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The socio-historic sexualisation of transgender identities is reported to have disaffirming consequences for the broad trans community, and for trans women in particular. Given trans people's increasing use of socio-sexual 'hook up' apps, this paper looks at trans women's talk of self/other identifications in relation to their regular use of Grindr. Eight semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with London-based women who identified as trans* in some way. A Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis highlights intersecting frames of trans authenticity, validation and sexualisation. Within these frames trans women can be variously positioned in gendered and sexualised ways. Specifically, a discourse of trans authenticity is seen to involve the marking out of an identificatory truth that is situated in culturally acceptable and hence de-sexualised womanhood, while a competing discourse of trans validation involves an ambiguity and eroticism that can serve to reimagine this truth. Trans subjectivities can thus consist of a desire for authentic (gendered and non-sexualised) selfhood, on the one hand, and self-affirming ambiguity and sexualisation on the other. That trans women can construct ambivalent relationships with trans sexualisation discourse highlights the limitation of anti-sexualisation advocacy and implications for supporting trans sexualities are considered.

Key Words

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Introduction

In reaction to the 1970s medicalisation of gender dysphoria and transsexualism, from the early 1990s there have been important trans activist, feminist and queer challenges to the Western gender and sexual order and cisgendered (normative) ideals of femininity (Bordo, 1993; Bornstein, 1994; Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990; Stone, 1992, to cite a few early influential examples). This has led to the more contemporary framing of 'transgender' as a politicalised subversion of (hetero)sexual and gender discourses and associated rigidities (see Hines & Sanger, 2010, and Stryker & Whittle, 2006, for more detailed overviews). There is, however, much contestation over the politicisation of 'trans' as a vanguard of postmodern change. For example, strong criticism has been made of the essentialisation of transgender in queer theorisations of 'difference', neglect of the varied lived experiences of (non-White, non-middle class) trans people, and disregard of the ordinariness and diversity of transitioning (Hines, 2006; Namaste, 2000, 2011; Prosser, 1999; Richards, Barker, Lenihan & Iantaffi, 2014; Serano, 2013a)1.

The warrant for such caution is lent significant weight as many scholars and trans activists continue to highlight ways in which trans women and men can experience acute forms of misrepresentation, stigma and violent oppression in psychological, social, sexual and material ways and the health-harming implications of this (e.g. Ellis, Bailey & McNeil, 2016; Miller & Grollman, 2015; Serano, 2007, 2013b; Richardson, 2016; see Meyerowiotz, 2002, for an historical account). Widely used since 2005 and now a contentious political and policy issue (Attwood, Bale & Barker, 2013), the concept of 'sexualisation' has been deployed to help sharpen understanding of trans discrimination and oppression. Many maintain that trans women, in particular, are invalidated in the routine positioning of them as seductive, hypersexual and predatory objects with mere fetishistic and sexual value (e.g. Serano, 2007, 2009). In an array of other stigmatising objectifications: gender transitioning can be

eroticised; trans is typically associated with the sex industry and pornography; and trans women and cross-dressers are often depicted in the media in sexually suggestive poses and clothing, often marking them as objects of promiscuity and ridicule (Attwood et al., 2013; Miller, 2015; Serano, 2013b).

Adding theoretical weight to the complexities of the sexualisation—and identificatory processes—of trans women is the conceptual paradigm of intersectionality[2]. Academic and activist writers have effectively drawn on this theoretical perspective to highlight ways in which trans women (and men) are obliged to navigate an intricate network of interconnected sociocultural contexts and the constitutive and regulative effects of this. Commentators have highlighted how trans women are uniquely (self) sexualised in the intersections of gender-related prejudice, transphobia, homophobia, cis-sexism, trans-misogyny and femmephobia (e.g. Miller, 2015; Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Serano, 2007). Processes of socio-economic classing and racialisation are also heavily bound up with this intersectionality with trans women of women of colour, for example, facing a unique set of oppressions around their de-humanised, sexualised and racialised bodies (de Vries, 2015; Haritaworn, 2008; Namaste, 2000, 2011; see Bordo, 1993). Sexualisation, then, is not a homogenous or indeed static process: individuals are sexualised in various ways and with diverse and shifting meanings.

