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Trans
masculinities:
embodiments,
performances and the
materiality of gender
in times of change

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the increased visibility of the category, transgender – or simply trans¹ – has brought new challenges to light and, most importantly, led to the formation of a new lexicon for the naming of privilege and oppression (Boellstorff et al. 2014; Marciano 2014). While women and femininity remain subaltern in contemporary societies, the affirmation of the rights of gender minorities and the expansion of plural gender identities beyond normative definitions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity (Plummer 1996) can be seen as one of the most challenging forms of resistance to the limits imposed by binary systems of gender that oppose men and women.

At present, according to hegemonic principles of correspondence between “sex” and “gender”, those whose gendered bodies and minds are “in conformity” (cis-people)² contrast with the unprivileged minority whose gender identity “contradicts” the sexed body each person is assigned at birth. If, in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir broke new ground when arguing that one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one, (de Beauvoir 1949) today embodying a gender seems a more complex process as new possibilities for naming oneself widen and gain increased recognition in the social and political realm. As Joe Biden, former USA vice-president, recently said, “transgender equality is the civil rights issue of our time” (*The Independent* 2017).

Against this backdrop, we argue that the categories for naming gender – whether femininity, masculinity or other forms of definition that reject or bend these binary terms – must be analysed and addressed from a critical standpoint. Stemming from the “transgender moment” of the early 1990s (Stryker 2014; Namaste 2005), the “gender revolution” of the present-day implies not only a characterisation of the forms of inclusion of an already large and varied gender minority – gathered under the prefix trans – but also

1 *Trans people* is a provisional umbrella term to name those who, in a variety of ways, challenge the naturalness of gender as emanating from the sexed codification of bodies, whether they are transsexual (both male to female, and female to male), transgender, transvestites and cross-dressers, “travestis” or other forms of gender variance, such as genderqueer, non-binary, gender fluid, androgynous, among other designations. In a nutshell, Trans is a wide-ranging designation that includes all individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. For an overview, see Stryker (2008).

2 The terms cisgender and cissexual are used to refer to individuals who identify with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth. Cisgender replaced the nowadays pejorative notion of “gender normals”, commonly used in the social sciences since Garfinkel (1967).

a reflection on how new names for affirming gender generate new oppositions and processes of exclusion.

However, working with growing axes of oppression and subalternity challenges us to dismantle hierarchies of privilege (being non-trans, white, western) that might obfuscate the prevalent inequality between the masculine and the feminine in favour of other differences that create new designations for redressing the traditional order of gender. Yet, while the current politics of trans-naming is vital (Aboim 2018), the materiality of gendered inequality cannot be ignored and reduced to one-dimensional oppositions. If the tangled web of gender diversity brings new challenges for interpreting privileges and oppressions (Connell 1987; Bourdieu 2001), we argue that inequalities between feminine and masculine also mark the internal divisions within the trans collective. For that reason, in this chapter we focus on the construction of masculinity enacted by trans individuals,³ seeking to address both the internal plurality of trans masculinities and the ways in which such apparent subaltern forms of “doing masculinity” (Cromwell 1999) might, even if unwillingly, benefit from the privilege historically associated with manhood when compared to the more evident exclusion and discrimination of trans femininities (Connell 2012).

Drawing on fieldwork with trans men in Portugal and the United Kingdom, two lines of argument will be developed. Firstly, from a theoretical standpoint, the importance of building bridges between different areas of critical gender studies, namely Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (henceforth CSMM)

3 The sub-sample analysed in this chapter was drawn from a much larger empirical data-set created over the course of the past three years, aiming to compare five European countries from South to North: Portugal, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden. Until the mid of August 2018, nearly 160 in-depth interviews have been carried out with both trans people and healthcare practitioners alongside ethnographic work (ranging from political, medical and activist venues to street trans sex work), which is representative of yet another 40 cases. In addition, an extensive historical and document analysis has been done (including all major legal and social developments across the globe, including both the centres in the global north, such as the USA, and the global south) and media analysis is ongoing at a rapid pace, with the construction of a database containing more than 8,000 items published between 2014 and 2017. These data-sets enable us to reflect upon gender and citizenship by focusing on trans people (namely, transsexuals, transgender, crossdressers and other forms of gender identifications) as subjects whose recognition constitutes one of the most challenging boundaries for framing contemporary debates about human and gender rights. It also enables us to characterise the institutional apparatuses (whether legal, medical, political or even social-scientific) that frame trans lives. We interpret our empirical data as a privileged locus from which to investigate, at large, the doings of gender and gender politics.

and Trans Studies is advocated. Following Connell's proposal (Connell 1987, 1995), it is suggested that redressing the conceptual premises of masculinity is a fundamental step to understand the plurality of trans embodiments, bodily materiality and the possibilities of doing masculinity without men (Prosser 1998).

