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Studying trans: recommendations for ethical recruitment and collaboration with transgender participants in academic research

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Abstract

The transgender population has been subject to a troubled history of ethically and methodologically flawed research practices. Whilst interest and ethical standards have both risen, there remains little specific methodological consideration of research with transgender participants. This article draws on practical experiences of doing research with transgender communities, and insider group status, to construct six categories to consider when working on trans-focused research. These categories include the importance of transgender history, the assurance of transparency, the significance of nuanced language use, the benefits of feminist methodological contributions, the value of intersectionality, and the necessity of respecting trans spaces. The paper concludes by reflecting on the overlapping and non-exhaustive nature of these categories, and wider structural concerns that may trouble knowledge production more generally.

Keywords: transgender, non-binary, methodology, ethics, intersectionality, recruitment

Introduction

Academic interest in the transgender population has exponentially increased over the last twenty years. Much of the mid-20th century literature comprised of highly pathologising and voyeuristic studies within clinical medicine and sexology (Baril & Trevenen, 2014; Sennott, 2010), lessening from the 1990's onwards with contributions from the social sciences and humanities (Ekins & King, 1999). There is now much contemporary research considering transgender people, across disparate academic disciplines. Scholarship that has addressed ethical standards in research has historically tended to collect together and conflate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations under LGBT (Martin & Meezan, 2003). Work specifically focusing on trans experiences has been limited to

very specific contexts (Spencer & Capuzza, 2016), or become dated through rapid evolutions in both theory and language[i] (Nagoshi, 2010). As a result, many trans[ii] groups can be frustrated by a stream of poorly-designed calls for participation, heightening community alienation from academic enterprises. A recent review (Adams et al., 2017) has synthesised existing guidance for the context of transgender health, and the Institutional Review Boards that assess it. While extremely useful in the context of health research, the authors note that 'no research on the application of ethical standards in this population exists within social and psychological research' (p.166).

Research with transgender participants necessitates ethical nuance, due to both the problematic history of trans research and the marginalised status of trans communities worldwide (Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2012). Older medical studies have alienated some trans community members from research through objectification and delegitimisation. Insensitive research can confirm suspicions of an out-of-touch scholastic enterprise, more concerned with publication and career progression than with participant well-being (beyond researcher obligations to avoid personal and institutional liability). This has resulted in a seemingly contradictory circumstance – transgender communities that feel 'research participation fatigue' (Tagonist, 2009), yet large knowledge gaps on trans experiences and wellbeing persist (Bauer et al., 2009; MacCarthy, Reisner, Nunn, Perez-Brumer, & Operario, 2015). In addition, the heterogeneity of the transgender population means that language and interactions that may be well received by some individuals may be alienating or offensive for others.

This article aims to highlight some of the pitfalls that may be encountered in the context of designing trans-focused research, recruiting transgender research participants, and building rapport and trust. Due to the ever-fluctuating terrain of gender identities – particularly with regards to how language is deployed – this paper does not attempt to essentialise how research 'should' be conducted. Rather, six areas of discussion are offered to assist researchers of different backgrounds and levels of experience in conducting research involving trans participants. These areas are not exhaustive, nor

hierarchical, but stem from especially positive experiences with conducting trans research, and through conversations with fellow trans investigators, and trans participants themselves.