At the same time, academics and activists have variously highlighted self-expressions of trans sexualisation and eroticism as sex-positive aspects of trans embodiment, desire and identification, thus further complicating debate around trans sexualisation (Califa, 2000; Pfeffer, 2014). For example, Dreger (2008) and Tompkins (2014) have argued for sex-positive re-evaluations of trans people and trans embodiments that do not involve the denial of desire and the de-eroticisation of trans lives and possibility. Like Davy and Steinbeck (2012) who emphasise the significance of eroticism to trans experience, Taormino (2011) offers an edited collection of explicit narratives of trans and genderqueer sexualities that

illuminate the importance of being recognised and desired in sexual contexts. Similarly, Richards (cited in Barker, 2014) has highlighted the productive relationship (both limiting and valuable) between porn/sexual media and trans people's lived experiences. Importantly, burgeoning focus on trans people's subjective experiences of sexuality is helping to broaden understanding of trans sexuality (the sexuality of trans people) beyond the realms of oppressive sexualisation, pathology and sexual health (Davy & Steinbeck, 2012). For Doorduin & van Berlo (2014), this can be useful for understanding the complexity of trans sexualities particularly during periods of coming-out and transitioning.

This sex-positive understanding of trans experience sits alongside critical porn studies that have cautioned against the unhelpful polarisation of anti-porn and pro-porn positions (Barker, 2014), and it aligns with scholarship that has critiqued the so-called sexualisation of girls and young women. With regard to the latter, post-feminist moral panic has been challenged as subscribing to a heteronormative depiction of (young) female sexuality as innocent, passive and as coding any sexual expression as evidence of 'sexualisation' (see Egan, 2013; Renold & Ringrose, 2013, and special issues of *Feminist Theory* 14,3 and *Sex Roles*, 66,11-12). Counter to this is the feminist caution that positive conceptualisations of sexualisation can overly privilege neoliberal concerns for agency, choice and empowerment and thus downplay the inherent power relations of coercion and victimisation (Gill & Donaghue, 2013). The ongoing sexualisation debate is therefore not without its political and moral controversies and continues to be fuelled by rapidly changing techno contexts for new forms of sexual networking and sexual subjectivities.

A new techno context for the sexualis(ing)ed self

Following the advent of computer-based social networking as a newly emerging social practice at the start of this millennium, the world has witnessed more game changing

technological development with the introduction of GPS technology (global positioning systems). Giving rise to new location-aware mobile technology that has taken social networking away from home computers and onto the streets in a newly fashioned geolocative environment, possibilities for how people can interact in social, sexual and spatial terms have been anticipated and theorised (e.g. Farman, 2011; Gordo-López & Cleminson, 2004).

Launched in 2009, and aimed at men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM), one of the most dominant location-aware mobile applications ('app') on the market is *Grindr*. Along with more recent popular apps like Tinder that target a wider market, this socio-sexual 'hook-up' app has sparked phenomenal global interest because of its facilitation of mobile, proximate and spontaneous sexual networking. This new techno-social phenomenon is, however, not exclusive to the MSM and cisgender communities. After recent controversy over alleged banning, deletion and censoring of trans users' profiles, in 2013 Grindr added *Trans* as a 'tribe' through which a user can self-identify. This move has reportedly helped to attract more trans users (Levesley, 2015) while also limiting the expression of wider transgender representations on such devices (Dame, 2016). In light of the fact that trans people are actively using these devices, and given some of the unique issues that are beginning to show (see Fink & Miller, 2014, for a discussion of trans people on Tumblr), how trans people experience their use of these apps, and themselves as users, warrants greater research attention.

What we set out to do, then, was to develop empirically grounded knowledge of trans people's subjective experiences of using socio-sexual media like Grindr. The study's focus on self-identifying trans women is because it was individuals from this population who responded to our wide recruitment call. Grindr was the application that participants exclusively or primarily used, hence this paper's focus on that particular device.