Secondly, from an empirical angle, such a perspective will enable us to tackle masculinities by exploring trans men's subjectivities and doings of gender. The stories of trans men might tell us more about what masculinity(ies) is(are). When not naturalised as emanating from the (pre-existing) body, what defines masculinity can become clearer. However, as will be put forward, masculinity cannot be understood without taking into account the materiality of bodies regardless of their diversity and transformations. In the end, when the meanings of masculinity and femininity are increasingly diffuse and changeable, the body resists, in spite of all changes, as an important focal point of gender performativity, whether self-recognised or, perhaps also very importantly, as perceived by others. If we live in a legal and political world where, despite regressive backlashes, the language of self-determination and degenderisation of the body is becoming unavoidable,⁴ the interactional and normative orders of gender resist when bodies and bodily performances are displayed under the public eye and interpreted in accordance with historically available categories. Hence, the relative privilege awarded to bodies and performances recognised as masculine.

In the section that follows, we argue in favour of a sociological analysis of trans masculinities that might bridge the gap between trans men and masculinity studies. In a second moment, we briefly explore trans men's life stories and, while accounting for their empirical diversity, bodies and embodiment will be shown to be of paramount importance. Bodily capital (Wacquant 2004, 2005) emerged as a (if not the) central feature of masculinity. Finally, we contend

4 Regarding gender identity laws, we are, in fact, witnessing the emergence of principles of self-determination, autonomy and individual sovereignty in a number of national polities. Overall, these principles produce the individual's right to legally define their legal gender identity/category in almost any circumstance, namely without prior medical control or interventions, and without the need for judicial authorisation. Such legal and political shifts can be found, for instance, in the gender identity laws of Argentina (2012), Denmark (2014), Ireland (2015), Malta (2015), Colombia (2015), Norway (2016), Bolivia (2016), Ecuador (2016) and Belgium (2017). In Portugal, the Assembly of the Republic put forward a new gender identity law along principles of self-determination. The law (Lei n.º 38/2018) has been in effect since August 7th 2018, after it was promulgated by the President of the Republic. For an analysis of these institutional changes, see Vasconcelos, 2018 (forthcoming).

that under the name Trans, processes of inclusion and exclusion are taking place, while offering a privileged lens to understand – from margins to centre – the workings of gender as a prevailing power mechanism of binarisation – or governance – of diversity, in which the gendered body is centre-stage (Foucault 1979).

TRANS MASCULINITIES AND MASCULINITY STUDIES: BRIDGING THE GAP

Critical Studies about Men and Masculinities (CSMM) have often been perceived as mainly focusing on straight cisgender masculinities, leaving aside the masculinities of trans men (Green 2005). This is an excessive criticism insofar as heteronormativity has been harshly viewed as a discriminatory principle. Gay men have been under scrutiny, with many contributions exploring forms of masculinity other than the hegemonic (Connell 1995; Donaldson 1993; Whitehead 2002). However, it is true that transsexual and transgender men have been given less attention. On the one hand, trans men have been seen as located in a “no man’s land”: they seem neither relevant for transgressing the boundaries of male privilege, thus not contributing to changing the order of masculine domination, nor important to assess the trappings of that same male privilege.

On the other hand, trans men have also received less attention from trans-studies (Hausman 2001), when compared to their female counterparts. It is as if trans men have just been seen as wanting to “pass” and, for that reason, have been unnoticed. In addition, when the interest falls on the emancipatory potential of transgression as common in queer oriented studies, trans men can be easily put aside insofar as they bear the burden of reproducing male privilege and even hegemonic masculinity. For many feminist strands, they are betrayers of the cause. After all, they became men. For other key developments in LGBTQ+ scholarship, the tensions between the perceived subversive potential of lesbians – and particularly butch lesbians – and the alleged conformity of trans masculinities have contributed to maintaining trans men at the margins of the fields of gender and sexuality (Beasley 2005).

It is our contention that theoretical connections between different areas of gender critical studies should be fostered, not only as to avoid the ghettoisation and closure of perspectives but also because objects pertaining to particular

fields or sub-fields might inform developments in neighbouring areas of research. In this sense, though there are already a number of studies about trans men (Green 2005), not many have discussed the problem of masculinities as constructed by CSMM. We know that trans men's masculinities may be seen as contingent (Blackwood 2009), defensive or constrained (Abelson 2014), hyper-masculine, women-hating and aspiring to the patriarchal hegemonic pattern (quite evident in trans exclusionary feminists; see Raymond 1979; and Jeffreys 2014) or, conversely, feminist (Hines 2002). However, regardless of all the plurality of masculinities enacted by trans men (and non-trans men), which has been portrayed in the studies of Devor (1997), Rubin (2003), Vidal-Ortiz (2002) or Green (2005), among others (Aboim 2016), there is still a gap to be bridged. The conceptual connections between CSMM and studies of trans men have yet to come of age. One example of such fruitful linkages has been the importance of Halberstam's work on *Female Masculinities* (1998) for redressing debates around what men and masculinity really are. In particular, Connell's (1995) theoretical edifice has suffered from criticisms that point out, following Halberstam, the problems of rigidly equating masculinity with men's practices or even just men themselves.