Know your History

It is undoubtedly important to gain familiarity with existing literature in any research context, to ensure contribution towards knowledge production. Yet, if a researcher is unaware of how (and by who) trans people have received ethically dubious, or even outright traumatic treatment in research contexts, there is a risk of problematic practices being repeated, and a lost opportunity for the researcher to demonstrate their commitment to the wellbeing of the trans population. An appreciation of transgender history not only involves clinical contexts, but also how trans communities have formed and resisted oppression, including contexts where this was (or is) legally sanctioned. For example, the Stonewall Riots of 1969 were seminal in the development of the 'gay rights movement' (a popular description for the struggles for marginalised gender and sexuality rights, erroneously implying a gay cisgender male hegemony), while many of the key figures in the riots were trans women of colour (Carter, 2004; Stryker, 2008). Whilst any particular name (such as Silvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, or Miss Major Griffin-Gracy) may not come up with research participants, this knowledge is less about specific individual facts, and more about an overarching appreciation of neglected trans discourses. Resources such as Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* (2008) and Christine Burn's edited collection *Trans Britain* (forthcoming) contextualise historical interactions between institutional powers (law enforcement, medical professionals) and different trans populations. A further historical resource is the Transgender Archives, based at the University of Victoria, Canada. One of the archive's partners, the Digital Transgender Archive, has made significant historical resources available online[iii].

 Especially relevant history for researchers with clinical, psychological, or therapeutic backgrounds is the gatekeeping of trans access to medical care. The earliest work on psychosexual 'pathology' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries shows how sexuality and gender identity were not yet firmly

differentiated (Ellis, 1927; Krafft-Ebing, 1886; Marcuse, 1916). The theory of sexual inversion

positioned men[iv] who reported same-sex attraction as having 'a female soul trapped in a male body'

(Ovesey & Person, 1973) due to the essentialisation of 'opposite-sex sexual attraction' to being male

or female (Trumbach, 1993). In a contemporary research context, researchers can benefit from

going beyond the basic appreciation that 'sexuality is whom one goes to bed *with*, gender identity is

whom one goes to bed *as*', to understand that for some trans people, the negotiation of sexuality

and gender identity can be closely linked (Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011; Vidal-Ortiz, 2005). Valentine

(2006) recognises this intersection, arguing that the emergence of 'transgender' as an umbrella

category in the 1990s neglected expressions of desire outside of a hetero/bi/homosexual trinary.

This critique has limitations as the trans umbrella has continued to evolve by recognising non-binary

and non-western articulations of gender and desire. Further, the proliferation of 'queer' as an

identity category – which can bridge desires and gendered identities – has allowed for the

exploration and intelligibility of desire in resistance to hegemonic frameworks of gender and

sexuality (Miller, Taylor, & Rupp, 2016).

Most research on transgender people conducted before the 1990s was by clinical researchers –

often medical practitioners with little research training, who accessed their participants through

their patient cohorts, when trans people sought access to gender affirming medical interventions.

Such work constructed a hierarchy between trans(sexual, as was the term used) people on the basis

of sexuality, delegitimising people who reported interest in sexual activity of any kind, then later,

anything other than heterosexual behaviour following genital reconstruction (Davy, 2011). As noted

by Joy Diane Shaffer, 'academic physicians and psychologists were often more interested in

validating their own theories of the etiology of transsexualism than in helping transsexuals to live

happier lives' (Israel & Tarver II, 1997, p. xi). The work of academic clinicians who have attempted to

pathologise transgender identities and sexualities (among the most heavily criticised being work by

Kenneth Zucker, and Ray Blanchard) has been accompanied by an 'us versus them' distain for trans-

identified critics of their methods (Bailey & Triea, 2007). It has taken significant time to debunk this

work as seriously methodologically flawed (Moser, 2010; Namaste, 2000; Richards et al., 2015; Serano, 2010; Veale, Clarke, & Lomax, 2012).

An exhaustive review of the factors that have alienated many transgender people from (clinical) researchers is beyond the scope of this paper. Clinicians must begin any research enterprise by appreciating the systematic impact of historically unchecked transphobia within their discipline. This is not to indict or homogenise *all* clinicians or clinical researchers – as Richards, Barker, Lenihan, and Iantaffi (2014) have discussed. Nor is it to suggest that all trans people hold clinical or academic researchers in contempt. Rather, greater sensitivity may be possible when one explicitly recognises how a problematic history has shaped the constructed image of 'the researcher'. This may be aided through engagement with grey literature (such as reports and responses from transgender organisations), and informal resources (including transgender blogs and vlogs).

