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The Interactional Production of Narratives on Trans Categories. The Role of Body Modifications

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Abstract: In this article, we investigate how participants self-identified as travestis and transsexual women negotiate gender identity categories during meetings of a support group in a non-governmental organization in Porto Alegre, Brazil. We are interested in (a) how trans categories become relevant in talk-in-interaction and in (b) how these categories are constructed vis-à-vis biomedical discourse about transsexuality. The corpus of this research is composed of seven hours of video-recorded interaction, which were analyzed and transcribed following Conversation Analysis (CA) theoretical principles and methodological procedures. Our results point out that participants oriented to the role of body modifications in stressing identity category differences among travestis, transsexual women and gay men. We noticed that narrative analysis inspired by CA emerges as a powerful apparatus to understand the process of membership categorization. Data are in Brazilian Portuguese.

Keywords: Gender, Membership Categories, Transsexuality, Travestility, Biomedical Discourse

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Preliminary Considerations: Gender Categories as Conversational Traits in Everyday Interactions

Historicizing gender as an analytical category rebuilds important epistemological changes that have occurred across recent decades. These changes marked the development of a science focused on understanding society as a gendered grouping, in which labor, language, education, religion, and other social institutions conform to significant sexual division (Scott 1995). Such theorization, which took place in sociological discussions in the 1980s and 1990s, represented not only a useful way to mediate social dynamics in a common academic vocabulary but also the condensing of multiple scientific objects into a unified topology for theoretical investigation (Mariano 2005). The feminist discussion focused mostly on reinterpreting the power relations between women and men, initially as complementary and different dimensions, later as relational substrates of the same discursive order (Harding 1986). This theoretical field attempted not only to reconsider the power inequality between men and women in modern society but also to reassess how knowledge was being produced in androcentric 20th century science, a tendency that continued to be pushed in Western culture into the 21st century.

While acknowledging the large contributions these theoretical strands have made to the social sciences and humanities, we cannot avoid pointing out that such attempts have had consequences for the conceptualization of femininity – as it correlates to and complements masculinity – by scholars in the so-called feminist academy. Most such consequences relate to the implementation of inductive theoretical presuppositions (Stolcke 2004). The feminist social agent could not encompass all gendered socialization systems; therefore, this agency displayed categories of men and women that invoked colonialist meaning schemes (Hall 1992; Boatcă/Roth 2015).

Linda Nicholson (1999) showed that this virtualization, especially for the category “woman”, brought difficulties for feminist discussions concerning sociological speculations that endeavored to be universal. The theorization of gender relations started to increasingly face problems with the understanding of idio-

syncratic social milieu, mostly where masculinity and femininity were not fully represented by the typologies¹ provided by the European and North American academy (Harding 1986). This scene would be deepened by late-1980s studies on intersectionality and the urgency to understand gender roles in relation to race and sex, especially in environments where such dynamics were quite subtle within social interactions (Crenshaw 1989).

With Judith Butler's (1990) "heterosexual matrix" and the notion of gender, sex, and desire as a genealogical continuum (performed under particular social conditions), feminist discussions were pushed once more to face the dilemma of bringing together theoretical conceptualizations and empirical reasoning in the same explanatory system. If the post-identity-perspective presumptions are right and gender categories are not conceived as something individual but rather as a socially shared construction process (Butler 1990; 2011), that should be shown less with inductive theory and much more with empirical, methodologically grounded interpretations.

The main core of such discussion, then, lay in the complexity of dealing with categories that are part of a common, shared culture and at the same time biographical elements of everyday interactions. It was of great interest to the feminist program to understand how such categories would operate when they were being displayed and assigned during social encounters. These methodological standards are important, especially to gender studies, for comprehending counter-hegemonic constructions of gendered social roles. These constructions represent both political "slumbers" in the state of the art of social sciences and humanities and fruitful spaces for scientific development and the social empowerment of oppressed groups (Borba 2017).