Participants

The study was conducted in 2014-15 and participation was open to trans* people, broadly defined. Recruitment was through snowball sampling. Eight participants took part in semi-structured, one-to-one in-depth interviews. All respondents lived in London and ages ranged from 23 to 42 years with a mean of 29 years. While all participants referred to themselves as a 'transgender woman', one respondent also identified as 'gender fluid'. All were living as women (and had done so for the past 13 years on average) and used the pronoun 'she'. All engaged with Grindr on a daily or weekly basis for sexual and/or social networking purposes (with lesser use of dating apps like Tindr and Blendr, if at all). Usage ranged between three to six hours a day and three hours a week.

Five participants identified their sexual expression as heterosexual, one as bisexual, one as hetero-flexible, and one as queer. Ethnicities also varied with three identifying as white British, four as mixed-race and one as Asian. Six were single and two were in significant relationships at the time of interview. We want to emphasise that while the current analysis does not account for the intersectionalities of age, race, sexuality, trans identificatory timeframes and relationship status, we do not mean to imply that these, like class and ability, are not important aspects of participants' contingent and multi-dimensional experiences. To facilitate a reader's own intersectional interpretation of the data we present, we contextualise extracts with some pertinent demographic detail while mindful of guarding anonymity.

Theoretical framing and methodology

Our study is grounded in the philosophical perspective of post-structuralism wherein human experience is not understood as operating independently from its social, cultural or historical conditions of emergence, or from wider ideologies and institutional practices (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984; Parker, 1992). Here language is

understood as a crucial aspect of the productions of knowledge and of the (various and conflicting) systems of meaning through which we come to know and make sense of our world, our experiences and ourselves. Consistent with post-structuralism, we employed a discourse analytic methodology to interpret our dataset.

The term discourse analysis covers a broad spectrum of language-oriented approaches that, generally speaking, are concerned with the analysis of talk, text and other signifying practices (Parker, 1992; Willig, 2013). Within this framework, 'discourse' as a systematic way of talking about something (an object) is regarded not as a transparent medium that reflects some underlying putative reality, but as that which constitutes social, psychological and material realities in context-specific ways (Foucault, 1990/1976; Parker, 1992). As we, for example, talk about gender and sexuality in theory and in everyday conversation, we continually produce the shared knowledge and assumed 'truths' of these objects rather than merely reflect a meaning that is anterior to culturally embedded ways of talking.

In that our analysis accounts for ways in which discourses and associated relations of power work to produce the trans experiences and subjectivities we explore, our discourse analysis can be characterised as Foucauldian-informed[3]. In Foucauldian terms, 'relations of power' are the productive and regulative effects of a field of knowledge, or way of knowing and experiencing a phenomena (Foucault, 1990/1976). Thus, power and knowledge are intricately linked in terms of how social actions, experience and identities are made possible and meaningful, with these productions having subjectifying and disciplinary effects.

In our analysis we also had an eye on *subject positioning* and *subjectivity* as related components of Foucauldian discourse analyses as this has been practiced (Henriques et al.; 1984; Parker, 1992; Willig, 2013). Discourses not only construct objects but also subjects. Discourses make available spaces for particular types of self to step into and know themselves by, thus positioning subjects (selfhoods) in a particular relation of power (Foucault,

1990/1976); Parker, 1992). Directly tied to this is subjectivity, referred to by Henriques et al. (1984) as the process of being made-up as a certain kind of person with particular (discursively available) motives, desires, reactions and emotional investments (as a gendered or sexual subject, for example). Such Foucauldian constructs guided our analytic concern for how trans identificatory positions, selves and meanings were constructed, deployed and resisted by individuals in their accounts of Grindr-related experience.

Analytic procedure

While there is no definitive procedure for any version of discourse analysis, we drew on Willig's (2013) guide for conducting Foucauldian discourse analysis and Braun & Clarke's (2006; 2014) suggested 'stages' of pattern-based (Foucauldian-inflected) discourse analysis. Transcripts were read several times and a coding frame was developed for the systematic identification of discourse and the discursive construction of objects and subjects. Variability and contradiction in participants' talk were also coded at this time. Codes were then mapped with a view to what discursive themes could be discerned in the data and how these linked to the research question. This involved clustering codes together, re-naming them or putting some aside if they did not seem to fit the developing interpretive frame. Selected coded data extracts were then assigned to each of the resultant codes.