It is possible to argue that by focusing on men rather than masculinities, we could perhaps more easily avoid the trap of reification, into which we can easily fall whenever we couple general principles of power with particular groupings of men. On the other hand, we could also be at risk of ignoring the plurality of men and masculinities, a plurality that makes it difficult to operate either with the notion of masculinities or the category of men. However, even if masculinities may be diverse and one single dominant form of masculinity is difficult to imagine (Jefferson, 2002), men remain at the centre of power. Brittan, who has approached masculinity from a poststructuralist standpoint, also makes an interesting point when considering this question (Brittan 1989, 2): "While it is apparent that styles of masculinity alter in relatively short time-spans, the substance of male power does not", he states.

An additional difficulty therefore emerges whenever we aim to trace the main traits of masculinity, without really disposing of a conceptual apparatus that allows them to be identified in different contexts and historical settings. How should we look at the multiplicity of men and masculinities? Should we identify different groups a priori, only then to characterise their practices, which may in the end result in an array of subcategories of a major group,

or should we follow the reverse pathway? This is a difficult question, but its intricacy must not prevent us from asking it. In a way, Connell does not present us with a solution, and tends to juggle between a practice-based approach and certain a priori definitions of groupings, a problem that she recognises in the article co-authored with Messerschmidt in 2005 (see also Messerschmidt 2015).

In a way, masculinities may be more plural than men, but the inverse can also be true (Hearn 2004). The complex relationship between men and masculinities has served as the backdrop for a wide range of criticism of the notion of masculinity itself, based on the common acknowledgement that the lives of “real men” would have difficulty fitting into the model of a hegemonic masculinity. In accordance with the view of masculinity as practice, all forms of practice are constitutive of masculinity and it is through practice, from daily interaction to institutional frameworks, that masculinity comes to organise social life, upholding a patriarchal gender order. From this perspective, masculinity could certainly be defined as simultaneously practice, place and effect (Connell 1995). Individuals embody masculinity from a particular place, enact masculinity as it is embodied and live with the effects of the masculinity they contribute to reproducing and shaping at the interactional and structural levels of society. However, as proposed, the inverse connection can also be of analytical interest and perhaps more heuristic when it comes to avoiding falling into the trap of locations as the triggers of all practice. We can, provisionally, see location as the final destination – of a journey as in the case of trans men – and not necessarily as the beginning.

However, even if we argue in favour of making the connections between “place” and “practice” more flexible, or even inverting them, it is still theoretically useful to work with the distinction between masculinity and men. It is true that masculinity is what men do, in the sense West and Zimmerman (1987) gave to the notion of “doing gender” in and through interaction. Nevertheless, by holding to such a definition we may end up with the simple fact that masculinity and men (and femininity and women, for that matter) overlap, with two probable and opposite tautological outcomes: a situation of entrenchment into categorical (and potentially essentialist) definitions of men or, on the other hand, the dilution of the category of men.

The former assumption may generate reification and reductionism and lead us to see black men as performing black masculinity, gay men as enactors of gay masculinity, white men as bearers of the dominant white masculinity, and

so on. In this respect, the work of Judith/Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998), broke new ground and presented a challenging and compelling thesis that dissociates men from masculinity, while also fomenting the links between feminism and queer theory. Rather than assuming that white masculinity is foundational, Halberstam puts forward the significant proposition that it is possible to study masculinity without men. In fact, Halberstam concludes, masculinity is most complicated and transgressive when it is not tied to the male body, especially the straight, white male body. Bearing in mind the will “to make my own female masculinity plausible, credible, and real” (1998, xi), Halberstam argues that female masculinity – that she found among a variety of women from butch lesbians and tomboys to the drag kings she studied ethnographically – is not merely a perverse supplement to dominant configurations of gender. Rather, masculinity itself cannot be fully understood unless female masculinity is taken into account. Likewise, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also recognise that professional “bourgeois women” are nowadays appropriating masculinity.

In this line of reasoning, masculinity and men become different things, which is a compelling thesis. Masculinity is not, after all, what men do. Instead, norms and ideologies become more important, an idea which ultimately fits the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Gramsci 1979 [1947]) from which Connell drew her theorisation. Once again, however, we encounter the same problem. What ideologies are dominant in a given context and how are they related to and created by men’s practices?