In terms of methodology, many authors in the 20th century developed and improved what has been called "Empirical Qualitative Research" (Potter 1996). Among them, Harold Garfinkel (1991) was the first who tried to comprehend the methods social agents use to understand each other in everyday encounters and, from that point on, how they build up belonging to social categories within common-sense knowledge. At the same time, Erving Goffman (1967) developed a sophisticated theorization of how agents fulfill social roles within systems of interactive rituals. Due to these authors' methodological refinements, a new metacritical model of social science was inaugurated, one more useful to

1 Stolcke (2014) discusses the notion of intersectionality and gender relations based on her historical analysis of colonial Cuban society. She argues that gender relations are not fully encompassed by sociological and anthropological theorization. Dealing with intersectionality serves much more as a sensitizing concept (Blumer 1954) for social sciences and humanities seeking to understand institutions' social roles and their relations to the construction of reality for any grouping in any geographical context.

pragmatic approaches to qualitative research methods, allowing researchers to observe the “process” of generating knowledge about some given social phenomenon within a self-critical and interactional perspective.

Inspired by these models, especially by Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Conversation Analysis (CA) emerged in the late 1960s as a theoretical and methodological approach that conceives of interaction as the main substrate for socialization (Goodwin/Heritage 1990). In this sense, group membership is understood by CA as a linguistic interactional process in which categories are displayed by social interactants and used for producing belonging to a certain group or culture (Sacks/Schegloff /Jefferson 1974).

As these authors have demonstrated that the study of psychosocial categories involves a paradox between micro and macro levels of qualitative social research (Sacks 1992; Hopper/Lebaron 1998; Nicholson 1999) – and that gender is, *par excellence*, a unit for feminist ontological speculations (Scott 1995) – it is reasonable to say that contemporary science has to focus on social interactions at a molecular level of investigation, at least if scholars want to properly analyze gender relations in different groups and cultures with similar topologies. Representing a microethnographic level of empirical analysis, CA becomes a powerful tool for gender studies.

Such an apparatus stresses the detailed analysis of social and cultural processes that shape what is considered appropriate for both men and women in some circumscribed political social order (Erickson 2014). Gender membership categorization, when comprehended as a linguistic process that operates through microsocial interactions (Stokoe 2012), unveils the dynamics behind the sexed-bodies discursive machinery and the performative processes of being men and women within a specific social milieu in intersection with other social constructs (such as race and social class). Paired with empirical reasoning, such an approach would, therefore, enable a fluid and non-essentialist gender maneuver. This methodological and theoretical model could also provide understanding of gender-stigmatized groups that often challenge both the heterosexual matrix and biopolitical discourses (Foucault 1978).

Travestility and Transsexuality in Brazil: Historical and Sociological Aspects

Aligned with these discussions, travestis' and trans women's experiences in Brazil present a diverse, challenging and suitable environment for CA-based research within the scope of gender relations. In the Brazilian context, trans categories reveal a complex dispute over the T in the LGBT acronym (lesbi-

an, gay, bisexual, transgender). The term transgender – commonly used in English to refer to trans people – is rejected by many social trans activists for not being able to capture the diversity of trans categories in Brazil (Carvalho/Carrara 2013).²

Travesti emerged as a gender category in Brazil in the 1970s as a way to overcome the dichotomy between different gender identities used to refer to both effeminate and masculine homosexual men (Carvalho/Carrara 2013). Being a travesti involves a series of modifications on a sexed body assigned as male at birth. These modifications include feminine body features, dressing, language, silicone injections, breast implants, hormone therapy, and social roles (Kulick 1998; Bento 2006).

The distinction between gays and travestis resulted from the changes that homosexuality went through in Brazil in the 1970s (Carvalho/Carrara 2013). The debate on the difference between “travesti” and “transsexual woman” became public in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The *fight for* the inclusion of the T in the LGBT acronym then gave way to the *dispute over* the T in the social movement. While travestis fought against police violence and for access to health care, transsexual women worked to get closer to hospitals³ in order to guarantee that the Brazilian public health system would not only offer medical transition to trans people (Carvalho/Carrara 2013), but also provide psychological assistance and legal counseling, among other services, which led to the establishment of what is currently known as The Transsexualization Process.

To better understand this debate over trans categories in the Brazilian context, we investigated how participants who self-identified as travesti or trans women negotiated gender membership during meetings of a support group in a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Porto Alegre, Brazil. We were particularly interested in (a) how trans categories became relevant in talk-in-interaction and (b) how these categories were constructed vis-à-vis biomedical discourse (i.e., the DSM-5 and ICD 10) about transsexuality.

Considering that research focused on participants’ emic perspective (such as studies inspired by CA) is not widespread in the Brazilian academic context, we see our study’s potential in revealing how membership and common-sense knowledge are constructed through language use by participants’ categorization work in naturally occurring interactions.