This interpretive process of arriving at a reduced number of refined codes, and assigning key extracts to each of these, moved us towards the framing of five candidate themes. Each candidate theme was reviewed by checking the extent to which it had a distinct organising concept/focus and how it related to other candidate themes. The driving question here was what was the extent to which each of the possible themes reflected a discreet pattern of discursively produced meaning and associated subject positioning and subjectivity. The subsequent process of amalgamating, renaming and deselecting our five candidate themes was

led by our aim to settle on three discursive themes that formed a coherent analytic narrative that best addressed the research question. The analysis continued to be refined as we wrote it up and revised it.

Analysis and discussion

Our analytic narrative about participants' accounts of misrecognition and sexualisation on Grindr is structured around the three themes of: Framings of trans and feminised authenticities; De-sexualised authenticity and acceptability; and Validation through ambiguity and sexualisation.

Framings of trans and feminised trans authenticities

Participants typically spoke of Grindr users as tending to make the assumption that the app is an exclusive environment for MSM and as often questioning a trans presence on the device. This presented challenge for participants who could express offense and frustration in being presumed to be gay, drag queens, cross-dressers or feminine men, amongst other misrecognitions. In the following extract, Ava spoke of this as indicative of transphobia on Grindr.

> *Extract 1: Ava (Transgender woman, bisexual, mixed-race, aged 27)*
> I get it from a lot of gay guys who think that Grindr is just for gay men, they are
> like, 'Why are you even on this?' And I am like, 'Cause there is a tribe'. And he
> was like, 'Oh, so you are a queer man but a feminine man' and I am like, 'No'.
> They can say that all trans women are just men and that in itself is transphobic. So
> it has highlighted some transphobia.

In her use of the app for social and sexual purposes, Ava could experience acute marginalisation as a transgender woman inasmuch as her self-identity was rendered invisible and thus invalidated. On a device that perpetuates a discourse and representations of hyper-masculinity (Mowlabocus, 2016), Ava is positioned at the intersection of transphobia, trans-misogyny and femmephobia (or 'effemimania' as the devaluation of men's gender performance when it enters the 'female realm' [Serano, 2007]). ('They can say that all trans women are just men', 'So you are a queer man but a feminine man'). This was despite the app's addition of a 'Trans' tribe as an identificatory option, albeit one that can reportedly limit self-presentation (Dame, 2016). Sophia spoke of experiencing similar invalidation when using the application.

Extract 2: Sophia (Transgender woman, heterosexual, White, aged 23)
I don't like the fact I am categorised with a boy who puts a wig on to get attention because it is my normal life. It [Grindr] is mainly full of men in dresses. I don't like it. I don't like sounding arrogant with it but, you know, these apps don't contribute to my life as a trans person…I put my Instagram link on there [her Grindr profile] because I want people on there to have the ability to see that I am a real person.

Not wanting to be perceived as a boy who dresses up, Sophia distinguished herself from other users who present themselves as boys in wigs and dresses, constructing them as attention-seeking imposters in their cross-dressing and transvestism. By distancing herself from what she saw as fraudulent femininity, Sophia worked to validate her femininity as cisnormal and thus her (trans) personhood as 'real'. She counteracted the threat of illegitimacy with an Instagram link to everyday images of herself as evidence of her feminine

aesthetics and authenticity. This also implicitly helped to ward off the threat of trans-misogyny insofar as trans women can be Othered not only for their appearance but also for failing to perform cisnormative standards of femininity (Miller, 2015; Serano, 2007).