An answer to this question can be found in poststructuralist approaches to masculinity, where discourses are power and the emphasis is placed upon the complexity and plasticity of masculinities, when defined as discursive practices (Wetherell and Edley 1999). Following Foucault, the embodying subject, as the centre of productive power, now becomes the key problem and object of theorisation. The main concern is placed on the plurality of meanings associated with the masculinity that men can manage, enact and assemble according to their interactional needs. Men cannot be conflated with masculinity insofar as there is no essential subject (Jefferson 2002; Wetherell and Edley 1999).

Debating such central problems and operating with such a perspective will enable us to tackle the definition of masculinity. By exploring trans men’s subjectivities and doings of gender, their transition stories, we might be able to bring a degree of clarity to Connell’s canonical definition of masculinity as

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

DOING RESEARCH WITH TRANS PEOPLE

Our analysis builds upon the conceptual perplexities raised by the life stories and transitional journeys of trans men and individuals performing masculinity. In-depth interviews were carried out with a variety of trans men and masculine defined individuals along the spectrum of trans masculinities in Portugal and the United Kingdom.⁵ Some participants, especially in Portugal, self-defined as transsexual, while transgender is a more common term in the United Kingdom. Others, however, have also explicitly defined themselves as transgender, genderqueer, non-binary FtM, gender fluid or androgynous, among other designations. Only rarely was a single definition enough to account for gender identity across their life courses. For instance, categories such as cross-dresser or lesbian were often associated with former life stages.

In both countries, our samples can be seen as of convenience (Given 2008) as they were constructed with the aim of showcasing the diversity of trajectories and modes of self-definition gathered beneath the trans masculine umbrella. However, even if we cannot claim to know all processes of becoming trans masculine, we consider, notwithstanding, that we were able to achieve our initial purpose and, even, a considerable saturation of the most common processes. Our assumption is supported by the comparison with former studies in the field.

Participants were recruited by various means (personal contacts, participation in events, networks associated with trans rights organisations) and a snowball method was used. Ethical approval had been previously granted by the Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa and the European Research Council Executive Agency. Clearance was also given by the Portuguese National Commission for Data Protection. All participants were provided with detailed information about the aims and procedures of

5 For a comparative overview of legal frameworks and trans activism in Portugal and the United Kingdom, see Santos and Hines (2017).

the study and were cognisant that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any moment. All participants were aware of their right to skip any question they might feel uncomfortable with. The terms of confidentiality and use of the information gathered in the interview were outlined. It was made clear that results would be reported in such a way that no individual would be identifiable.

Privileging a narrative approach, in-depth interviews with 13 trans men and trans masculine individuals were then carried out in Portugal in 2015 and 2016. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 58 years old; 8 could be identified as FtM, 3 as FtM non-binary and 1 as non-binary FtX; 8 had legally changed their name and gender; 6 were actively involved in activism campaigns, support groups or movements – 4 of them affiliated to queer “radical” movements. Two of the interviewees were not Portuguese nationals and some lived/had lived in other countries ranging from France, the UK or the Nordic countries.

In the United Kingdom, the same ethical protocols were followed. In total, 17 trans men and trans masculine individuals were interviewed in-depth in 2016. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 55 years old; 10 could be identified as FtM; 5 as FtM non-binary and 2 as non-binary FtX; 16 had legally changed their name and 10 of them also changed their gender in documents; 12 were actively involved in (LGB)T organisations, support groups and campaigns. One of the interviewees was not a British national.

In accordance with our ethical protocol, all individuals were given pseudonyms and, when relevant, potentially identifiable socio-demographic data or specific life events were omitted or slightly transformed without ever compromising the validity of participants' stories and voices. For this reason, the stories here told, with full respect for each participant's perspective and cooperation, and the pseudonyms chosen to name them in the first person cannot be associated with any individuals who by mere chance might have a similar name, characteristics and stories.

The depth of the information collected enabled us to draw a number of important conclusions, which are not empirically distant from those presented in studies such as Rubin's (2003).

TRANS MEN AND TRANS MASCULINITIES: PERFORMANCES OF THE MASCULINE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MANHOOD

From our samples of trans men and trans masculine individuals in Portugal and the United Kingdom, we selected cases that portray three exemplary processes in the construction of masculinity. In our analysis, we emphasise more the cross-national similarities that were found when comparing Portugal and the United Kingdom, and opt, rather, to disentangle the diversity encountered within the spectrum of trans masculinities. From our perspective, under a common name, different stories and appropriations of a similar designation are accommodated, while translated into diverse definitions and constructions of a bodily masculinity.

