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Emotion Work in the Public Performances of Male-to-Female Transsexuals

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Abstract Much research has shown that entering the public sphere is emotionally taxing yet key to male-to-female transsexuals' status passage. Yet, little is known about how transsexuals actively manage their emotions during this important transitional phase. Taking a dramaturgical approach to emotions, we explored how some male-to-female transsexuals managed their emotions in ways that helped generate self-confidence and commitment to their paths. Interviewees engaged in three primary forms of emotion work: (1) preparatory emotion work mitigated anxiety and bolstered confidence, which motivated them to enter public arenas as women; (2) in situ emotion work transformed negative emotions as they arose when performing womanhood in public; and (3) retrospective emotion work reinterpreted past public performances to neutralize negative and accentuate positive emotions.

Keywords Transsexuals · Emotion work · Gender performativity · Passing

Introduction

Social scientists commonly view transsexuals as moving through a "status passage" (Glaser & Strauss, 1971) from one sex category to another (Bolin, 1988; Ekins, 1997; Kando, 1972; Risman, 1982; Schrock & Boyd, 2006). The transition involves learning to retrain, redecorate, and reshape the physical body (Dozier, 2005; Ekins & King, 1999; Rubin 2003; Schrock, Reid, & Boyd, 2005), dealing with psychiatrists and other "gatekeepers" (King, 1987; Speer & Parsons, 2006), coming out to family, friends, and coworkers (Feinbloom, 1976; Schilt, 2006; Schrock & Boyd, 2006), and performing their new gender identities in public (Bolin, 1988; Garfinkel, 1967; Feinbloom, 1976; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Lewins, 1995). In this article, we examined how some male-to-female transsexuals accomplished what sociologists call "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1979) to facilitate public gender performances, which aids their transition.

Although performing womanhood in public is an essential part of male-to-female transsexuals' transition, it puts them at risk for anti-trans prejudice (Hill & Willoughby, 2005). In their non-random survey of over 402 transgendered people, Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, and Malouf (2001) found that, in their lifetimes, 55.5% had been targets of street verbal harassment, 22.9% had been followed, 19.4% had been assaulted without a weapon, 10.2% had been assaulted with a weapon, 13.7% had been victims of rape or attempted rape, and 7.7% were arrested for what they defined as "unjustified" reasons. Doan's (2007) survey of 149 urban transgendered people found that, within the last 12 months, 32.9% of male-to-female transsexuals had been stared at in a hostile fashion, 25.0% had been targeted with hostile comments, and 17.7% had been physically harassed (see also Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kenagy, 2005; Namaste, 1996; Witten & Even, 1999 for similar findings and discussions). Many transsexuals emphasize passing as a means to avoid such negative reactions, which some argue may also reflect internalized transphobia (see Roen, 2002).

It should thus not be surprising that ethnographers have frequently noted that male-to-female transsexuals' initial forays into public as women are emotionally fraught. Ekins

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(1997) mentioned that transsexuals experience "apprehension and fear of involuntary disclosure" and Lewins (1995) said transsexuals experience "uncomfortable feelings [that] sprang from situations in which [they] were aware their gender was not being taken for granted." Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) found that male-to-female transsexuals were often anxious about passing because failing to do so could "increase the likelihood of harassment, threats, or attack while in public." Ekins (1997) suggested that the negative emotions that arise from being identified as transgendered may stall or possibly derail the status passage. Finding ways to deal with such emotions is thus key for transsexuals moving through this important juncture in their transition.

While much research has suggested that transsexuals' self-confidence is an antidote to anxiety (Bolin, 1988; Ekins, 1997; Feinbloom, 1976; Gagne, Tewksbury, & McCaughey, 1997; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; King, 1993; Lewins, 1995), relatively little is known about how transsexuals[1] actually bolster their self-assurance or manage other emotions. Gagne et al. (1997) mentioned that transsexuals beginning to venture out of their domiciles as women sometimes choose what they perceive as "safe" places like gay bars (though other research shows that gay and lesbian spaces can often be hostile (Gamson, 1997; Namaste, 2000)). Kessler and McKenna (1978) mentioned in passing that transsexuals become confident "once they accept their gender as unquestionable." Bolin (1988) suggested that "passing enhances their self-confidence in a positive feedback loop." Wojdowski and Tebor (1976) pointed out that, because doctors, spouses, friends, and family were often not supportive, "much of the tension generated by [going out in public] had to be handled internally." In this article, we systematically examine how some male-to-female transsexuals managed their emotions in ways that helped maintain commitment to their transsexual passage.

