsexuals three autobiographical narratives are chosen i.e., *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004), *The Testosterone Files* (2006), and *Both Sides now* (2006). To analyze and dissect the FTM autobiographical narratives, the techniques of discourse analysis, literary analysis and narrative analysis are used. This study will address the performative factors that contribute to the formation of a transsexual role as seen through sartorial style, mannerisms, and other aspects that influence a gendered presentation of ‘self’. It includes the process of construction of FTM transsexual’s corporeality through performative attributes to approximate masculinity and come in accord with the social role of a ‘man’.

Keywords: body, gender, FTM, transsexuals, gender identity.

Producción de Género: Un Estudio sobre la Performatividad de Mujeres a Hombres Transexuales

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Resumen

La identidad de género es crítica para cada individuo; es una realidad autodefinida y construida por la cultura y la sociedad. Las identidades de género se forman a través de espacios públicos y privados. Existen dos tradiciones de pensamiento principales (esencialistas y construccionistas) sobre el sexo y el género, las formulaciones construccionistas se basan en la teoría del "desempeño". En contraposición a la tradición esencialista, el construccionismo cree que el sexo y el género no residen en un individuo sino que se encuentran en las interacciones que se definen socialmente. Dentro de la teoría de género, la "performatividad" se puede profundizar a partir de la construcción de Beauvoir (1949) "una persona no nace mujer, sino que se convierte en una persona" (p.8). La autora sugiere la naturaleza construida y performativa del género. Butler (1999) en su teoría de la performatividad de género también enfatiza la naturaleza construida del sexo y el género, y refiere al género como "la estilización repetida del cuerpo, un conjunto de actos repetidos dentro de un marco regulatorio altamente rígido" (p.33). Dentro de la teoría "performativa", el género es un proceso, más que algo naturalmente poseído. En el presente artículo, para comprender y explorar el proceso de formación del género en personas transexuales (FTM) se eligen tres narrativas autobiográficas, es decir, *Becoming a visible man* (2004), *The testosterone files* (2006) y *Both sides now* (2006). Para analizar y diseccionar las narrativas autobiográficas FTM, se utilizan las técnicas de análisis del discurso, análisis literario y análisis narrativo. Este estudio abordará los factores performativos que contribuyen a la formación de un papel transexual, en concreto a través del estilo de vestimenta, manierismos y otros aspectos que influyen en una presentación del "yo" de género. Ésto incluye el proceso de construcción de la corporeidad de las personas transexuales de FTM a través de atributos performativos que se aproximen a la masculinidad y el seguimiento del rol social de "hombre".

Palabras clave: cuerpo, género, FTM, transexual, identidad de género.

The term “transsexual” was coined and publicized in the early 1950s by Harry Benjamin and David Cauldwell when news about Christine Jorgenson’s sex change, through surgery and hormones, triggered in American newspapers. Jorgenson’s sex transformation was highly publicized by the American media even when Meyerowitz (1998) states that, news about ‘sex change’ and ‘sex transformation’ had appeared in newspapers and magazines since the 1930s. The concept of sex change and sex transformation existed much before the term “transsexual” was executed in medical discourses. The early research on sex transformation traces back to European origins and research by European sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld, who defined and coined the term ‘transvestism’, and Havelock Ellis who defined ‘eonism’ as a separate category that included cross gender identification and cross dressing. ‘Transsexualism’ did not appear as a medical parlance until early 1950s. The term ‘transsexual’ was popularized only after the Jorgenson’s sex change surgery which was a widely read and published headline during that time. The publication of Jorgenson’s autobiography *Christine Jorgenson: A Personal Autobiography* in 1967, came as a reply to a storm of hysterical press coverage about her sex change. Jorgenson’s autobiography was a turning point for transsexuals and Hausman (2006) mentions the impact of her autobiography on transsexuals. Mario Martino, in his autobiography *Emergence*, mentions that, “as Marie, she was the first in her town to buy Christine Jorgenson’s autobiography when it came out in 1967” (p.336). The autobiography in a way validated their desire and helped to identify themselves as transsexuals (transman or transwoman), hence allowing individuals to come in terms with their identity, and construct their identity as transsexuals. *Conundrum* (1974) by Jan Morris, appeared a decade later after Jorgenson’s autobiography. In her autobiography, Morris credits Jorgenson with the liberalization of public attitude towards medical treatment of transsexuality. In 1977, Mario Martino published *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography*, the first female-to-male autobiography but it didn’t gain much readership and popularity like Jorgenson’s and Morris’s autobiography. Perhaps, the possible reason could be, as Califia (1997) states, “transsexuality was no longer such a shocking idea or because public had much less interest in the phenomenon of biological females becoming men” (p.38) as the “gender