TRANS MEN AND THE DESIRE FOR A MALE BODY

The first process pertains to trans men who fit into and self-identify with the medical categorisation of transsexuality or, to be more exact, gender dysphoria (DSM-5 2013).⁶ Usually, these individuals are undergoing treatment aimed at a full bodily transition, including genital surgery, wishing to migrate from one gender (female at birth) to the other. The emphasis is clearly put on the desire to become a man who can be publicly recognised as a man, regardless of the years lived in a body perceived as female. Trans men refuse, in this case, any idea of “evil deceiving or make believing” (Bettcher 2007). Often declaring they were born in the wrong body, the emphasis is then placed on the transformation of the body, in a way that is akin to the definition of transsexuality put forward by Harry Benjamin in 1966.⁷ The wrong body

6 The DSM is a manual on mental disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Despite the name change from earlier versions of transsexualism, Gender Dysphoria (GD) retains its classification as a mental disorder. In contrast, the ICD-International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (other relevant manual published by the World Health Organisation) is not limited to only mental disorders. In its eleventh revision dated from June 2018, ICD-11, the diagnosis of Gender Incongruence (GI) (corresponding to GD in DSM-5 terminology) was moved out of the section on mental disorders. Instead, it has been placed in a separate section on Conditions Related to Sexual Health or Sexual and Gender Health. Placing GI in this section declassifies it as a mental disorder, while maintaining a diagnosis that will facilitate access to care through third party reimbursement, and could eventually lead to American Psychiatric Association (APA) also removing GD from the DSM.

7 In fact, the notion of transsexualism is older and deserves a brief note. In 1923, Hirschfeld introduced the (German) term “Transsexualismus” (after which David Oliver Cauldwell introduced >

narrative – which infers a desire for transition as normalisation according to the medicalisation process – has been used by a number of participants. The challenges are more related to medical practice and access to healthcare than to defying gender binaries as they were constructed. To some degree, there is still a genitalisation of gender, even if this is an over-simplification. Many cases show the entanglement of different discourses about the trans – but the medical construct has not disappeared.

This short definition is quite applicable to the case of Luís (33, Portuguese of African descent, 6th grade, construction worker, living in a Nordic country) and Daniel (26, Portuguese, white, bachelor's degree, painter and decorator, living in the suburbs of Lisbon). Both define themselves as men and display the imageries and the hexis of the stereotypical straight working-class guy. Their processes of transition were quite different though. Daniel matches the canonical medical definition of transsexuality and had always felt trapped in the wrong body since he was a small child. His diagnosis was swift and unproblematic, as was hormonal treatment and mastectomy. Having now achieved a male bodily appearance and presenting a visible beard and masculine voice, his main problem is the lack of a penis, which he replaces using strap-ons. For him, full masculinity will be achieved when genital surgery is completed. He defines himself as a man, putting aside the term “transsexual”, which he feels as a temporary medical condition to be corrected. Luís shares the same desires and projects, even if he “discovered” his transsexuality much later in life, already in his late twenties. Having a past as a butch lesbian, he now wants to put aside that past and live fully as a man able to sexually penetrate his female partner.

When asked about masculinity, all that mattered for them was gaining a male body that could be seen as genuinely male and sexually functional. Masculinity is equated with bodily maleness in a very strong sense. What they feel is lacking cannot be solved by any performative strategy, but only by a reconstruction of the body itself. On the other hand, masculinity remains diffuse and permeated by a myriad of references. Certainly, the gains of masculinity are very welcomed: being perceived as a man allows them a

► “transsexualism” and “transsexual” to English in 1949 and 1950). In 1969, Harry Benjamin claimed to have been the first to use the term “transsexual” in a public lecture, which he gave in December 1953. Benjamin went on to popularise the term in his 1966 book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, in which he described transsexual people on a scale (later called the “Benjamin scale”) of three levels of intensity: Transsexual (nonsurgical), Transsexual (moderate intensity), and Transsexual (high intensity).

share of what Connell terms the patriarchal dividend (Connell 1995). They feel empowered by masculinity and enjoy it, but without a complete bodily metamorphosis the transition is not complete and they are not men yet, so they say. Luís is quite clear about the problem. For now, he contends, he still sees himself as a transsexual, but in the future he will drop the word and will be just a man.

Although Barry (36, British, bachelor's degree, artist and performer, living in the suburbs of London) does not use the term transsexual, he positions himself in a very similar way to the two Portuguese cases. Just like Luís, Barry wants to “fit in with other guys” and “be one of the guys”. Followed by medical doctors since age 18, he was 21 when he started the process of bodily transition. In the last 8/9 years, he has had about 20 operations and, despite the surgical complications, Barry persists in trying to reach the last phase of a phalloplasty – the surgical insertion of an erection device. Barry carries the bodily marks of his transition: a large scar on his arm and the often swollen hands as a consequence of the surgery. Nonetheless, for him physical pain and discomfort were and are worth it. For Barry, completing his body transition and being perceived as a “straight male” will finally get him “to the level of confidence and state of feeling comfortable”.