Our study draws on a dramaturgical approach to emotions, which is part of the more general social constructionist paradigm (Turner & Stets, 2006). From this perspective, emotions are "characterized by infinite plasticity" and shaped by interpretative and interactional processes, rather than reflecting physiological processes or personality types (Flaherty, 1992). Key to this approach is emotion work, which refers to the "act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" (Hochschild, 1979). Emotion work may involve using cognitive, bodily, or interpersonal techniques to evoke, or "work up," a specific emotion, or suppress, or "work down" a specific emotion.

Cognitive emotion work refers to thinking about a situation differently to change one's emotions. Hochschild (1983), for example, found that flight attendants imagined obnoxious men as children in order to suppress their anger. Bodily emotion work refers to using the body to change emotions, whether through deep breathing, drinking alcohol, or more extreme actions. Leaf's (2006) study of self-injurers revealed that people cut themselves in order to mitigate feelings of shame, powerlessness, and inauthenticity. Interpersonal emotion work refers to the interactional process of shaping others' emotions (Cahill & Eggleston, 1994). Sanders (2004), for example, found that prostitutes used humor to manage their clients' emotions.

Emotion work also has temporal dimensions (Denzin, 1984). That is, emotion work can be geared toward the past, present, or future. By *preparatory* emotion work, we refer to emotion work aimed at increasing the likelihood of achieving or maintaining desired emotional states in future situations. For example, Konradi (1996) found that rape victims who pressed charges against rapists often engaged in preparatory emotion work to better handle the potentially overwhelming emotions that might arise during their upcoming trials. Scott (2005) found that self-defined shy people often rehearsed what they were going to say to others before going out in public in order to decrease the likelihood of embarrassment. Chin (2000) found that parents trying to get their children accepted into private schools prepared their children for possible feelings of disappointment.

In situ emotion work refers to emotion work that is primarily geared to changing emotion in the present moment. For example, Smith and Kleinman (1989) found that male medical students metaphorically transformed women patients' bodies into toasters and cars in order to suppress feelings of sexual arousal when performing medical exams. Wolkomir (2006) showed how members of gay Christian and ex-gay Christian support groups interactionally suppressed shame and evoked pride (see also Fields, 2001). And, although not labeling it "emotion work," Weinberg, Williams, and Moser (1984) found that SM "tops" used bodily techniques to evoke in "bottoms" humiliation, pain, and sexual pleasure (see also Baumeister, 1989).

In developing the notion of *retrospective* emotion work, Mattley (2002) showed how people reinterpret their own and others' past emotional difficulties, which helped neutralize the emotional "lag" of such negative experiences. Similarly, Luce (1998) found that consumers whose purchases evoked negative emotions often reinterpreted their decision-making in ways that mitigated such feelings. Gottschalk (2003) found that children of Holocaust survivors often defined their parents as emotionally fragile as a result of the trauma they experienced, which shaped how they cared for them. As Harvey and Dasborough (2006) have suggested, such emotion work can involve attribution, which refers to defining an event or behavior as resulting from the actor (an *internal* attribution) or the environment (an *external* attribution) (see Kelly, 1973). For example, defining personal failures or problems as caused by the

[1] Unless noted otherwise, when we refer to "transsexuals" in this article, we mean male-to-female transsexuals.

situation rather than one's personal faults may help mitigate negative emotions, and vice-versa.

In sum, while much interactionist research has focused on how male-to-female transsexuals manage their presentations as women in public and has mentioned that such gender performances are emotionally tumultuous (Bolin, 1988; Ekins, 1997; Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998; Garfinkel, 1967; Feinbloom, 1976; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Lewins, 1995; Wojdowski & Tebor, 1976), little is known about how such emotions are managed. Drawing on a complementary perspective on emotions, we analyze how male-to-female transsexuals' preparatory, in situ, and retrospective emotion work strategies facilitated performing womanhood in public.

Method

Participants

Data for our IRB-approved study derive from interviews with male-to-female transsexuals whom the first author met while conducting fieldwork at a support group for cross-dressers, transsexuals, and significant others in the mid-1990s. The group was located in a politically conservative, mid-sized southeastern city. The LGBT community was not politically well organized and there were no LGBT-friendly areas in the city. Support group members viewed cross-dressing in public as particularly risky because of the abundance of poor and working class white men they referred to as "rednecks." Interviewees' emphasis on passing as non-transgendered stemmed in large part from this historical, political, and regional context.

The first author began fieldwork after calling the co-leader of the advertised group and explaining he desired to study the group. The co-leader invited him to attend the next meeting, where he explained that he would like to sit in and take notes on the meetings and eventually interview members, promising that members' names and the support group name would never be revealed (all names used in this article are pseudonyms). After the members gave their approval, the first author observed meetings for the next 14 months and talked with members before and after meetings and during check-ins. He spoke only during the meetings when he introduced himself as a researcher or when a member asked him a direct question (a rare occurrence).