For both Ava and Sophia, acceptance as a (trans) woman on Grindr meant presenting their gender transitions, and their femininities, as authentic and not to be read as a gay or gender parody. The discursive framing of authenticity for these women was clear: self/other recognition hinged on the drawing up conceptual spaces of realness and falsity, the firm positioning of themselves in the former domain, and adherence to normative gender representations that could be visually demonstrated. This, then, is a trans authenticity that while threatened by misogyny and femmephobia must rely on the very notion of 'feminine essence' and as a mark of authenticity and as a means of acceptance (Dreger, 2008; see also Blair & Hoskin, 2014). Resisting overt oppressions can clearly involve normalising power relations in the marking out of a 'true' femininity that the women were compelled to know and confirm themselves by (Serano, 2007). As we go on to consider, framings of trans and feminised truths through deployment of a discourse of trans authenticity were further reinforced as the women gave account of managing the additional oppression of trans-sexualisation.

De-sexualised authenticity and acceptability

In accounting for their experiences of using Grindr, participants frequently spoke of ways in which they felt sexualised as trans women and how they variously responded to this. For example, Natasha and Clara spoke of the prolific fetishisation of trans women as they saw it playing out on the app.

Extract 3: Natasha (Transgender woman, heterosexual, White, aged 36)

I think so many of the people that use those apps fetishise trans woman, they see us as a kink, as something that they would only ever do in secrecy and behind closed doors. When you get the attention of an admirer—someone who talks to you because you are a trans woman—you think this person might not only fancy you but accept you as a trans person. That is not correct, you know, they are only fancying a specific side of you that is very, very sexualised.

Extract 4: Clara (Gender fluid, queer, mixed-race, aged 23)

I think there is a problem for trans people in terms of being ostracised and used as just sexual objects, they [trans people] therefore kind of just fall into that. Most of the people are taught these days that being transgender is all about sex but it's not true, they are actually looking for relationships and so on. To most people we are just a fantasy. That is why all these men like to meet you at your place only.

Natasha and Clara explicitly referred to the exploitative and demoralising effects of trans sexualisation as they experienced it on Grindr. For Natasha, trans sexualisation can objectify trans women as kinky, perverted and immoral subjects who are likely to bring shame upon others unless kept secret (Miller, 2015; Serano, 2007, 2009). Given this discursively contrived objectification, Clara depicted trans women as not even able to encroach on the civilised outside world of the men who take secret pleasure from the marked trans woman (extract 4). That trans people can passively 'kind of just fall into' the sexual objectification imposed on them (extract 4) underscores the pacifying power relations of the non-consensual nature of trans sexualisation. For Serano (2009), it is the enforced, non-consensual aspect of trans-sexualisation that renders it particularly oppressive.

In these extracts, resistance of the ostracising discourse of trans sexuality and its sexualised subject position is bound up with discursive framings of in/authenticity ('that is not correct', 'it's not true'). Further to the gendered acceptability alluded to in extracts one and two, here acceptance specifically involves an authenticity of emotional depth and value, of a 'realness' that involves wanting, and being capable of, emotional connection. To resist the objectifying effects of trans sexualisation and thus be accepted by others, it is as if these two participants were obliged to embody a feminised emotional authenticity that could not be overtly sexual. For our participants, then, sought after authenticity as a trans woman called for the show of a 'real' cisnormative femininity that cannot be sexualised lest the authenticity is marked as somehow unfeminine.

Charlie was similarly aware of the objectifying discourse of trans sexuality and the subject positioning it can tie trans women to. In the following extract she alluded to how some trans women on Grindr can be complicit in perpetuating the stereotype of trans hypersexuality.

Extract 5: Charlie (Transgender woman, heterosexual, mixed-race, aged 27)
I think trans women communicate sexually through the app [Grindr]. Some of the pictures that some of these women post, or the innuendos in their comments, they might as well just come out and say what they are looking for because it is obvious. I mean those women are probably the type of people who have created the stereotype.

Significant here is that in guarding against the sexualised trans woman stereotype perpetuated on Grindr, it is as if Charlie was obliged to bracket off sexuality from the 'truth' and authenticity of (hetero)trans women altogether, even on a sexual networking app.