transition from female to male allows biological women to access male privilege within their reassigned genders” (Halberstam, p.143). Theorists Judith Halberstam and Jay Prosser, in their works *Female Masculinity* (1998) and *Second Skins* (1998) provide an extensive analysis of FTM autobiographical narratives. Their perspective to approach FTM transsexuality is different, as Halberstam understands FTM transsexuality from the perspective of a lesbian feminist, whereas Prosser establishes FTM transsexuality from an FTM transsexual perspective. To interpret and provide clear differences between identities Halberstam (1998) formulates a masculine continuum based on lesbian and transgender masculinities i.e., “Androgyny- Soft Butch- Butch- Strong Butch- Transgender Butch- FTM not Masculine- Very Masculine” (p.151). Martino’s autobiography provides differences between butch and FTM transsexual, as to disentangle his identity as an FTM transsexual from butch. Mario explains, “A butch is the masculine member of the lesbian team” (p.141). Another transsexual autobiography *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996) by Mark Rees also magnifies the gulf between butch and transsexual male to mark out the boundaries of transsexual masculinity. The autobiographies can be considered as a way through which transsexuals communicate and share their experiences.

The earlier published autobiographical accounts of female-to-male autobiographies can be roughly traced as Mario Martino’s *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* (1977), Raymond Thompson and Kitty Sewell’s *What Took You So Long* (Memoir) (1995), Mark Rees’s *Dear Sir or Ma’am* (1996), Jamison Green’s *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004), Matt Kailey’s *Just Add Hormones* (2005), Max W. Valerio’s *The Testosterone Files* (2006), Rico Adrian Paris’ *Transman - Bitesize: The Story of a Woman Who Became a Man* (2005), Dhillon Khosla *Both Sides Now* (2006), and Thomas Beatie’s *The Story of One Man's Extraordinary Pregnancy* (2008). Transsexual autobiographies marked the establishment of an official discourse regulating the self-representation and provided an orientation to other individuals who identified themselves as transsexual after reading the autobiographies. Earlier, to undergo sex reassignment surgery, clinicians or the medical practitioners, demanded a personal history before carrying out the operation, and the success in obtaining treatment depended on “their ability to convince doctors that their personal history matches the officially sanctioned etiology” (Bolin, 1988, p.64;

Green, 1987, p.7-8). So, the published accounts became the “guide-books” (Hausman, 2006, p.337) for transsexuals to obtain desired medical treatment. But, transsexual autobiographies cannot be just considered as the part of repressive structure of “official” (Hausman, 2006, p.339) transsexual experience, as they enable others to form a transsexual identity as transsexuals. Bernice L. Hausman in *Body Technology and Gender in Transsexual Autobiographies* (2006) situates the importance of transsexual autobiographies and shows the effect of writing autobiography on transsexuals. He mentions;

Mario Martino writes in *Emergence* that, as Marie, she was the first in her town to buy Christine Jorgenson’s autobiography when it came out in 1967. In her autobiography *Conundrum*, Jan Morris discusses the emotional significance of finding Lili Elbe’s autobiography. Nancy Hunt writes in *Mirror Image*, “I can remember only once when my life has been altered by the printed word (p.336).

This study attempts to understand the performative aspect of sexuality in transsexuals, as Bolin (1988) and Stone (1991) suggests that, “in transsexual stories, the truth of the transsexual experience, are about sexuality” (p.339). Foucault (1977) also stresses on the ways in which sexuality is written in or on the ‘body’, he deconstructs the notion that sexuality is a transparent face of life. Purvis in his essay “Sexualities” (2006) states, “If sexuality is inscribed in or on the body, then it is texts and discourses (literary, medical, legal and religious, for example) which make the sexual into something that is also *textual*” (p.435). To argue, sexuality and textuality are linked, is to propose that sexual is conceived in relation to words, sign systems, discourses and representations” (p.436). It is within and against the careful reading of texts that sexualities can be re-written or re-conceived. Jay Prosser also explores trans narratives in his work *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) which examines the literary texts that discuss themes of transitioning and discusses the importance of studying trans narratives.