2 We adopt the expression “trans categories” to refer to gender categories that have emerged in social movements in Brazil and that cannot be understood under the term “transgender”.

3 Some non-governmental organizations adopted pedagogical interventions directed at the medical staff of hospitals treating trans women. These interventions aimed at reinforcing the importance of understanding transsexuality beyond procedures such as sex reassignment surgery.

Furthermore, our contributions may add to gender studies the notion that *interactional categorization work* (here used as a substitute expression for *identity construction*) should be taken as sensitizing theoretical and methodological machinery (Blumer 1954), not as an inductive theoretical explanatory scheme. A detailed sequential analysis of talk-in-interaction can thus demonstrate how people construct their own gender membership and resist dominant discourses in everyday life.

Method

Our study was conducted in an NGO in Porto Alegre, in the south of Brazil. The NGO was founded in 1999 and aims at advocating for travestis and trans people's human rights, as well as at promoting campaigns focused on citizenship and health care. We followed ethnographic procedures (Lamnek 1989), such as participant observation, for 2 months before we started audiovisual recording. We then video-recorded the weekly meetings of a support group for travestis and transsexuals from May to June 2016, which generated a research corpus of 7 hours of interaction. We adopted Conversation Analysis (CA) as our theoretical and methodological framework and used interpretative microethnographic procedures in the data segmentation phase (Erickson 1992; Garcez/Bulla/Loder 2014).

The weekly meetings were held at the NGO every Wednesday as part of psychological services provided via the NGO's partnership with a private university located in Porto Alegre. Each meeting lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and there was neither a predefined topic to be discussed by the group nor a predefined order or hierarchy for turn-taking to be followed in the course of interaction. For this article, we analyze two different group meetings in which both NGO workers and occasional participants were present. We follow CA transcription conventions (see Table 1, Appendix) and first transcribed the data in Brazilian Portuguese before translating it into English.

In regard to ethical aspects of our study, we have anonymized participants' names by using pseudonyms. Each pseudonym is based on the number of syllables, intonation, and grammatical gender of the respective person's actual name. It is important to mention that all participants knew they were being recorded and had signed an informed consent form for participating in our study.

We considered any interaction (verbal and non-verbal) with researchers during the recording as interactions and any mention of the recording as such as a part of an interaction itself.

Results and Discussion

Narratives and Categorization Analysis: *Making Sense and Being Social*

Narratives on body modification and its relationship to the expression of masculinities and femininities within trans categories in Brazil were frequent in our data. Associations between gender categories such as “gay”, “travesti” and “transsexual” became sequentially relevant, being collaboratively constructed in talk-in-interaction.

Excerpt 1 (divided into two parts, 1A and 1B) is one example of such an occurrence, as it shows how participants orient themselves in relation to ongoing narratives and affiliate with their interlocutors throughout the meeting. This first excerpt comes from a meeting held on 11 May 2016, in which participants Nina, Adriana, Helena, Denise, Douglas, and Aline were present, sitting around a table.

- 059 Nina né porque não é mais aquele gayzi:nho aquele
 060 **ok because you are not that li:ttle gay anymore that**
 061 homenzi:nho assim °°.hh°° fre:sco=
 062 **li:ttle man like °°.hh°° fa:iry=**
 063 Adriana ((*continua acenando positivamente com a cabeça*))
 064 ((*continues nodding affirmatively*))
 065 Nina =d: da da da da mão caí:da sabe
 066 =w: with with with with a li:mp wrist you know
 067 como se chama (0.5)entendeu?
 068 **how people usually say (0.5) got it?**
 069 (0.5)
 070 Nina porque tu a-assume tua identidade como tu go- tu
 071 **because you em-embrace your identity how you li- you**
 072 go- tu te sente bem (0.3) feminina no caso?
 073 **li- you feel good (0.3) feminine in this case?**
 074 Adriana °°urum°°((*acena positivamente com a cabeça*))
 075 °°uhum°° ((*nods affirmatively*))
 076 Nina entendeu? como a traves:ti ou como a transexua:l
 077 **got it? like the traves:ti or like the transsexua:l**
 078 (0.4) tu tá entendendo?
 079 **(0.4) do you understand that?**
 080 Adriana (0.4)((*acena positivamente com a cabeça*))
 081 **(0.4)((nods affirmatively))**