A NINE OUT OF TEN: ON THE AMBIVALENCE OF TRANS MASCULINITY

The second major process is of discursive ambivalence. Individuals tie the categories of the medical apparatus and those emanating from queer activism together (Corwin 2017), thus juggling with a degree of apparent incoherence between a few ideas about non-binary gender self-categorisation and canonical medical binary thinking. They use the word transsexual and transgender interchangeably (much more in the Portuguese case), but showing respect for trans medicine as their resort for comfort and guidance.

An exemplary case is that of António (26, Portuguese, bachelor's degree, sales clerk). António has been struggling to get his transsexuality (“gender dysphoria”) diagnosis for the past five years. As he says, he is a “nine out of ten” in his own perception of what becoming a man means. He always felt uncomfortable as a girl, though he was not completely certain of his condition or desires. As a bisexual individual divided between medical knowledge and queer proposals for identity, he had found it difficult to make sense of himself. He now wants to be a man and has started hormonal treatment, a step that left

him extremely proud of his physical transformation. Each hair in his body is a victory and he says masculinity is growing on him. A penis is not mandatory as masculinity is not so dependent upon conventions of bodily maleness, but a masculine attire is key and a mastectomy is planned for the near future. António is not like the former trans men. He does not wish to forget or deny his previous self as a girl, but he feels closer to masculinity, and that, all in all, a quantum of bodily maleness is needed. Aside from the body, masculinity seems an obscure topic. He explicitly states that he will know what it means when his body is further transformed. António believes the body will play its part and teach him how to be a man. He feels like one, wants to be seen as one, but ultimately does not know what a man really is. Rejecting stereotypes, he waits for the revelation of an essence through the body.

Likewise, Sandy (49, British, bachelor's degree, working part-time as a gender equality advisor) struggles with a stereotyped perception of himself. Subjectively embracing both what he sees as "traits" of masculinity and femininity as his own, he sees himself as re-defining "what masculinity actually means". As he puts it:

All I can do now is do what I can as a guy, now, to break down the roots of those issues and that as well which I take to be toxic masculinity and that need for power and control which I will challenge and I'll challenge other men about it and of course now they take that much more seriously.

Also divided between medical knowledge and activist terminology, Sandy feels more comfortable to be perceived as a man. He questions himself whether this has more to do with the improvement in his relationship with his body or the attainment of male privilege. As he states: "It's hard to separate that stuff out. I have got no way of telling what that is and it's probably a combination actually." In relation to medical care and services, he does not see the need for psychiatrists to be the gatekeepers of gender recognition and voices his concern about medical power, considering the system to be "paternalistic". Sandy considers that the use of psychiatric support should be a decision made by trans people, whose informed consent is sufficient. Yet, because he fitted the criteria, he has not experienced any sort of prejudice from clinicians. His biggest fear is, as he gets older, to become more vulnerable to maltreatment by medical and social care services if he chooses "not to have certain surgery" (namely, genital surgery).

A QUEER MIND AND THE TRANSGRESSIVE BODY: REDEFINING MANHOOD?

In contrast, the third process includes trans masculine individuals with a strong queer self-identification and rather critical of medical standards. At first glance, coherence seems achieved, though they also (not always but quite often) resort to medical treatment and ultimately desire a fair amount of bodily modification – an aspiration that might be seen as oscillating between the desire of transcending gender and the power of the prevailing gender binaries. Indeed, transgressing gender might not come as an easy task for some, even when they achieve a bodily hybridisation. However, even if in both Portugal and the United Kingdom a number of participants self-defined as non-binary, that is, neither man nor woman; a significant part embraced a journey of bodily masculinisation, which might create situations (even if experienced with discomfort) of “passing” in the eyes of others – an expression that we use only in replicating the voices of participants and not as our own.

Diniz (27, Portuguese, university student) defines himself as a non-binary genderqueer FtM individual, with a “pansexual” orientation. Affiliated to queer activism, he is a very active member of both an organic LGBTQ+ genderqueer organisation and also less structured discussion groups aimed at the critique of the binary gender order. Hence, he (the pronoun the participant prefers) rejects all he perceives as forms of gender conventionalism and binary categories. However, in spite of his critical position and political engagement, he sought for a medical diagnosis that enabled him to go ahead with legal procedures and some treatment. Unsurprisingly, the contradiction between his ideological positioning and the demands of the medical apparatus made it difficult for him to adjust to medical standards of transsexual/transgender diagnosis and healthcare. Such contradictions of the system mark all his discourse about his journey and present gender identity. Before starting medical procedures in Portugal, he spent some time in a Nordic country but, disappointed with the medical system, migrated to Belgium, where he got a diagnosis that enabled him to finally change his legal name in Portugal. In Portugal, he had access to hormonal treatment and a mastectomy, modifications that he is keen on sharing through social media.