The theory of ‘performativity’ of gender by Butler can be applied for both transmen and transwomen, as the theory isn’t indicative of any identity, but describes the performative nature of gender. Often, in

discourses about transmen and transwomen, it is seen that transmen have had less visibility than other forms of gender variance and thus it occupies a very less space in trans discourses. For instance, In India, there are no published accounts of transmen autobiographies, which provides a very narrow space about discussing their identity. Beasley (2005) mentions that masculinities only focus on cisgender masculinities and thereby reinforcing certain constructions of masculinity and side-lining the masculinities of a plurality of gender non-conforming men. Aboim (2017) mentions, “transmen have also received less attention from the part of ‘Trans Studies’ when compared to their female counterparts, which have gained far more visibility” (p.226). Literature explicitly focuses on the experiences of transmen that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These studies include the one by Jamison Green (2004), studies by Aaron Devor (1997), Henry Rubin (2003), Jason Cromwell (1999) and Stephen Whittle (2002).

The female-to-male autobiographies chosen for this study are Jamison Green’s *Becoming A Visible Man*, Max W. Valerio’s *The Testosterone Files* and Dhillon Khosla’s *Both Sides Now*. These narratives could be considered as contemporary transsexual narratives and autobiographical narrative of Jorgenson, Rees, Martino and Thompson, can be considered as first wave of autobiographies, that are also analyzed by theorists such as Jay Prosser, Bernice Hausman and Judith Halberstam. These autobiographies are responsible for the formation and setting up of the discourses and can be considered as classics in the context of transsexual autobiographies. The autobiographical narratives selected for the study were chosen after a careful reading of other autobiographical narratives too. Few commonalities have been traced between these three autobiographies. The first being that these autobiographies were published in the 21st century and showed a linear pattern of transition. Jonathan Ames in *Sexual Metamorphosis: An Anthology of Transsexual Memoirs* (2005), compares transsexual autobiographies (of both FTM and MTF trans people) to a classic literary model, the *bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age novel. He states that he sees a basic outline of transsexual memoirs in three acts, “first act: gender-dysphoria childhood; second act: the move to the big city and the transformation... [third act] the sex change” (p.xii). Within these three autobiographies, there is a linear story of transitioning, where the authors track their transition in a linear fashion. From identifying themselves as

lesbian in the beginning to finding their ‘self’ as transmen. Jay Prosser’s *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) explores transsexual autobiographies in the chapter entitled “Mirror Images: Transsexuality and Autobiography”, and he examines the way autobiography is an important process where “the trajectories of transsexuality and autobiography are entwined in complex ways, with narrative and bodily form, conducting each other” (p.101). The portrayal of ‘self’ and identity formation are explored vividly in the transsexual autobiography.

Research studies in literature are conducted applying many innovative methods. The methods employed for this study are literary analysis, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis. Through various gender theories, the transsexual autobiographies are considered as open to interpretations. Ekins and King in *The Transgender Phenomenon* (2006), talks about the process of Migrating, Oscillating, Negating and Transcending as part of the formation of their identity. The autobiographies can be analyzed through various lens, but for this study, it will investigate the functioning of performativity as a part of their sexuality in the life of transsexuals.

Discourse analysis is another important research method employed in this study. Discourse analysis is concerned with producing an analysis or ‘explanatory critique’ (Fairclough, p.235-236) of how and to what purpose language use is invested through deployment of specific textual features to facilitate the knowledge of its effects. The term ‘discourse’ itself means multiple meanings, like the Derridean notion of ‘deconstruction’ where every signifier refers to other words/signifier in an ‘endless postponement of meaning’. Hence, one travels along the path of meaning making. Yet another method i.e., ‘narrative inquiry’ uses autobiography and life experience, as the units of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives, as narratives. To carry out narrative analysis in qualitative studies, Creswell (2007) provides four elements to describe, classify and interpret the text i.e., codes, categories, patterns and themes. Codes involves identifying concepts from the text, categories include, linking codes to create a unit or a category, themes involves creating a theme that represents similar patterns, and patterns are identifying repeated units from categories. So, discourse analysis, narrative

analysis and literary analysis are used as tool to interpret and analyze the texts.

Aspects of Performativity

Beauvoir makes a point that “one becomes a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one” (Butler, 1999, p.8). This statement implies that the sexed body may or may not come in terms with the gender role assigned. Body thus, is a surface on which various performative acts can be carried out, to affirm one’s gender identity. But Gender theorist, Butler makes it clear in her work *Gender Trouble* that, “performativity must be understood not as a singular act, but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. xii). Thus, gender identity is a result of repeated acts, and through performative attributes transsexuals claim their authority over their desired gender identity.