Excerpt 1A: We are not that little gay, that little fairy man anymore

Studies in CA conceive a narrative from an *interactional* perspective (Jefferson 1978; Schegloff 1997; Hyvärinen 2008). Through communicational movements of alignment, such as verbal and non-verbal ratification, turn-of-talk orientation, and sequentially located assessments (Jefferson 1978), interactants work together to produce intersubjectivity (i.e., sociability and intelligibility) during the course of a narrative (Erickson 2014). Producing intersubjectivity grants agents the possibility of legitimizing their knowledge (turning something individual into something social) and, then, making sense of experiences to others and to themselves (Bamberg 2012). By all means, producing intersubjectivity is a phenomenon, *ipso facto*, of membership categorization. In order to understand our experiences, we have to mediate them through other social agents, which requires us to be exposed to interactional membership work.

In excerpt 1A, Nina initially explains to the participants (lines 60 and 62) that families normally reject trans people because a travesti or trans woman is not recognized as “that little gay” and “that little fairy man” anymore. In lines 71, 73, and 77, she says that a travesti or trans woman embraces her identity because she “feels good”, i.e., feminine. Adriana, in line 75, verbally aligns with Nina (“uhum”) and nods affirmatively. We notice that Nina associates the category gay to some category-bound features such as a “fairy”, “little man”, and “with a limp wrist”. Nina produces a narrative in which she rejects the association of these features with travestis or trans women. Instead, she associates the gender categories “gay”, “travesti” and “trans woman” with attributes that contrast different types of masculinities and femininities.

153		(0.6)
154	Nina	a gente toma hormô:nios (.) a gente (.) coloca
155		we take hormo:nes (.) we (.) put
156		pró:tese a gente coloca silico:ne (.) a gente coloca
157		i:mpplant we put silico:ne (.) we put
158		isso (.) >°aquil-°< a gente modifica (0.7) o nosso
159		this (.) >°tha-°< we modify (0.7) our
160		co:rpo (0.5) pra assumir aquela identidade que ta
161		bo:dy (0.5) to embrace that identity that is
162		que a gente tem aqui ó dentro da cabeç- .hh=
163		that we have here you see inside the head- .hh=
164	Adriana	°u:rrum° ((acena positivamente com a cabeça))
165		°uhum° ((nods affirmatively))
166	Nina	=porque eu acho que a nossa identidade tá aqui
167		=because I think our identity is here

168 de:ntro.
 169 **i:nside.**
 170 (0.9)
 171 Nina né:?
 172 **o:k?**
 173 (0.4)
 174 Nina não tá lá embaixo (0.4) no sexo biológico.
 175 **not down there (0.4) in the biological sex**

Excerpt 1B: Because I think our identity is here ... inside

Nina recognizes the importance of hormone therapy and silicone implants as procedures to enable travestis and trans people to embrace their gender identity. She emphasizes that “travesti” and “trans women” are subjective and self-perceived gender categories and she refuses their association to the biological-sex preponderance (line 175).

We notice here that participants do not conform to the heteronormative perspective present in biomedical discourse (Foucault 1978), which conceives of trans identities as a phenomenon in which people have an aversion to their genitalia – as stated in documents such as the ICD 10 (World Health Organization 2016) and the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

Interactants work transsexuality’s and travestility’s categories as similar “family” categories. The narrator, Nina, and her interlocutors produce category consistency between “gay” and “fairy little man” as well as between “travesti” and “trans woman” by marking them with similar membership categorization devices (Sacks 1992; Stokoe 2012). These devices are normally seen as an apparatus that encompasses shared associated attributes among categories, such as category-bound activities (e.g., body-modification procedures for both travestis and trans women) and category-tied predicates (e.g., travestis and trans women feel feminine). Category consistency is a method for speakers to add meaning to social categories and events during talk-in-interaction and consequently to present interactants’ association with these elements to others participants (Stokoe 2012).⁴