In spite of his convictions, Diniz also acknowledges that he feels more like a man and wants to pursue further body modifications. If a penis is not mandatory, a male appearance is nonetheless fairly important. Juggling between his FtM identity and the queer canon, he finds it difficult to construct a non-binary

gender identity and tries to justify his choices as non-conventional in terms of gender. For him, masculinity is lived afar from any hegemonic connotation, as he emphasises.

Interestingly though, he seems quite aware of the recent privileges of masculinity and does not refuse them. Being seen as a man is better, he says. Diniz reflexively states the structural gains of being a man as deeply rooted in the mere fact of looking like one. Once again, and contrary to first impressions, the body gains ascendancy.

In the same vein, Ash (34, British, Master's degree, self-employed) considers that his definition as "more towards the male end of the spectrum (...) largely stems from a physical thing for me more than anything else". However, even if he clearly states that he does not "and never will identify as fully male", the mere possibility of being perceived as female is very uncomfortable for him. Above all, rejecting femininity, Ash thinks of his body as a mix, which mirrors his self-defined gender identity as non-binary – a term he has come to use in the last five years.

The changes in Ash's self-designation reflects the developments in terminology within the Trans community. An activist himself, Ash wants to raise awareness among the general population regarding trans' claims and issues. Namely, the need to contest "traditional" medical narratives about trans people as well as the oppression that affects the trans population. He sees these public mediations as ways of countering the tendency to disregard some trans' identities over others as normally endorsed by the media and even some trans people or groups. For him, the decreased visibility of non-binary people stems from a strong mediated focus on physical transitions that omits the social, philosophical and psychological transitions, considered by Ash to be more difficult.

For Ash, his identity is not permanent. On the contrary, it fluctuated and fluctuates still within the "realm of the masculine". He sees his future as open but, despite all doubts, does not vehemently reject the "route of surgery". Ash thinks he will, most likely, not need genital surgery as hormones and chest surgery were just enough to make him happier. The feeling of bodily discrepancy was over after starting hormones, and now his body is "just functional for what I want it to be functional for, it does its job and it feels fine." Ash believes he was confident enough to deal with doctors and use the system to his own benefit. Other than with the endocrinologist, Ash did not feel pressure to decide on genital surgery or perform his gender in a more masculine manner. Yet, he was initially denied chest surgery, got two appointments cancelled

and had to “fight” to be included in the system. Despite his struggles with the establishment, he narrates the whole process as relatively “simple” and sees the access to medical intervention as just a way “to change the physical side of things that I needed to change”.

Both Ash and Diniz are most often seen as masculine, as men. In spite of the refusal of the system, their transformed bodies, leaving aside all aspirations and ambivalences, generated a new gender location. And with the new location in the “land of masculinity” came a degree of privilege, even if unwanted. Recognition is, in fact (Fraser and Honneth 2003), a fundamental moment that cannot be dialectically separated from body materiality and the history of gender as a binary system of difference.

Nor can it be disassociated from certain forms of privilege that mould the present day dynamics of inclusion or exclusion. A key example that must be taken into consideration concerns violence. Transgender people experience multiple forms of violence (Valentine 2007). However, trans men’s and trans women’s experiences differ significantly. At the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality or class, the violence against transsexual, transgender and other gender non-conforming individuals is striking, with the acknowledged rates of homicide rising visibly. According to the Trans Murder Monitoring project conducted by Transgender Europe (TGEU), since 2008, nearly 2,000 trans people have been reported killed. These official numbers cover 64 countries and affect mainly trans women – 99 per cent of the reported victims – and sex workers – 65 per cent (TGEU 2015). This worldwide pattern is far from random and targets the most vulnerable segments of the trans population, coupling transphobia with the particular violence of femmephobia.

Moving from the macroscopic to the microscopic angle, the awareness of the privileges of masculinity, whether wanted or unwanted, are quite present in the discourse of trans men, even when they perform a non-binary form of masculinity at a distance from hegemonic gender normativity and even categories.