Masculinity in a female body is enacted not only through surgeries and hormones but through a correlation of ‘performativity’, ‘representation’ and ‘transition’. It is a process of ‘becoming a man’ and trying to ascertain a male identity and masculine presentation of self. Beynon (2002) mentions, “Men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated and is composed of social codes of behavior which they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways” (p.2). This observation describes the performative nature of gender. Femininity and masculinity are both culturally shaped and can be experienced and enacted. According to Butler (1999), gender identity does not cause gendered behavior, but rather performing gender creates the sense of an internal gender identity. In order to create an identity that is approximately masculine, FTM transsexuals undergoes surgeries and adapts masculine attributes. It includes behavior that is primarily masculine, which includes imitating the male sartorial style, their desire for women, “passing” as man, using cosmetics to draw moustaches, and relate themselves with male experiences and desires.

Theorist Jay Prosser (2006) suggests from a reading of Butler’s text that transsexualism is equally productive and not essentialist. It was argued by Prosser that, even though Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1999) discusses performativity in the final chapter “Bodily Inscriptions and Performative

Subversions”, it is gender “performativity” that *Gender Trouble* is known for. While it argues that all gender is ‘performative’, that man and woman are not expressions of prior internal essences, but is constituted, “through the repetition of culturally intelligible stylized acts” (p.33). *Gender Trouble* presents the transgendered subject as the concrete example that brings into relief ‘performativity’ of gender (p.31). In *Bodies that Matter* (1993) Butler explains performativity as;

Performativity is thus not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition (p.13-14).

According to Butler, all performances that are understood as reflections of an essential identity or ‘self’ are ‘constative performances’. By ‘constative’, she means those performances of identity that actively construct the identity, they are taken to be expressions of.

Butler (1999) mentions that body, sex and gender are performative categories. She mentions that gendered body is performative, and it has no prior ontological status, apart multiple and repeated acts that constitute its reality (p.136). Butler (1999) emphasizes on the constructed nature of sex and gender. She deconstructs the innate basis of one’s gender identity and considers gender as ‘performative’, which can essentially come into expression through repetition of acts, utterances, habits, and gestures. It expresses that gendered identities are actually “fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (p.136). Repetition and recitation establish some of these utterances as ‘proper’, but they are not fixed. In similar lines, Khosla (2006) in his autobiographical narrative, repetitively mentions about his practice of fixing a fake phallus to feel a complete man. “I grabbed a fresh pair of underwear and tucked in my prosthesis, pulling it up tight against my body” (p.171). Recitation establishes the ground for identity formation and it is a discursive process. Performativity is thus, not about the singular act, but plural acts and the discursive process of configuring the body that presents individuals as male or female, masculine and feminine. In this sense, masculinity is not seen in an essentialist perspective for men who possess physiologies and corporeality. Masculinity is seen as a free-floating artifice, which isn’t

exclusive for males, but includes female experiences of being a male or a man. Female masculinity has not only shattered the essentialist and fixed domains of masculinity, it has also portrayed that even if individuals are bound to social roles of man and woman, and gender identity is what distinguishes them from one another.

Production of Gender

Production of gender means the process of producing gender through a set of repeated stylized acts. Butler's (1999) concept of 'corporeal signification' sees body as a surface on which acts, gestures, desires and performative attributes are carried out which results in the production of identity which is close to natural being (p.173). Bristow (1997) also sees body as a platform which give gendered connotations to acts, construction and performative attributes. It is through sartorial style, 'passing' and 'performative' acts that one constructs an identity as a transsexual. The first literature on transsexuals have attributed transsexuals' specific characteristics, behaviors, identities, and sexualities. Individuals were expected to fit within these attributions, which became the diagnostic criteria and were considered the etiological factors in the diagnosis of "true" transsexualism (Stoller, 1975, p.74). After a thorough reading of autobiographies, select factors such as, 'passing' as a man, the concept of wrong body, transition from sex to sexuality, trajectories of transsexuals, surgical procedures and erasing femininity are the common themes found in select autobiographies. The body is the site on which individuals "erect a reliable sense of self" (Boddy, 1995, p.135). The themes discussed below are an attempt to understand the sexuality of transsexuals, and body being one of the aspects to enhance masculinity in a female body. The study traces the performative attributes and processes adopted by authors to gain the sense of a male identity. The theoretical concepts such 'passing', 'wrong body', 'trajectories of transsexuals', 'etiological construction of FTMs' are considered as the performative elements to describe and understand the construction of a transsexual body. These concepts can be applied in the cases of transwoman too.