About 5 months into fieldwork, the first author asked members of the support group who introduced themselves as transsexuals for an interview. All nine who were asked agreed and none were paid for their participation. At the beginning of interviews, participants were asked how they identified themselves and all indicated that they were male-to-female transsexuals. In addition, all interviewees were white, college-educated, and between 31 and 47 years of age.

All but one of our interviewees recalled cross-dressing before puberty. Six said they had used women's garments, at least once, during erotic activities. Before defining themselves as transsexuals, six interviewees had exclusively defined themselves as heterosexual men (two were married), two had defined as heterosexual as adolescents but as gay men as young adults, and one had exclusively defined as a homosexual man. At the time of the interview, three viewed themselves as lesbian women, three as heterosexual women, and three as bisexual women.[2]

None of the interviewees had undergone sex reassignment surgery (SRS) or other non-SRS feminizing surgical procedures, but all planned on doing so. Seven interviewees had begun electrolysis and six had started hormone therapy. In addition, seven had worked extensively on feminizing their voices and eight had systematically worked on feminizing their deportment, clothing, and make-up.

Interviewees varied with regard to how much experience they had going out in public as women. Two interviewees had only recently defined themselves as transsexuals and had only on occasion gone out in public as women. Five were living part-time as women; they worked as men and spent most of their weeknights and weekends as women, going out in public on a regular basis. Two interviewees lived full-time as women.

Procedure

The interviews lasted between 2 and 3½ h and took place in the interviewee's or interviewers' homes. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions about coming to terms with their transsexual identities, bodily transformation, going out in public, and coming out to family and friends. All interviewees signed university-approved consent forms.

The analysis proceeded in an inductive fashion (see Lofland & Lofland, 1984), taking about 4 months. The co-authors independently read the interview transcripts, indicating in the margins where and how interviewees talked about going out in public as women. Though we were initially interested in strategies of passing, each of us was struck by the emotionality of interviewees' public outings and noticed that even when interviewees were not trying to pass, they tried to control their emotions when in public. We then did "theoretical sampling" (Becker, 1998); that is, we sorted every excerpt about going out in public as women into a separate file

[2] While some essentialist sex researchers (Bailey, 2003; Blanchard, 1991, 1993a, b; Lawrence, 2004) might label our interviewees "homosexual" or "autogynephilic" transsexuals, we do not use these labels because the assumptions of our constructionist approach are fundamentally incompatible with an essentialist paradigm (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Schrock & Reid, 2006; Tiefer, 1995).

in order to conduct more nuanced analyses of the role of emotion.

The coding of this sorted file was initially guided by the question, "What strategies of emotion work are used?" We took turns coding and all agreed that interviewees most often did cognitive emotion work (though there were variations) and sometimes did bodily emotion work. Upon reflection, however, we found such coding analytically unsatisfying because it lumped together emotion work strategies that served different purposes (e.g., boosting confidence to go out in public and mitigating fear when out in public). This led us to code the data according to whether emotion work occurred before, during, or after presenting themselves as women in public. While we were in complete agreement on how to apply these basic codes to the data, we occasionally had to work through disagreements on how to interpret a particular data excerpt.[3]

Results

Below, we discuss how interviewees engaged in three basic types of emotion work surrounding their public performances of womanhood. First, we examined how interviewees' preparatory emotion work helped mitigate fear and build confidence before going out in public as women. Second, we analyzed the forms of in situ emotion management that arose when interviewees performed womanhood in public. Third, we examined how interviewees' retrospective emotion work minimized doubt and reinforced positive feelings.

Preparatory Emotion Work

Interviewees' initial forays into public as women evoked a mix of excitement and anxiety. Echoing others' sentiments, Joyce said, "Maybe because it's still new, but there is a thrill in being out, being with others, and really being able to express myself." On the other hand, as Jenny mentioned, "The really hard part … is walking out the door." Kris' account exemplifies the emotionally tumultuous nature of going out in public as women:

> Even when I thought I looked pretty good, it was such a struggle to leave the apartment. I'd get dressed to go and I'd sit and look out the blinds [and] look out the peephole in the door to see if anybody was out there. Then I would turn off the stereo and the TV. I would turn off all the lamps, then open the blinds so that I could look out and people couldn't see me. And then when I didn't hear a thing, no cars were coming, no cars were going, didn't hear any neighbors, I'd open the door and run like hell to the car. When I got in the car, I was safe.

Like Kris and Jenny, other interviewees revealed they often experienced much fear and anxiety about going out in public. They needed to build up enough confidence to get out the door. Confidence-building involved preparatory emotion work, which was aimed at mitigating stage fright. Interviewees primarily accomplished this through internal or cognitive work. That is, interviewees thought about things in ways that mitigated anxiety while boosting confidence.