4 For example, the sentence “The woman picked up the baby.” – a purposeful derivation of Sacks’ (1992) canonical example “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.” – shows that the consistency between two categories – in this case, “woman” and “baby” – provides a myriad of possibilities for participants to associate with shared common-sense knowledge. This sentence expresses a relationship between the woman and the baby, e.g., a *family bond* (if the woman is understood as “mother”, “aunt”, “godmother”, among other possible categories); a *professional bond* (if the person picked up the baby because she is a “doctor”, “nurse”, “teacher” etc.); or *any other type of social attribution* intelligible for the interactants. The *action* of establishing consistency between two or more categories expresses a direct association between speakers and the categories they are displaying during the conversation (Stokoe 2012): “I know/saw/heard/... that the woman picked up the baby, and therefore I can express that to you, here and now, because I am related to that woman, or to that

It is important to notice in this first excerpt that participants acknowledge body modifications and femininity as attributes associated with travestis and trans women. In contrast, gay men are pictured as effeminate and associated with what has been described as non-desired traits in hegemonic or complicit masculinities (Connell 1995; 2000). Nina demonstrates her association with these categories by producing consistency between them (e.g., “fairy little man-gay” in lines 60, 62, and 66; “we-travesti-transsexual-feminine” in lines 71, 73, and 77). The use of possessive adjectives and/or personal pronouns (for example, “we” in lines 155, 157, 159, and 163 and “our” in line 167) makes such a relation explicit.

Gender in Talk: Debunking Discourses in Everyday Interactions

In this section, we discuss the subtleties of belonging to different trans categories by focusing on an extract from the first day of data generation, which occurred on 4 May 2016. In this excerpt (divided into three parts, 2A, 2B and 2C), participants discuss the history of the trans social movement in Brazil, the differences between travestis and trans women, as well as the contemporary political scene in the country. At this meeting, Martina, Morgana, Lia, Carolina, Helena, Denise, Nina, and Douglas were present.

- 398 Martina e nós a morgana e::: e gurias todo mundo aqui né
 399 **and us morgana a:::nd the girls everybody here ok**
 400 (0.4) é:: a gente decidiu né nós somos
 401 **(0.4) we::ll we decided ok that we are**
 402 mulheres travestis (.) e mulheres (0.3) e transexuais
 403 **travesti women (.) and women (0.3) and transsexuals**
 404 Lia sim
 405 **yes**
 406 Martina entendeu? essa coisa (.) transgênero >entendeu<
 407 **got it? that thing (.) transgender >got it<**
 408 então a gente nem fala ma- aí é uma palavra
 409 **so we don't even speak anymo- oh it's a word**
 410 boni:[ta] uma palavra france:sa uma pala:[vra] né=
 411 **so be:uti[ful] a fre:nch word a wo:[rd] right=**

baby, or to something else on a professional or family level, or via any other bond.” That type of interactional work provides information about speakers’ own selves (or memberships). It is also notable that each chosen category corresponds to a certain type of social *intelligibility* for the objects that are being described (e.g., for the “woman” category, most of the times, a “proper” family bond would be within the spectrum of “mother/feminine” roles but not “father/masculine” representations).

412 Lia [é]
 413 [yeah]
 414 Morgana [é:]
 415 [ye:ah]
 416 Martina =ai o que que nós somos? nós somos [travestis]
 417 =oh what what are we? we are [travestis]

Excerpt 2A: That beautiful French word

Martina brings the categories “travesti women”, “women” and “transsexuals” into the conversation (line 403) by saying that she and the other girls identify themselves with these gendered terms. After Lia’s alignment elocation (line 405), Martina rejects the category “transgender” as a representative term for trans categories in Brazil. She associates this term with a beautiful French word, emphasizing how foreign it sounds (lines 407, 409, and 411).

“Transgender” as a gender category characterizes the political context of the 1970s, in which the theoretical and political structuration of “the transsexual phenomenon” (Castel 2001) in Europe and in the United States went through different historical and cultural phases. It played an important role for LGBT social movements and empowerment. However, it could not be captured by social movements in countries such as Brazil and other South American nations that were facing different political issues and were not fully engaged in the international social-activism scenario (Carvalho/Carrara 2013).

In our data, the rejection of the term “transgender” exemplifies the use of a linguistic category as a term that captures the political and ontological substrate of belonging to a specific group within a specific society (Antaki/Widdicombe 1998). Within the categorization process, “transgender” is rejected as a potential category because it does not represent the possibility of dealing with the common-sense knowledge that is locally constructed by participants.