‘The Concept of ‘Passing’: ‘Passing’ as a ‘Man’

‘Passing’ signifies performance and passing as a man is an important factor which influence transsexual lives and construct a male social role. The concept of ‘passing’ dates back to eighteenth century and its original usage as Friedli (1987) who used it the context of African Americans ‘passing’ as whites (p.251). ‘Passing’ is perceived as a performance and the concept of passing is associated with transgenders and transsexuals. In the context of transsexual discourses, ‘passing’ means blending in and becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable, as either a man or a woman. ‘Passing’ is the notion that a person dresses in the clothing of the opposite dress “for convincing an ‘unknowing audience’ that one actually is a member of that sex” (p.179) as Anne Herrmann defines in “Passing Women, Performing Men” (1991). Stoller (1965) mentions that “passing is problematic for trans people and is related to the problems of identity formation” (p.191). Similarly, Weigert et al (1986), mentions, “the predicament of the transsexual, specially the preoperative one, provides a rich example of how an individual engages in artful impression management to present a problematic gender identity as beyond doubt and within a totally taken-for-granted world of social action” (p.75). ‘Passing’ within this discourse is only problematic, when artful impression management is not successful, and the person is read (e.g., as a man in a dress or as a woman in a man’s suit). One of the important factors when it comes to passing is the use of the female pronouns for FTM transsexuals.

In *Both Sides Now*, Khosla (2006) gave a lot of thought to the process of passing and in many instances, he was seen contemplating about his looks. “I remember feeling deep gratitude toward him, followed by sadness. He was calling me ‘he’ because he had read the memo, not because I looked like it” (p.64). The constant fear to be referred as female is evident from the autobiographies. Green (2004) puts the concept of ‘passing’ as a man not limited to bodily modifications, but to the self. He questions the implicit connotations linked with the category ‘man’ and dismisses it. Green mentions;

What makes a man a man? His penis? His beard? His receding hairline? His lack of breasts? His sense of himself as a man? Some men have no beard, some have no penis, some never lose their hair,

some have breasts; all have a sense of themselves as men. Transsexual men are also men. Transsexual men are men who have lived in female bodies (p.186-187).

Green (2004) understands ‘passing’ as a ‘performance’ and sees “changing sex as just one way of changing one’s body” (p.89), he also questions, “so why change one’s body? Because the body is where we live and through it we communicate to others” (p.95). Green also describes the importance of and the concept of passing as a man, in the life of all men, trans or non-trans. Green describes the very nature of gender roles and gender identity and thus, confirms that the concept of passing as a man or woman is crucial for transsexuals and cisgenders both. He mentions;

The crux of the matter of gender for anyone is their own visibility and enough external confirmation of their gender identity; thus, if a person is comfortable with her or his gender-body congruity or incongruity and their gender identity is confirmed by people around them whom they value, they will feel seen and validated by others (p.187).

From this observation, the importance and functioning of performativity in everyday life of transsexuals and cis- males is emphasized. Raewyn Connell (2012) mentions that “most of the discussions about transsexuality are focused on identity questions” (p.863). He also mentions that bodies form the vital arena of contradiction and change. After changing one’s body, the process and struggle of passing comes into picture. Khosla’s autobiographical (2006) account greatly focused on his struggles of passing as a man, looking manly enough, and the inexplicable pain he feels when referred with feminine pronouns. He mentions, “I don’t think I could ever fully describe the pain and anguish of hearing “she” and “ma’am” and “miss” (p.54). He describes an incident after his mastectomy, when he was excited that he finally looks like a man, but after being referred to as “ma’am” (p.56) in a restaurant, he mentions, “it hit me like a sucker punch-like everything I had just gone through had been ripped out from under me in one fell swoop” (p.56). He described his anguish and failing to pass as a man, “How am I supposed to have people call me ‘he’ at work when I still

look the same?” (p.57). In one of the instances, to pass as a male, Khosla used his old *kajal* to draw moustache and beard on his face. He mentions;

I had asked my therapist whether she knew specifically how hormones changed the face. Did the face shape change or was it just facial hair that made one look male? She answered that she thought it was just the facial hair and then I could specific things to make it easier to “pass” as male, such as cutting my hair even shorter and removing my one earring (p.36).