The most basic way interviewees did such emotion work was by choosing to go out to places that they defined as safe. Such choices enabled interviewees to imagine that even if they failed to pass, others would not negatively sanction them, which lessened fear. "The first place I went was a lesbian bar, since I thought it would be the least threatening," said Shelly. Karen said she strategically went out in public for the first time on a business trip: "I felt if there was some place that I could come out and have the least fear of being unusual was New York City. I went to a bar down in the village that was one night a week for crossdressers and transsexuals." Jenny said, "The first place I went was to a [transgendered] friend's house, then to the support group, and to a Mary Kay party at another transsexual's house, and then to visit [another transgendered friend] to watch *The Wall*." Joyce first went to a midnight showing of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, where she thought it did not matter if she passed because others dressed up in costumes, including drag. She also stopped at gas stations, but said, "I stick to gas stations that will take your credit card at the pump. So I *don't* have to go inside and I *don't* have to talk." Overall, choosing places they interpreted as "safe" helped keep their stage fright in check and help them get out the door.

One form of cognitive emotion work involved personal "pep talks," which "psyched themselves up" for going out in public as women. In their pep talks, interviewees often minimized the potential for public embarrassment, defined lingering in the security of their homes as shameful or repressive, and personally coached themselves via motivational speeches. Drawing on all three cognitive techniques, Kris gave herself a pep talk before leaving her apartment dressed as a woman for the first time in a new city.

> I said to myself, "Okay, you've got to make a decision. What are you gong to do? Are you going to hide and always be unhappy even though you are in a place where no one knows you?" There was still that fear of taking that step out of that door. Oh God! There again, "live on the edge, put your toes over, wiggle them a little bit and let's see what happens, right?" So, I said, "We're going to do this!" It was a Sunday night, I put on a blue denim

[3] We generally resolved such disagreements by going back to the data and determining that one of us had proposed an interpretation that strayed too far from the empirical evidence.

> colorful skirt and a red sweater, red shoes, white hose—I'll never forget what I wore—and a white blouse underneath the sweater and I had on a blond wig. God knows! A blond wig! Anyway, so I got in my car.

Although Kris discussed being overwhelmed with fear of going out in public, her cognitive work trumped such fear in three ways. First, she defined staying home as choosing to "always be unhappy," which could evoke shame and fear. Second, she reminded herself that few people knew her in her new town. Third, she encouraged herself to "live on the edge" and to "do this!"

Another technique of cognitively managing potential distress while boosting confidence was to use a kind of gender identity mantra. That is, in the fashion of pop psychology, interviewees used self-affirmations to validate their womanhood. After explaining that born females who present themselves as women do not go through life "trying to be perfect women," for example, Sue said:

> Women have grown up to be natural. They don't think about anything. They just go. If people don't like the way they do things, big deal, [they think], "I'm a woman. I do whatever the hell I want to do." So the whole key is to get in your head that, "I'm a woman." So what if I do something a little bit different. As long as I don't go, "whoops," you know, and try to change it too quick. People notice those things.

Because interviewees understood that public audiences could deny their claims of womanhood (see below), reaffirming their self-concepts as women helped foster self-confidence.

While such cognitive emotion work helped alleviate fears and boost confidence, some interviewees suggested that transsexuals could overdo it. As Erin said:

> Achieving confidence is not trivial. There are people who lie to themselves and build up false confidence. Real confidence comes from just a deliberate studied approach to what it is objectively going to take to pass and a lot of honesty within yourself. Look in the mirror and not lie to yourself about what you see looking back.

As Erin pointed out, cognitive emotion work had the potential to make transsexuals overconfident, which could lead to trouble in the public sphere.

While cognitive emotion work was the most common method through which interviewees attempted to mitigate distress and evoke confidence, it was not completely successful. For example, while choosing a gay bar as her initial foray into public life minimized some of Kris' fear and bolstered her courage, she still felt emotionally overwhelmed when thinking about going there, in part due to her relatively sheltered heterosexual life: "I had never been to a gay bar in my life. *Oh my God*! I expected to see naked men swinging from the chandeliers [and] screwing on the floor!" In order to gain more control over their anxiety and feel more confident, interviewees also attempted to change the physical symptoms of anxiety through strategies of bodily emotion work, such as deep breathing, smoking, or drinking.

While Kris was nervous about going out as a woman to a gay bar for the first time, for example, she combined bodily emotion work with a personal pep talk (more on this below) to get out of her car and into the bar:

> I went down and parked … about five blocks down from the bar and just sat in the car for about an hour. I must have smoked about half a pack of cigarettes [just] trying to get the nerve to get out of the damn car. So I saw there were people everywhere and I thought … what are you going to do? I thought, "If you go home, that's it. Or you get out of the car and you go for it." So I got out of the car.