Be Transparent

The significance of transparency is contextualised by historical practices, and concerns over whether a given project will have an explicit, positive impact on trans lives. While the wider benefits of transparency for social scientific research are already well appreciated (Miguel et al., 2014), trans research contexts benefit from specific attention. Transparent research practice ultimately begins prior to the conception of research questions, as the researcher (or research team) should be pre-empting the possible question 'why is this study being done?' – and recognise that answers which may satisfy ethical review or funding allocators may not be adequate for participants. Researchers may benefit from reaching out to transgender communities and discussing the co-production of research questions (Orr & Bennett, 2009).

Researchers should be aware that when making requests of trans individuals or groups for engagement with a project, this is a request for intellectual and emotional labour (Ahmed, 2014; Hochschild, 2012). In the context of clinical research, this remains relevant whenever any measures

are administered that would not occur (or would be different) were research not being conducted – such as non-essential question sets. Consider, where possible, allocating funding to compensate participants. This evidences commitment to using institutional power to the benefit of the trans community (the creation of paid work), which may assist in building rapport. For example, Clements-Nolle, Marx, and Katz (2006) paid their participants $40 for an interview, and a further $5 (up to five times per participant) for each eligible subject referred to the study. Whether such a method is pursued or not, some population members are inevitably harder to access than others. Without creating material reasons for trans people to engage, researchers risk limiting their sample to particular vocal sub-populations, and those who are willing to participate for free, and have the social and economic capital necessary to do so.

Requests for information from potential participants may come in different forms and contexts. The illustrative quotation below (used with explicit participant consent) was an email received during recruitment of non-binary people for a four-month diary-keeping project, with a follow-up semi-structured interview:

> I'd definitely be interested in participating. Before I go any further, though, I wonder if you could let me know a bit more about yourself. What brought you to this research? What do you hope to achieve and what impact do you hope your research will have? How did you come to your research methods and what challenges do you envisage this particular methodology posing? What ideas/theories/scholars/writers (academic and non-academic) have inspired you?
>
> Sorry, I know these are a lot of questions and I really don't expect long answers. It's just that if you're asking me to share very personal aspects of my life and thoughts, then I'd like to know more about you as a person. I suppose, in many ways it's about trust but I also believe in a feminist standpoint position and whilst

identity isn't, for me, a deciding factor in whether one should/can do research, I do think it's important in envisaging how that research takes place (Leon, 34).

This can be related to Patricia Hill Collins' concept of an 'ethic of caring' (Collins, 2002, p. 265) whereby my personal values are vital in assessing the meaning my work has. My response to Leon (which ran to nearly a thousand words) shared a full overview of my academic history, detailing events within my personal life which intimately connected me to transgender activism and scholarship. A different example can be found in the work of Genny Beemyn and Sue Rankin (2011) who highlight that being explicit about their insider status as trans greatly enabled their ability to 'conduct one of the largest surveys to date of transgender people in the United States' (p.6). An ethics of care may also involve considering what not to say, as much as what to share. Namaste (2000) explains how in her research:

> Many [participants] were highly critical of the services offered at the GIC[v] and hoped that my role as a researcher would provide legitimacy to their perceptions and experiences. I did not want to betray this trust, yet I feared that if my final report reflected all of the information I gathered with respect to the GIC, the provincial government could use my research as justification for defunding SRS[vi]. For this reason, I decided to withhold much of the information collected during the research process (p.197).

Being transparent about this choice further demonstrates Namaste's commitment to her trans participant's wellbeing. While criticisms have been made of how trans lives have been mostly investigated, and correspondingly constructed, by cisgender people (Stone, 2006), this does not mean that cis researchers are not capable of excellent trans research with emancipatory potential (e.g. Hines, 2007; Sanger, 2010). Researchers should consider carefully how much of their own stories they are comfortable sharing, whether that involves outing oneself as a marginalised gender or sexuality, or sharing a narrative related to having a trans family member, partner, or friends. Hale

(2009), in writing *Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals,* critiques

Hausman's (1995) primary motivation of finding transsexualism 'fascinating' as voyeuristic.