The concept of passing is applicable to transsexuals in general even with the change in the culture or region. Passing as woman or man, establishes them as a gender identity and social role of a woman or man. Thus, the very nature of citing, reiterating, reenacting a performative act establishes a gender identity.

Anxiety of being in a Wrong Body

Critic Talia Bettcher’s (2014) idea of ‘wrong body’ in transsexuality involves a misalignment between gender identity and the sexed body. The phrase ‘wrong body’ describes the feeling that one’s body is not a part of one’s self. The insider within the body does not recognize the outside of the body as belonging. The wrong body is envisioned as a state in which body and gender identity do not match, hence “a disparity between body (materiality) and self (subjectivity) is embodied, entertaining dichotomous disjunctions such as the body and its expression, the body and its perception, the body and surrounding gender norms, and sex and gender, which implicitly places sex with (material) genitalia and gender with its (social) expression” (Engdahl, 2014, p.268). Khosla’s autobiography (2006) repeatedly mentions the anxiety of being trapped in a female body and his continuing questions to the surgeons before any surgery which describe his incessant desire of a male identity. He would question, “How long it would take for the changes to hold- for me to look like a man” (p.60), “how much more surgery do I need to feel complete”? (p.61). Money’s (1990) claim that the concept of being trapped in the wrong body was “adopted by transsexuals as their own” (p. xiv), the idea has been forced on transsexuals by those who have control and have access to medical technologies, and

have controlled discourses about transsexuals. Cromwell (1999) mentions from the excerpts of a personal communication with a transsexual, he says, “When a man is a man in every way (except) the lower part of the body, he is trapped, and I mean trapped, in a woman’s body” (p.104). For many transsexuals, after the surgical procedures and the alteration of body, they no longer consider themselves to be transsexual. Their ‘wrong body’, now altered becomes a gendered body of woman or man. Valerio’s (2006) account presents positive experiences after transition, and he mentions, “If I am out with a woman friend for dinner, I get attention of the waiter or bartender more easily than she does. They look at me for direction and act as though they expect me to pay” (p.187). He describes it as an authority or the ability to move and change situations in the world after his transition and the change in the sex roles. In the case of Valerio (2006), he mentions, “The tits are the first thing I have to take care of. Can’t go around with those things hanging out, bouncing all over the place like wild rubber balls. They will definitely put a dent in my male image” (p.128). FTM transsexuals deploy few such practices and procedures to pass as a man and to bring into action the archetype of a complete man. In many instances, these narratives illustrate hatred of, and dissociation from, aspects of their bodies. Transmen used negative expressions to articulate their anger and frustration for having linked with the parts of their bodies which are considered as social markers of female sex. Although this was not an unexpected finding, it was expressed by intensified language to articulate their anger and frustration. Khosla (2006) underwent mastectomy twice to get a flat chest. He mentions, “There was a slight throbbing in my chest and I went to touch the bandages to make sure it was all flat” (p.48). In his autobiography, Khosla gets irritated when he had bandages and was tubed after his surgery and he gets his periods. He states that;

It was not just physically uncomfortable-weakly stumbling to the bathroom to insert a tampon with this contraption of bandages and tubes dangling from my chest. It was psychologically jarring. Here I was in most tentative stage of developing my male body only to be shocked back into reality of my female one (p.51).

The autobiographical narratives illustrate and reveal the excruciating and harrowing disconnection that transmen undergo due to the incongruity between their bodies and gender identifications.

Trajectories of Transsexuals

Henry Rubin (2008) mentions, the process of consolidating a transsexual identity as “transsexual trajectory” (p.114). The concept of ‘trajectory’ is borrowed from sociologist Barbara Ponse, (1978), who develops Goffman’s (1959) notion of ‘career’. Goffman mentions;

The term is used in a broadened sense to refer to any social strand of any person’s course through life... [t]he regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person’s self and in his framework of imagery of judging himself and others (p.127-28).