Even though she chose what she thought was a "safe place," Kris still felt a lot of anxiety about going out and thus used a bodily emotion work strategy—in this case, smoking—to suppress unwanted feelings, at least temporarily. Feeling more relaxed, in turn, helped her build up the courage she needed to enter as a woman.

A more common form of bodily emotion work revealed by interviewees involved using alcohol in an attempt to suppress social anxiety. Drinking before going out or immediately upon entering a public establishment helped them relax and feel more confident. After saying that going to a gay bar was her "first time in a public place," Jenny said, "I was pretty nervous and had two double vodkas." Similarly, Joyce volunteered that when she first went out to a public place—a pizza parlor—with a handful of other transgendered people after a support group meeting, the first thing that most of them did was "put down" some stiff drinks.

Such bodily emotion work, however, can have unintended consequences. When the first author asked Shelly, for example, "how often do you go out and dress in public?" she answered:

> I'd like to go out more, but right now I'm not able to because I lost my license. I lost it because I was really trying to go out every day and I was doing it by myself …. I had a lot of anxiety when I was by myself. I was self-conscious that somebody might read me and I'd feel embarrassed….And so I was drinking some so it would decrease the anxiety. I wanted to master [going out] and the stress was very high. So, unfortunately I messed up there.

The negative consequences of her drinking appeared to be spiraling out of control. Losing her driver's license

limited her employment options, leaving her to work a low-paying part-time job. She worried about being evicted from her apartment and received calls from bill collectors during our interview.

Overall, interviewees' cognitive and bodily emotion work helped them mitigate feelings of anxiety and bolster self-confidence. Such emotion work prepared them to enter public arenas and interact with others.

In Situ Emotion Work

As interviewees began venturing out in public as women, they put their emotional well-being, at least partly, in others' hands. Having others read them as men in women's clothing eroded their confidence and made them feel intimidated or fearful. One interviewee said, for example, "I'm very rarely intimidated unless I really feel that someone has read me and identified themselves as having read me: 'Oh you are a guy.'" Interviewees said they experienced unwanted emotions when, for example, being followed by male teenagers in a shopping mall who shouted, "That's a dude in a dress," being approached by male teenagers "who were ready to beat us up" while eating at a restaurant, and being stopped by police officers and giving them a driver's license that listed them as "male" while they were dressed in feminine attire.

Such negative responses can decrease the self-confidence of male-to-female transsexuals who are just beginning to present themselves as women in public. For example, Sue, who had only been out in public a few times lost her nerve when she thought she was challenged:

> I walked out of the apartment and down the steps and into the parking lot, this was in broad daylight. It's a two tiered parking lot and there was a couple of teenagers in a car up the hill and one of them was just staring at me and I just *lost* it. I didn't run back inside but I just lost all, all, *all* the nerve I built up to actually go into a store.

While such a "stare" is objectively less traumatic than being verbally or physically harassed, this example illustrates that entering the public realm could produce *unmanageable* emotions, which could hinder their efforts to enter other public arenas, at least in the short run.

Upon entering more high-density social contexts, they feared that unintended expressions of embarrassment, anxiety, or fear could make them suspect in the eyes of co-present others. And they worried that the extra attention could lead to being categorized as men in women's clothing. Joyce said, "If you act guilty or act like you have something to hide, people are going to pay more attention to you." Jenny said, "That look of absolute terror is a dead give away. It makes people look twice as hard." "Being too self-conscious," said Kris, could lead the audience to notice that your "face is a little too masculine, that Adam's apple does kind of stick out too much, or maybe the voice is a little too deep." As Erin put it, "If you act nervous, you cannot move naturally and the incongruence between the female artifacts that you covered your body with and your presentation will attract attention."

When interviewees embodied womanhood in public and fear, embarrassment, and anxiety arose, they engaged in in situ emotion work to neutralize or transform the feelings in the "here and now." One form of in situ emotion work interviewees used to counter negative emotions and suppress shame when failing to pass involved defining the "reader." For example, after driving to the local support group meeting, housed in a low-income residential neighborhood, Sue got out of her car and "was walking down the street and these two kids come by on bicycles and one of them says, 'sir, ma'am, sir, ma'am, sir, can I borrow fifty cents?" Instead of losing confidence, as she did when the teenagers had stared at her, she did not let it bother her and walked into the support group meeting: "Kids are hard; they're harder to fool and they're more open with the fact they're reading you." By attributing to the children a superior ability to read transgendered people, Sue thus minimized embarrassment and felt better about herself.