Diniz clearly states how being seen as a man generated a competitive advantage in the labour market:

Sometimes I apply for jobs, and I was looking for a job before changing my name. I have a LinkedIn profile, and the only thing I did was to change my name, my gender... I didn’t even change my picture, it’s very androgynous. And I noticed that if before I had only received one offer after a year and a half, from the moment I changed my name and my

gender, in a month I received two job offers. I was thinking: Wow, this is... It's sad, very sad, because I'm the same person with the same qualifications. But now that I've changed my gender and name, employers come looking for me... [Laughs]

CONCLUSION

In spite of their significant differences, all these trans men/masculine individuals share one common feature, even if in different forms and degrees: the desire for a male bodily appearance. Even if a penis is not always necessary, a masculine appearance is key for most of them. Almost all participants were under hormonal treatment and the majority had also undergone mastectomies, which are narrated as a source of joy and accomplishment. If not all, most desire a degree of maleness, which often leads to being perceived as a man, even if there is no specific style or type of masculinity that overall prevails. Neither the macho nor the genderqueer imageries are dominant, though a quest for "recognition" is often mentioned, particularly when the topic is social interaction.

Interestingly though, the "recognition" of masculinity is not necessarily the same thing for any of them. In other words, while masculinity as ideology can have quite different meanings, being/becoming viewed as a man or as masculine ends up being defined through the materiality of the body, whether this was the plan or not. In sum, if masculinity encompasses a wide number of definitions, maleness (that is, bodily masculinity as "flesh") seems quite monolithic. Styles and clothes vary, but what is beneath seems to need more stability as a key capital of masculinity. However, if masculinity can exist without stereotypical full bodily maleness, a certain degree of maleness seems to be a condition for masculinity to subsist and sediment over time. Therefore, perceptions of difference and of gender binaries appear much more tied to notions of bodily maleness than of masculinity. While that bodily maleness seems quite clear-cut, masculinity (as femininity) is quite fuzzy and hard to define.

Maybe the linkages between location, practice and effects as put forward by Connell are imprecise and overly conflated, at least for analytical purposes. In the case of trans men, we contend, there might be a conceptual inversion of this scheme, with bodies being more than an effect but rather a vital constituent of the location and, through embodiment, the core of all gender praxis, that is to say, practices can build up the location, including, in the case of trans men, the bodily location. Our perspective does not fall into a citational version of

masculinity inasmuch as materiality as phenomenology is ever-present. Doing masculinity cannot be reduced to a text, a recitation, or even to performative exaggeration as argued in some versions of queer contributions (Green 2007). It is rather that, and playing with Judith Butler's (1993) famous title, *bodies matter*. Not only because they are canvas where stories are written and read, but also because they have a material reality, a shape defining self-perception and the perception of others.

Doing masculinity can take varied forms, but whatever its "doings", it is through bodies that it gains a palpable form and becomes more than a mere disembodied discourse. Derridian citational iterability (Derrida 1988), which Butler (2004) takes as key for her performativity theory, cannot then be effective if we dismiss all the material dimensions of the body, without obviously falling into any form of essentialism or dismissing Connell's contributions. After all, bodies are paramount and ultimate capitals of masculinity because they are interpreted through the historical and cultural lens of the gender order. Not because their value exists *per se*.

However, without bodily masculinities, the doings of masculinity fall short and tend to live theatrically, if ever, outside the *apparent (but still potentially subversive) normality* of everyday life. Also in line with Bourdieu's views, there is no gender without locations, composing a field and market of struggles, or a gender order. Nonetheless, when a body – or even just a hexis – is transformed, there is a change in its location. It is this nuanced version of gender, and particularly of masculinity, that can be furthered by bringing trans men to the frontline of the analysis. In a way, we can argue that, conceptually, masculinity may precede men – being or becoming a man – but without men masculinity loses its bearings. It becomes no more than a masquerade; transgressive it may be (or not). Trans men then are men only to the extent that they are bodily perceived as men, navigating along their journeys between available categories and systems of categorisation. Nonetheless, as evident from the analysed cases, bodies do matter in a very material sense. In sum, neither Connell nor Halberstam are quite right. In the former's case, we cannot say that men (the location) always precede masculinity. Masculinity makes the man. In the latter case, we can neither agree that female masculinities can be the equivalent of male masculinities.

Certainly, when not naturalised as emanating from the male body, what defines masculinity can become clearer. However, as put forward, masculinity cannot be understood without taking into account the materiality of bodies

regardless of their diversity and transformations. In the end, when the meanings of masculinity and femininity are increasingly diffuse and changeable, the body resists as the focal point of gender performativity, whether self-recognised or perceived by others.

Indeed, our research with trans men and trans masculine individuals in Portugal and the United Kingdom has shown that those performing masculinity (whether they self-define as men, FtM transsexuals, non-binary masculinised individuals or other) gained some advantages. The dividends that came with the fact of being perceived by others as men are acknowledged, even if they are unwanted or viewed with criticism (Schilt, 2010). That is not the case of trans women, regardless of their greater visibility in public spaces and the media. Gender matters, after all.

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