In Ponse’s schema, a “trajectory is a non-sequential route to an identity with five stops”: (1) experiencing a subjective feeling of difference, (2) finding the appropriate category and assigning the feeling of difference in relationship to that category, (3) accepting the category as descriptive of one’s experience, (4) seeking a community, and (5) engaging in relationships. This trajectory holds true for FTMs. Valerio (2006) experienced that subjective feeling of difference from the very beginning and was even referred as a “real tomboy” (p.42). He then identified himself as a lesbian and was linked to the lesbian community for a very short period. But later, he discovered his male ‘self’ and identified himself as a transman. He describes his instances from childhood and mentions, “I have a very difficult time relating to girls. I’m tormented and teased by a group of girls because I’m unable to play house to their expectations. They try to get me to play their girl games, sweeping floors and wearing fake curlers” (p.43). Valerio’s autobiography offers very interesting accounts which portrays the importance of performativity in the life of FTMs. Before getting a mastectomy surgery, he was suggested by fellow FTM transsexual, to use a wide stretch of elastic to his chest to flatten his chest. He mentions, “A method to reel my breasts in, tie them down, flatten my chest with least amount of discomfort” (p.128). Further, the repeated act to flatten his chest through “posture belt” (p.120) describes various aspects of

performativity. “I’ve been binding myself flat for six months now” (p.132). Apart from hormones and surgeries, these are practices used by the FTMs to establish an identity that is essentially masculine. David W. Krueger (1983) mentions that “absence of a penis is loathsome” for an FTM (p.77) and “goal is the attainment of a functional penis”, be it an artificial penis (p.521) as mentioned by Pauly (1974). Khosla (2006) mentions,

While I had often dreamed of having a penis, I had never given any thought to having testicles. After finally getting rid of my sagging, fleshy breasts, the last thing I had on my mind was adding another set of pendulous sacs of skin” (p.70).

He orders for himself a prosthetic phallus to feel a complete man. Valerio (2006) mentions, “I’ve been stuffing my briefs with a sock. It works. I safety-pin a large, rolled up athletic tube sock to the inside of my underwear each morning. Position it so that the bulge looks realistic” (p.137). For Jamison Green, bodily modifications are not the sole basis for the construction of gender identity, but on the contrary, he also examines the importance of “corporeality in producing the experience of particular gender consciousness, and complicates the relationship between the social, bodies and performativity” (Raj, 2001, p.2). On the other hand, Valerio’s chapter “Patriarchal Underwear Cannibals” (2006) describes the dilemma of an FTM in choosing underwear to wear. He mentions the instances of various transmen, who have always worn men’s underwear from the beginning. But Valerio and other transmen were too embarrassed to go and buy a pair of boxer or briefs, describes the subjective experience that transmen go through pre-transition. It is important to note, that each transman have their set of discourses and subjective experiences and masculinity is performed differently on FTM bodies.

Transition

Hausman (1999) mentions that, body is a visible signifier and thus it is “a mirror of identity” (p.191). She historicizes the relationship between the discovery and synthetization of the sex hormones, gender reassignment surgeries and the theories of gender identity. Masculinity and femininity are binary oppositions formed through dichotomous sexed bodies. Bodies are

made to go through the gendering discourses, but bodies perform and enact according to their sexuality. Halberstam (1998) asserts that masculinity must not be considered as a constructed or fixed identity to males, but female masculinity should also be accepted. It is not the feeling of a male identity that compels transmen to transition to visible manhood, but the inability to fight society's non-acceptance of female masculinity or "bodies that fail to integrate" (p.147). Halberstam (1998) also perceived that:

...sexual and gender identities involve some degree of movement (not free-flowing but much scripted) between bodies, desires, transgressions, and conformities; we do not necessarily shuttle back and forth between sexual roles and practices at will, but we do tend to adjust, accommodate, change, reverse, slide and move in gender between moods and modes of desire (p.147).

For Green, Valerio and Khosla, the dissonance between masculinity and the female body resulted in a desire to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Bodily change became a necessary factor to 'find' his masculine core due to the parental pressure and romantic frustrations. He describes transitioning, as "to seek an internal sense of comfort" and "to facilitate our being perceived socially by others as the men or women we know ourselves to be" (Green, 2004, p.90). Green (2004) mentions the phase of transition as,

There is also the inevitable fascination with our physical body as it changes right before our eyes into something to which we finally connected and of which we want to be proud. We may also share a sense of freedom in wearing clothing of choice, the ability to experience psychologically satisfying sexual interaction for this first time, being recognised at last as a member of the gender category in which we feel most comfortable, and the sense of doing something for ourselves rather than always trying to please others. (p.207).