Another form of emotion work involved not only suppressing undesired emotions, but also replacing them with other emotions. Interviewees sometimes transformed shame-related emotions such as embarrassment into anger. For example, after Taylor purchased some clothes at a store in the mall, she said, "I started walking away and the woman that had helped me … was like, 'Sir!' And I turned around just from, you know, reaction." At this point she felt embarrassed, but tried to suppress it by working up a bit of anger: "I just looked at her and I turned back around and walked away. Sort of like, 'Fuck you'." Rather than interpreting the saleswoman as making an "innocent" mistake, as interviewees did with children, her non-verbal expression of anger implied the saleswoman intentionally "outed" her as transgendered. By working up some anger, Taylor conveyed that she thought the saleswoman, not herself, had the problem—which may have transferred some of the embarrassment back to saleswoman.

But such emotion work did not always succeed: it depended on how others responded and how the scenario unfolded. For example, Taylor's walking away from the saleswoman in the above episode was not the end of the story. As Taylor was attempting to leave in a "huff," the saleswoman caught up with her. For an instant, Taylor did not know what was going to happen until the saleswoman handed Taylor back her purse that she had left at the register. At this point Taylor again felt ashamed, but rather than expressing anger more directly, she quickly removed herself from the situation to decrease the risk of further embarrassment: "I just got out of there."

Strategies of avoidance and self-protection helped interviewees also manage fear. One evening when she was driving, Karen "pulled up to a stop light and a couple of seconds later a Mustang with a guy with a beard pulled up next to me and he really looked at me hard." Karen managed her fear in two ways: "I tried to look straight ahead and lock my doors. I didn't know exactly what was coming down." Such precautions, however, proved ineffective. She said, "Then he tried to talk to me, but I didn't look over. Then the light changed and I went forward and he backed off and got behind me."

As the man tailgated her, Karen thought about calling the police, but was afraid to do so: "When you are in an alternate lifestyle like this, there's a lot more fear in approaching a policeman to help you because the policeman may be on the side of [the perpetrator] and, you know, [say] 'Hey, you get out of that dress—and so it's sort of a catch 22." She instead took matters into her own hands by getting on "a major thoroughfare and then I turned right when he couldn't get to me, so he lost me." This example shows not only that the man's actions scared Karen, but that she did not respond passively. Instead, she considered her options and locked her doors, avoided eye contact, drove strategically, which not only mitigated her fear, but, possibly, preserved her physical safety.

Unlike preparatory emotion work, in situ emotion work lacked the luxury of time for interviewees to prepare their emotional responses. Instead, interviewees were required to respond "in the moment" to public encounters that often involved being read, harassed, or threatened. They acted quickly to manage their anxiety by defining the situation or reader as non-threatening, replacing shame with anger, or strategically avoiding embarrassment and fear through self-protective actions. By promptly suppressing or displacing their fear, anxiety, or shame, interviewees were better able to navigate through—or out of—the situation.

Retrospective Emotion Work

Even if interviewees were able to manage negative emotions in situ, those emotions could re-arise when remembering past embarrassing and threatening public experiences. Looking back on these encounters led some interviewees to doubt their ability to successfully move through their transsexual passage. Taylor, for example, said:

> Getting read is negative. It makes me feel bad. [Question: In what sort of way?] It makes me doubt myself and my ability to go through with this. Initially it really makes me feel depressed, doubtful, and anxious.

As Taylor suggested, some transsexuals may interpret such disconcerting feelings as indicating that they might veer off the transsexual path or "stall" midcourse, due to intolerant public audiences. Interviewees, however, managed such negative emotions through retrospective emotion work. That is, in hindsight they reinterpreted their anxieties about being read so as to ease fears about not being able to embody womanhood in public.

The most common way interviewees suppressed such negative emotions was by attributing the cause of having been read as the result of the social context. For example, Taylor said that she and another transsexual woman, Julie, were read by "a drunk guy" at an outdoor Elton John concert about a year before our interview, but she minimized negative emotions with the following retrospective account:

> It was raining, just miserably raining. So none of the women there wore make up. I mean you can't go to an outdoor concert in the rain with makeup on and expect it to stay! Julie and I were the only two women with "faces" on and our hair fixed up and walking under umbrellas, hoping that nothing would happen…. So we stuck out in the crowd. Otherwise he [the "reader"] probably wouldn't have said two words to me.

Taylor's account thus placed the blame for being read on the situation rather than herself, a retrospective accounting that offered some protection from self-doubt.