423 Carolina vocês acham que tem diferença hoje entre: o que é
 424 do you think there are differences today betwee:n what is
 425 travesti e mulher transexual
 426 a travesti and a transsexual woman
 427 (1.0)
 428 Martina eu acho[que tem]
 429 I think [there are]
 430 Carolina [tem dife]rença? quais são as diferenças
 431 [are there diffe]rences? which are these differences?
 432 Morgana [tem tem tem >tem tem tem tem tem tem<]
 433 [yes there are yes yes >yes yes yes yes yes<]
 434 Martina [uma diferença muito grande]
 435 [a huge difference]

436 Lia eu posso falar o que eu penso? a minha [ideia]
 437 **can I say what I think? my [idea]**
 438 Carolina [po:de]
 439 **[ye:s]**
 440 Lia a:: eu acho que a diferença entre a
 441 **the:: I think the difference between a**
 442 mulher transexual é aquela que faz a cirurgia né
 443 **transsexual woman is the one who undergoes the surgery right**
 444 **(.)**
 445 Martina é e também não precisa fazer
 446 **yeah and she doesn't need to go either**
 447 Morgana não e a psicologia que né[vá me desculpar] eu=
 448 **no and psychology that ok [forgive me] I=**
 449 Martina [°se ela se sente°]
 450 **[°if she feels so°]**
 451 Morgana =[mo:ro e eu vivo com uma]
 452 **=[share my house and I live with one]**
 453 Lia [sim (0.3) a que se sente feminina:]
 454 **[yes (0.3) the one that feels feminine:]**

Excerpt 2B: Are there differences?

In this excerpt, Carolina (lines 424 and 426) asks the participants if there is any difference between a “travesti” and a “transsexual woman”. Martina takes the turn-of-talk (line 429) and states that there is a huge difference. After Martina’s production, Lia takes the turn (line 437) and asks for an opportunity to express her idea. She is then ratified by Carolina (line 439). Lia states that the difference is that a “transsexual woman” is the one who has surgery performed (line 443). We notice here that Lia refers to sex-reassignment surgery as *the* surgery that makes the difference between trans women and travestis.

After a brief period of silence, Martina corrects Lia’s assumption by stating that trans women do not need surgery (lines 446 and 450). Lia accepts this correction by aligning herself with Martina (“yes”), reformulating her previous elocation, and stating that a “transsexual woman” is “the one that feels feminine” (line 454). We can see here that resistance to biomedical discourse is collaboratively produced by participants through recurrent interactional strategies, such as constant reformulation of previous talk in order to show affiliation with interlocutors and to build up a cohesive gender category.

506 Lia uhum
 507 **uhum**
 508 Nina só me veio a diferença assim ó como a Martina
 509 **and the difference that just came to mind you see how martina**

- 510 colocou ali ó você não precisa fazer a cirurgia
 511 **said there you see you don't need to go under the surgery**
 512 pra você se sentir uma mulher transe[xual]
 513 **for you to feel like a transse[xual] woman**
 514 Morgana [com]certeza
 515 [for] sure
 516 Nina eu sou uma mulher transexual
 517 **I am a transsexual woman**
 518 Morgana eu me sinto mulher desde-
 519 **I feel like a woman since-**
 520 Nina >só um poquinho<
 521 >just a moment<
 522 Morgana hhhhhhhh
 523 hhhhhhhh
 524 (0.8)
 525 Nina eu sou uma mulher transexual pelo seguinte né eu me
 526 **I am a transsexual woman for this reason ok I feel**
 527 sinto assim (0.4) tá:
 528 **like that (0.4) ok**
 529 Carolina uhuh
 530 uhuh
 531 Nina então aquela coisa assim ó respeito às travestis
 532 **so that thing you see the respect for travestis**
 533 entendeu? né porque a gente a gente não nasceu
 534 **got it? ok because we we weren't born**
 535 transexual a gente nasceu uma travesti a gente
 536 **a transsexual we were born a travesti we**
 537 nasceu um ho:mem (.) e[veio de] =
 538 **were born a ma:n (.) and [came from]=**
 539 Morgana [ló::gico]
 540 [o::f course]

Excerpt 2C: We weren't born a transsexual. We were born a travesti. We were born a man

Here, Nina is asked by Carolina to explain how she feels about being a trans woman and travesti. Carolina invites the participant to establish possible differences between these two gender categories. Nina then agrees with Martina, saying that a "transsexual woman" does not need to undergo sex-reassignment surgery (lines 509 to 513).