Transitioning is an important aspect in the life of a transman and body dysphoria is omnipresent in these autobiographies. Butler's (1999) response to sex reassignment surgery implies that if bodily markers 'indicate' sex, then sex is different to the means through which it is articulated (p.90). To conceive of oneself as either a woman with a penis or a man with a vagina

is considered pathological as Stone (1991) mentions that, “under the binary phallocratic founding myth by which Western bodies subjects are authorized, only one body per gendered subject is ‘right’ (p.297). According to the imposed order, one can only be one or the other, not both and certainly not neither, regardless of choice. Yet, the order does not present individuals from challenging, and thus subverting it. Valerio (2006) in the process of exploring his sexuality as a male, describes his experiences with his female partners. For Valerio, he discovered his sexuality during his intimate encounters with female partners. He mentions, “I want to be with a partner who will ignore my female parts. I’ve come to the realization that I have to be seen as male with a woman in bed in order to be aroused” (p.69). He discovered much later that, “my male identity was deep, rooted in my body. That finally, like all transsexuals, the body is the issue and not the role” (p.101). Body dysphoria is experienced by Valerio too when he finds the incongruity between his gender role and gender identity. The chapter in his autobiography “Ephiphanies” states;

I’m actually a man looking from the eyes of a woman, looking out of the body of a woman, which I see in front of me. The moving backdrop of my life, a feeling of being male-not so much a man *in* a woman’s body as a man *with* a woman’s body. When I was a child, I could feel my boy self-peering out of my eyes, knowing that other people were seeing a little girl (p.106).

This statement implies that the body is a medium through which gendered identities present themselves and it is through body that one communicates to others. It also establishes the importance of body and corporeality in the life of transsexuals as a means to express their identity.

Erasing Femininity

According to transsexual discourses, “FTMs and transmen are obsessed with ridding themselves of breasts and internal female organs” (Cromwell, p.112) and with “idea of having a penis” (Lothstein, 1983, p.13; Steiner, 1985, p. 353). Money and Brennan in “Sexual Dimorphism in the Psychology of Female Transsexuals” (1968) mentions that, in case of FTMs, “I have never met an FTM or transman who did not want chest

surgery. Breasts are the primary sign of woman and by implication femininity, to reject them acknowledges the fact” (p.496). Valerio (2006) mentions,

I wear layers. I am lucky since I don't have huge breasts. I only have to wear a couple of pieces of clothing to disguise the bulging contour. A T-shirt and a heavier shirt over it. I can get away with only a t-shirt too since the binder makes me flat, but then I am paranoid about my binding showing (p.218).

Similarly, Khosla (2006) in his autobiography mentions, “I told him about my prior breast reduction and showed him T- shaped scars. I wanted absolutely flat pecs, and I didn't want to be disappointed a second time” (p.46). He has undergone the chest surgery twice to remove the vestiges of femininity. After his second surgery when he was draped in bandages in hospital he asked Selena if his bandages truly looked flat. “She lifted the blanket and said yes, they definitely looked flat” (p.48). Valerio's autobiography (2006) also mentions the anxiety that transmen go through without undergoing the chest surgery.

Taking off breasts will be like unfastening a couple of deflated balloons. I want that contour tight and masculine. I fantasize about finally being able to work out in a gym without worrying about the binding. Being able to see my pecs, instead of having them disappear under my flesh. Being seen as a man, feeling manly in my body without these barriers. I can't wait. I can't wait, but I have to (p.220).

Breasts are considered as important aspect that would change the appearance, as the chest is the body part most likely to block them from living full lives. It inhibits them from living as man and causes discomfort with their identity as a man.

Conclusion

Transmen are gendered identities with a masculine gender presentation and they undergo surgeries and take hormones to reconstruct their female body as essentially male. As understood from the autobiographical narratives

taken for the study, transmen prefer masculine pronouns and equally important is ‘passing’ as ‘man’ is an important aspect which constructs their identity as male. From Jamison Green (2004) to Max Wolf Valerio’s (2006) to Dhillon Khosla’s (2006) transition for transmen can be described as a process which includes the transformation of the body and corporeality to bridge the gap and maintain congruity between its visible signifiers of gender i.e., body and the internal invisible ‘self’. The (FTM) transsexual autobiographies are taken to explore the question of their representation by locating the assumptions related to masculinity within parameters of performativity and body. Transsexual autobiographies can be considered as an important tool in the non-transsexual’s understanding of an unimaginable life, as well as positioning that transsexuals are not alone in their female-bodied experience. Green (2004) in his autobiography asserts that, “Surgery is not what transsexualism is ultimately about” (p.89). The body modifications add on the ‘trans’ identity of the transsexuals but are not just limited within the corporeality.

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