Resistance of trans sexualisation can therefore be seen to be as potentially regulative and oppressive as the sexualisation itself in its privileging of de-sexualised acceptability. Marking overtly sexual trans women as another 'type' served as a discursive strategy that enabled Charlie to recognise herself as the more authentic (feminised and now moralised) trans woman and self-regulation is made the duty of the more authentic type as Charlie constructs her. Moreover, self-regulation that involves the silencing of sexuality as a counter to trans sexualisation can be seen to reinforce the objectification of the shamed trans subject whose sexuality must be kept passive, secret and hidden (extracts 3 and 4). In light of trans sexualisation, then, the trans woman is made responsible for maintaining an innocent and silent sexuality and the power effects of sexualisation discourse that codes all sexual expression as evidence of sexualisation are made clear (Renold & Ringrose, 2013).

Also significant is that unlike Clara in extract four, Charlie alluded to trans women as not passively 'falling into' the sexual objectification trap in their use of Grindr but of active and consensual participation in sexual communication and thus the sexualised trans stereotype. What is apparent here is the positioning of some trans women users as not passive victims of sexual stereotyping but as consenting and deliberate co-producers of it. The authenticities of the trans woman user of Grindr in earlier extracts (as not primarily sexual and with more worthy needs and desires) begin to shift.

This theme has highlighted ways in which constructions of authentic and thus acceptable trans subjectivity can also work to de-sexualise trans women inasmuch as acceptable (classed and racialised) femininity must itself be devoid of blatant or corrupt sexuality (Bordo, 1993; Egan, 2013; Renold & Ringrose, 2011, 2013). In the final theme, we show how participants could sometimes resist the discourse of trans authenticity and its obligatory de-sexualised femininity in favour of a self-validation that intersects with trans

sexualisation discourse in another way. In the process, a different kind of trans subjectivity is configured.

Validation through ambiguity and sexualisation

Having been clear in their interviews about experiencing misrecognition and sexualisation on Grindr (extracts 2 and 4), in the next extracts Sophia and Clara frame rather more complicated interactions with the device, and with themselves.

Extract 6: Sophia (Transgender woman, heterosexual, White, aged 23)
It is funny because it kind of puts me in a juxtaposing position in 'Why do you [referring to herself] kind of use a gay app if you don't class yourself as gay?' But I suppose it is just putting yourself out there…I've actually been on some dates with it… People [on Grindr] want to categorise you and put you in a box and they don't understand that you can't be categorised.

Sophia did not always see Grindr contributing to her life as a (heterosexual) trans woman (extract 2), but here she spoke of a playful and exploratory engagement with the app that did seem to have some value ('I suppose it is just putting yourself out there'). While positioning herself in a discourse of trans authenticity that warrants a show of 'real' femininity (extract 2), elsewhere in her interview Sophia also spoke of a tendency of trans people to 'define themselves by their gender too much' and of the pressure of having to be 'this and that' as a trans woman. According to Sophia, some of the images of herself on Grindr were deliberately 'unfeminine'.

Frustrated by misrecognition of her authentic transness on Grindr (extract 2), Sophia could also knowingly embody a more ambiguous transness when resisting cisgendered

femininity (and sexuality) as a regulative constraint. Blurred juxtapositions of gay/not gay and feminine/not feminine that could at times underpin Sophia's subjectivity seemed to afford her opportunity to present herself in ambiguous ways. Implicit in the extract above is that a discourse of trans authenticity can give way to—or at least co-exist with—a personal validation that privileges ambiguity over rigid categorisation. Like Clara in the next extract, Sophia could blur the discursively construed confines of trans authenticity and perhaps with unexpected self-knowing.

Extract 7: Clara (Gender fluid, queer, mixed-race, aged 23)

If I was horny and it was four in the morning and if someone else is online, it is like, 'You're probably horny as well', so you are not on there to discuss gender politics [laughs]…These sites are really over sexualised so there is lots of flirting and I suppose that is why I am on it [Grindr] because I do enjoy it…I know they are looking for a fuck and I understand that I am advertising that. So yeah, kind of the eroticisation of trans and of me as an individual. Of course it can be very flattering, and it can get trans women the validation that maybe she needs or wants.