Similarly, interviewees sometimes minimized the emotional consequences of failing to pass by pointing not to their own inadequacies, but instead to the conspicuous presence of their transgendered company. For example, during a national conference for transgendered people, Jenny was nearly assaulted by a group of teenagers at a restaurant. But she minimized her fear and embarrassment by saying: "Well, when six transgendered people go to a Denny's at 2:00 AM, it's pretty obvious." While Jenny was fearful and Taylor was embarrassed when she was read, in hindsight they used *external* attributions to minimize undesired feelings.

Interviewees also retroactively softened unwanted emotions arising from previous encounters by reframing the occasional failure to pass as merely part of the difficulty of transitioning. For example, after explaining that being read can make her doubt her ability to transition, Marzie said:

> But then I remind myself that I'm living two lives right now. It's impossible to think that I can adopt one-hundred percent female behavior and look like a woman until I'm full time. Until there isn't any more Mike—until Mike is gone and it's all Marzie—until then, I can't expect miracles. It'd be nice. But over time I've become more realistic and given myself a break.

Marzie thus evoked the context of where she was at in her transsexual passage to minimize doubt. More specifically, she said that she realized she needs to have "realistic" expectations about her situation, implying that the

occasional failure to pass does not mean that she will have trouble the rest of her life.

In addition to reframing their occasional failure to pass, interviewees also accentuated positive emotional experiences. Recalling such stories helped neutralize or prevent doubt from taking over. Interviewees viewed passing in front of children as a great milestone in their transition, emotionally wiping out doubt about their ability to pass. As Kris explained:

> Little kids can pick you out of a crowd, like *that* (snapping fingers). They're the worst… I went in the store the other day and there was this little girl with her mother and she's looking back at me and I was going, "Oh shit!" But I just smiled at her and said, "Hi, how are you?" and "Don't you look pretty today?" And she goes, "Whoa, Mommy. This nice lady thinks I'm real pretty." And I went, "Shew." Okay. If I fool little kids, I'm doing good. But there again it's not so much fooling as it is that everything is finally coming together.

Here Kris reinterpreted the girl's attributing her as a woman as indicating that "everything is finally coming together." There was no longer reason to fear or doubt her ability to move through her transsexual passage. Thus making *internal* attributions with regard to this episode of successful passing bolstered her positive emotions.

Accentuating the positive also took the form of interpreting men's gestures as objectifying them as women. While Joyce was putting gas in her car one day, for example,

> One man walked by and gave me what I think is the politically correct second glance. Men aren't supposed to get to look at women these days and if they're going to do it they can't look like they're interested. And it was a look, look away, look back with a very bored face and then look away after another couple of seconds. [Question: How did that make you feel?] It was nice. I felt like I had achieved something.

Similarly, Taylor looks back on an occasion in which a group of men let her cut in line when buying gas by saying, "It made me feel really good and attractive, too. I mean, if I would have been butt ugly they would have probably put me at the back of the line." In these examples, we can see how Joyce and Taylor employed internal attributions to retrospectively frame these experiences as achievements to feel happy and proud about.

Interviewees also retrospectively defined occasions in which they acknowledged failing to pass in positive ways to remain emotionally committed to their transsexual paths. For example, Karen and a supportive friend, Mary, traveled to New York for the expressed purpose of helping Karen build her confidence in presenting herself as a woman in public. As she recalled:

> I was just panicking…waiting for [the valet] to get the car. I was wearing this horrible outfit; I'm sure as everyone saw us walk through the lobby and Mary's looking real cute and I'm looking like her mother. Then as we get down to wait for the car, Mary goes, "Oh, I don't have my wallet." So she had to run up to her room and I was left standing in front of the hotel waiting for the car all by myself. I'm sure the valet parking guys knew that I was in drag. But they're being fine with it. "Ma'am can I help you" and I'm going, [changing to falsetto voice] "Well, can you…", trying to disguise my voice. But then we went to the restaurant and the restaurant was closed by the time we got there then we just ended up getting food at the hotel. But still that was going out in public [and] that was real positive and one of those things that made me feel like I needed to be going more that way.

By "going that way," Karen was referring to the conscious choice to pursue life as a public woman. Like most of the other interviewees, although she felt like a woman "inside," she was originally unsure if others would publicly validate her womanhood. But by doing retrospective emotion work—by making internal attributions when describing successes and external attributions to describe failures—interviewees were able to neutralize lingering feelings of fear or embarrassment and were able to work up the motivation and confidence to continue on their status passages.