After a brief turn dispute between Nina and Morgana (lines 517 to 523), Nina gets the floor and says that she feels “like that”, a “transsexual woman”. After Carolina ratifies Nina’s production (line 530), Nina says that travestis were not born “transsexuals” (line 536). In the same turn, she states that they (“we”) were born “a travesti”, they were born “a man” and “came from” there.

This extract exemplifies how people use categorization to produce belonging. Nina, in another moment in the interaction, tells the others that she has not undergone sex-reassignment surgery. Here, however, she self-orientates to the category of “transsexual woman”, being ratified by her interlocutors. With this movement, Nina dissociates the category-tied predicate sex-reassignment surgery from “transsexual women”. She also distinguishes trans women from travestis by stating that travestis were “born a man” and implying a gendered (male) body from which a travesti “comes”.

Nina’s view on travestility has been described in various ethnographic work, e.g., by Don Kulick (1998) and, more recently, Julieta Vartabedian (2018), in which travestilities are associated with a spectrum of men’s homosexuality. It is interesting to notice, however, that Martina, in a contrasting discursive strategy in excerpt 2B, associates travestis with “women” and “transsexual women”, rejecting for both travestis and trans women the category-tied predicate sex-reassignment surgery. Doing so, Martina increases the consistency between travestis and trans women within the feminine spectrum by stating that undergoing sex reassignment surgery is not necessary for someone to feel like a woman. In summary, Martina’s and Nina’s actions show how fluid, dynamic, and context-sensitive gender categories can be, since they have different views on the same trans categories. The extended categorization work conducted by the participants shows how defiant or even unusual for some interlocutors such categories may seem, especially for their representation in the common-sense knowledge.

Final Considerations

While LGBT social activism has led to historical changes such as listing “transsexuality” in a new category called “Gender Incongruence” in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 11) (a different and less pathologizing chapter), the path to full social rights and equality for LGBT people is still long. This is especially relevant for those who live in a context of severe violence and social stigmatization such as travestis and trans people in Brazil.

Belonging to a category is conversational work in relation to different social structures that starts with people’s access to shared common-sense knowledge.

As we have seen in our participants' rejection of "transgender" as a term capable of representing the idiosyncrasies of trans experiences in Brazil, there is need to study categorization work within the microsocial level of interaction. In the complex process of group membership, "transgender" was linked to a different membership categorization device from other local trans categories in Brazil. Participants associated the units "travestis-transsexual-women" and "transgender-French-word" with different category consistencies. We observed that, even in the same group, different membership categorization processes occur for the same categories, denoting how polysemic and context-sensitive gender categories can be. Interactants' discussions of body features and masculine/feminine traits for travestis, trans people, and gay men are a good example of that.

For the Brazilian academic context, we believe theoretical and methodological improvements can be achieved by focusing more on empirical and local research in lieu of theoretical hegemonic concepts and discourses inherited from research agendas from the Global North. As our data shows, the external political and academic theorization of gender relations may not accurately describe what people are *doing* in everyday interactions. This greatly impacts the applicability and effectiveness of political interventions, which often do not predict how laws and public services will be understood and accessed by interactants in their daily routines.

In regard to this last aspect, our findings point out the need to reassess public health policies and create new forms of access to the Brazilian public health system that more adequately address the diversity of the country's population. This is even more important when this same population is systematically labeled almost exclusively by static heteronormative categories and discourses. In our data, however, such categories and discourses were challenged by interactants through language use.

The understanding of gender categories as fixed analytic units can lead human and social sciences to a weak and cynical political criticism. We can resist this monolithic view of society by taking a turn to locally-based research, giving voice to participants' emic views of what is going on in the here and now of everyday interactions, especially when participants challenge the heteronormative matrix in which gender categories are culturally constructed.

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Appendix

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	continuing intonation
-	abrupt cut
↑↓	substantial movements in pitch
::	extended sound
<u>never</u>	emphasis on syllable or word
WORD	talk louder than surrounding sounds
°word°	spoken more quietly
>word<	speeded-up talk
<word>	slowed-down talk
Hh	expiration or laugh
.hh	audible expiration
[]	overlapping talk
=	latching elocutions
(2.4)	length of pause (seconds and decimal seconds)
(.)	micropause, up to 2/10 decimal seconds
()	inaudible passages
(word)	best guess for inaudible passages
((looking up))	description of non-verbal activities

Table 1: Transcription Conventions