Here Clara positioned herself as being overt and intentional with her sex-infused communication and self-presentation on Grindr. Of significance is that she spoke not of opposition, but of alignment between what other users may stereotypically expect of her/see in her as a trans woman and what she could herself seek and desire. While elsewhere clear about the objectifying stereotype of trans women (extract 4), in this extract Clara spoke of knowing sexualis(ed)ing pleasure from it in terms of personal sexual potency and desirability. That Clara advertised the eroticisation of her transness in an informed way is consistent with Tompkins' (2014) assertion that relations between cisgendered and trans people are not

always or necessarily exploitative. That Clara could seemingly manage both her deployment and resistance of trans sexualisation is also consistent with the schizoid sexual subjectivity that Renold and Ringrose (2011) recognised in their cohort of teenage girls as they managed themselves as sexualised subjects in both confirmatory and subversive ways. And it is parallel to ways in which femme-identified individuals can manage femme-identity as both stigmatising and as agentic and self-actualising (Blair & Hoskin, 2014).

What we want to suggest is that a discourse of trans authenticy, as we have interpreted it, can be juxtaposed to a discourse of trans validation that involves its own function and subject-making properties. It is as if Clara knows validation not by privileging what she is *not*, a central trope in a discourse of trans authenticity as participants talked it up (for example, not a gay parody, not overtly sexual, not kinky). Rather, she can know validation by embodying the sexualisation of her transness at the same time as recognising it for what it is ('I know they are looking for a fuck') and resisting it (extract 4). This, therefore, is a trans subjectivity that, as in extract six above, can involve shifting self-knowings and ambiguous authenticities.

For Serano (2009), trans-sexualisation has the effect of closing down the possibility of negotiating a less sexualised self. For Clara, however, an erotic sexuality can be extracted from it in a way that she constructs as personally substantiating, not least because of the non-silenced sexual selfhood it can afford her. Knowing herself through a trans validation that involves sexualis(ed)ing subjectivity can be seen as allowing Clara to position herself outside of the discursive domain of trans authenticity and acceptance that can work to feminise and thus regulate trans sexuality (extract 5). Bearing in mind the Foucauldian argument that power and pleasure do not cancel each other out but that feeling powerful is itself the product of intersecting power relations (Foucault, 1990/1976), it should be acknowledged at this point that Clara's affirmative erotic life, and reported validation, was invariably tied to gendered

and (hetero)sexual discourses and the power effects of these. As we have been suggesting, however, a discourse of trans validation can enable a less regulative alignment with normalised femininity than a discourse of trans authenticity wherein it can reinforce it as a self- and truth-telling tool.

Consistent with cautions about the unhelpful polarisation of trans people as either non-sexual or hyper-sexual (Davy, 2014) and the limiting polarisation of anti-porn and pro-porn positions (Barker, 2014), Clara's ambivalent relationship with gendered- and hetero- trans sexualisation flags the importance of avoiding antithetical pro- and anti-sexualisation positions in the theorisation and support of trans sexualities, and the importance of nuanced anti-sexualisation advocacy.

Conclusion

Central to our analysis is that to be accepted as properly gendered and hence as 'truly' trans, participants were obliged to know themselves as de-sexualised women with acceptable feminine and moral desires. At the same time, the women could also draw up a self-truth involving a re-configured trans subjectivity that prioritised ambiguity and where erotic validation was privileged over de-sexualised acceptance. In illustrating some of the subject-making intersections between discourses of trans sexualisation, authenticity and validation, as we have identified these, the analysis has highlighted acute power relations involved in collusions and collisions with 'sexualisation' as a topic of political and policy concern.

While we do not dispute the fact that the historic hypersexualisation of trans identities is damaging and oppressive, we do want to contribute to the current sexualisation debate by pointing to ways in which sex-positive (trans) validations can potentially be knowable through it and because of it, with this knowing never separate from the inherent power relations of gender and sexual discourse. In this we align with those who have called for the

illumination of trans desires (Dreger, 2008; Stone, 1992) and for a reappraisal of the erotics of transness (Davy & Steinbeck, 2012; Tompkins, 2014) in order to make space for a trans sexuality that has hitherto been closed down and pathologised (Davy, 2014; Pfeffer, 2014).