Discussion

While previous research has focused on how male-to-female transsexuals strategically manage their self-presentations as women in public (Bolin, 1988; Ekins, 1997; Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998; Garfinkel, 1967; Feinbloom, 1976; Lewins, 1995; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Wojdowski & Tebor, 1976), it has avoided examining how transsexuals manage their emotions to facilitate public gendered performances. This oversight is reflected in much contemporary theorizing about transsexuality—often defined as "postmodern"—that emphasizes gender performativity to the neglect of emotional experience (see Butler, 1990; Hird, 2002). But as Schwalbe (1993) argues, postmodern theorists often take Goffman's (1959) emphasis on performativity, but ignore the centrality he gives to emotions. Hochschild's (1979) extension of Goffman's dramaturgical approach to include the notion of emotion work has been central to the development of the sociology of emotions (see Turner & Stets, 2006), but has not previously been incorporated into research on how transsexuals perform their desired gender identity in public. This article has taken a modest step in this direction, illustrating how interviewees' emotion work was intertwined with their gender performativity.

First, our interviewees' preparatory emotion work helped minimize anxiety and bolster self-confidence, generating motivation to perform womanhood in public. Much of this emotion work was cognitive—defining certain places as safe and engaging in personal pep talks—although they also engaged in bodily emotion—including smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. Second, when interviewees performed gender in public arenas, they performed in situ emotion work to suppress anxiety, embarrassment, and fear. Interviewees most commonly did this by defining the situation or audience as non-threatening, transforming shame into anger, and strategically avoiding embarrassment and fear through self-protective actions. Third, interviewees engaged in retrospective emotion work to neutralize the lingering negative emotions from past situations of being read as men in women's clothing while accentuating positive emotions and successful stories of passage. Overall, these emotion work strategies aided interviewees in performing womanhood in public in ways that fueled their transsexual passage.

Some of our interviewees' strategies of emotion work may have reflected their socialization into manhood. For example, psyching themselves up before going out in public as women is reminiscent of young male athletes preparing for sporting events (Messner, 1992). In addition, socialization often conditions masculine selves to transform shame into anger (Scheff, 2007). Furthermore, using alcohol or drugs to manage distress is more common among men than women (Matud, 2006). This suggests that the remnants of some male-to-female transsexuals' masculine selves may have served as resources to manage emotions when performing womanhood. Our findings thus do not likely reflect the experiences of male-to-female transsexuals who were more stereotypically feminine as children or female-to-male transsexuals' experiences.

Interviewees' emotion work strategies and emphasis on passing should also be historically, politically, and geographically contextualized. As members of an apolitical support group in the mid-1990s in a relatively conservative southern town, their experiences with passing—indeed, even their desire to pass as non-transgendered women—are not generalizable to all male-to-female transsexuals. Interviewees' emotion work was likely geared much more toward passing than some transsexuals who come out today in LGBT-friendly communities. While some transgendered activists and postmodern theorists view passing as symptomatic of internalized transphobia and an underdeveloped political consciousness (Halberstam, 1994; Prosser, 1998; Stryker, 1998), many transsexuals (like our interviewees) view passing as a way to ward off harassment and violence and validate their gender identities (Namaste, 2000; Roen, 2002). For our interviewees, transition was a "liminal stage" (Bolin, 1988) in their paths to womanhood rather than a political project.

Interviewees' emotion work strategies may have unintended consequences as they transition into living full time as women. Using drugs or alcohol to quell distress could lead to addiction, which research suggests is a considerable problem for many transsexuals (Cole, O'Boyle, Emory, & Meyer, 1997). The strategy of attributing the cause of having been publicly read as transgendered to being in the middle of transition may lead transitioning male-to-female transsexuals to have unreasonable expectations. Because many transsexual women do not always pass as non-transgendered women even after transition, such aforementioned expectations may lead them to later blame themselves when public audiences read them as transgendered. On the other hand, it may be that as transsexual women come to terms with the fact that they may not always pass as non-transgendered women after transition, they adapt and place less importance on passing (Roen, 2002).

Rather than trying to generalize to the larger population of transsexuals, our study sensitizes researchers to the importance of emotion work in transsexuals' experiences. As Namaste (2000) points out, it is always inaccurate to speak of a singular transsexual experience. Future research should explore transsexuals' emotion work in other aspects of their gendered passage, including their experiences with health care workers and therapists, coming out to family, friends, and coworkers, support group members and social movement activists, as well as life after transition. Sex researchers should gather a larger and more diverse sample of participants in order to conduct comparative analyses on how race, class, region, age, and biographical differences shape transsexuals' experiences. Future research should also explore how transsexuals' different understandings of womanhood and manhood shapes their emotion work by comparing more traditionally gendered transsexuals with radical transgenderists.

Transsexuals' status passage is emotionally tumultuous. But, as our study suggests, transitioning transsexuals do not just passively absorb or react to emotional troubles as they arise. Rather, they put their agency to use to manage their emotions in ways that helped them navigate their gendered passage. Moving through the passage successfully thus not only requires mastering new gendered performances, but also the art of emotion work.

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