In clinical and non-clinical contexts where (trans) sexuality may be a prime concern, we see our analysis as helping to complicate perceptions, values and judgement around how trans women might be located in, and responding to, the constitutive power effects of a discourse of trans sexualisation. Where relevant to individuals who may be motivated towards sexual exploration and sex (through use of socio-sexual media or otherwise), recognition of the normalising and regulative effects of an anti-sexualisation position could be potentially useful. In this we suggest that a critical take on trans sexualisation could be useful in raising awareness of discursive and affective entanglements with (trans) sexualisation that do not have to be seen as always misguided, destabilising or in need of intervention but as potentially affirmative in the personal working out of trans subjectivity and subjective meaning.

We want to further suggest that apart from the necessary empirical emphasis on sexual risk in relation to 'hook up' apps like Grindr (e.g. Goedel & Duncan, 2015), these can be seen as useful platforms for experimenting with, or revisiting, trans sexuality during 'coming out' and transitioning periods, for example, when experimentation can be particularly warranted (Doorduin & van Berlo, 2014). Our analysis of the accounts of trans women on Grindr has shown how apps like Grindr can provide trans users with subjectifying juxtapositions and ambiguities that can be productive avenues for (re)working affirmative trans selfhoods and sexualities. Importantly, we want to emphasise that in our use of the term 'affirmative' we are not celebrating the enablement of a resilient, entrepreneurial and preferred trans personhood wherein 'affirmative' is emblematic of a neoliberal sense of empowerment (Gill & Donaghue, 2013). And nor are we reducing trans personhood to sexuality and sex or marking out trans

people as somehow extra-ordinary and responsible for social change (Namaste, 2011; Richards et al., 2014).

Furthermore, while not the explicit focus of our analysis and thus a limitation, we do not suggest that the complex intersectionality of age, race, class and sexuality (and so on) within which trans women can experience themselves and their use of dating apps is not important (de Vries, 2015; Haritaworn, 2008; Namaste, 2000, 2011). We acknowledge that the very idea of affirmative trans sexuality could well be viewed as a form of racialised and social privilege to which not all have equal access, or necessarily desire or perceive as positive: trans sexuality and desire are not separate to racism, classism, ableism and gender-related violence. Equally, an intersectional perspective could well serve to highlight elaborate intersections between the private, the public and the virtual in relation to re-territorialisations of the trans (sexual) domain as these are being drawn up in trans people's everyday engagements with new socio-sexual technologies.

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[1] 'Trans' is used throughout this paper as an inclusive term that encompasses a wide variety of contemporary non-cisgendered identities (often signified in the literature as trans*). As such, it is the preferred term for many people in transgender and genderqueer communities. Use of the term in this paper should, however, not be taken to mean that a person's trans status is always or necessarily their predominant identificatory marker (Richards & Barker, 2013). For this reason we frequently parenthesise 'trans'.

2 Stemming from Black US feminism in the 1980s, the theoretical and methodological perspective of intersectionality began with a focus on gender, race and social class but this quickly expanded to include other social systems such as sexuality, age, body, nationality, ability and religion, for example. Aside from its contribution to Black feminist theory, intersectionality has helped to shed light on the complex social positionings of trans people that can accentuate oppression, while also serving to challenge the essentialisation of trans* in a postmodern subversion of normative gender and sexual categories (de Vries, 2015: Namaste, 2000, 2011; Serano, 2007; Stryker & Whittle, 2006).

3 Since Foucauldian concepts like discourse, positioning and power relations were first deployed by qualitative researchers in psychology from the 1980s to explore the relationship between language, psychological life and subjectivity (e.g. Henriques et al., 1984), the term 'Foucauldian discourse analysis' has come to characterise a form of discourse analysis that deploys aspects of Foucauldian post-structuralist theory as analytic constructs. Foucauldian discourse analysis, then, is not a definitive or discreet methodology but rather representative of a particular way of conceptualising knowledge, psychology, subjectivity and the regulative effects of these (Henriques et al., 1984; Parker, 1992; Willig, 2013). In recognising this, and in drawing on selected analytic concepts emanating from Foucauldian discourse theory, we refer to our discourse analysis as Foucauldian-*informed*.