Transparency is easiest to manage when researchers have a clear goal of what they wish to achieve

and how, to the benefit of (at least part of) the trans population. There is a moral imperative to

pursue research agendas which contribute towards resisting and dismantling inequalities, due to the

privilege that accompanies researcher access to economic and social resources, to affect agency.

During the research process, contact information should be provided so participants can give

feedback, or raise any concerns with a figure outside of the core research team. This helps avoid

participants potentially feeling that a complaint or concern will be buried if members of a research

team 'close ranks', to preserve reputation. Research students should give contact information for a

supervising academic, and verifiable evidence of successful ethical review (such as an institutionally-

specific administrative code). Researchers should critically reflect on whether their institutional

ethical standards are sufficient rather than assuming this, offering another valuable discussion to

have with community members (Adams et al., 2017). Practitioner-researchers who may be

responsible for the assessment and medical care of research participants are faced with the

additional ethics of a potential conflict of interest, as patients may fear that refusing research

participation may impact their relationship with their clinician, or access to care. This may bias

responses irreparably.

Participant/community involvement in a project's formulation may not only grant valuable insights,

but also offer reassurance. McNeil, Bailey, Ellis, Morton, and Regan (2012) used an advisory group

containing non-academic community members in addition to researchers, and articulate how 'it was

essential to the success of this project that trans people were involved not simply as some of the

research team, but as advisors throughout the whole project' (p.5). This was in addition to their use

of a pilot questionnaire. Choice of research method(s) may impact how transparent a researcher's

analyses are to participants prior to completion/publication from a project. Whilst 'multi-contact'

research (where participants are involved in the production of data on more than one discrete occasion) has the drawback of requiring more time commitment from participants, this may be offset by the participant's ability to comment on project progress. For example, if a researcher intended to conduct multiple interviews with the same participants, themes/contents/discourses (depending on the form of analysis favoured) from the first interview could be shared with participants at the second, and their views of the analysis used to guide further directions. Not only can this benefit research by widening the possibility of insightful conclusions, but also result in direct positive impact, as such engagement can validate participant agency. This interaction also partially safeguards participants, by offering a system which allows them to prevent their misrepresentation or misinterpretation – though some methods of analysis may not allow for this. Much of this discussion is specific to qualitative research methods. For quantitative analysis, researchers may benefit from explicit inclusion of why (for example) particular survey questions are asked, and how/why data is coded in particular ways. This could be part of a further information sheet, or a dimension of the write-up of reports or publications.

Study Language Carefully

There is an entwined relationship between language deployment and history, such that without attention to shifts in meaning over time, researchers can easily come across as out-of-touch. Further, questions can be ambiguous if lacking suitable nuance, risking incomparable answers. For example, even a common question such as 'male/female?' fails not only in a lack of non-binary inclusivity, but imprecision as to whether the researcher wishes to know an individual's assignation at birth, or their identification. Earlier work often demarcated between transsexual and transgender people – differentiating based on the (intention to) access to hormones and surgeries, or not, respectively (Hale, 2009). The meaning of transgender has expanded, now used to describe almost all people who do not identify with their assignation at birth. Researchers should recognise the importance of self-determination – some trans people will use terms to describe/understand

themselves that other community members reject. Some find 'transsexual' to harken to the *pathological* construction of gender variance, and others may find those who define as 'just a man/woman' as not standing in solidarity with those who are out about their trans identity/history. Reclaimed slurs such as 'queer' may be an intimate, central aspect of being – or reviled.

In addition to becoming an umbrella term (Currah, 2006), syntactic and grammatical variations of trans/transgender can significantly impact how a researcher (or their project literature) is received. Zimman (2017) has outlined specific, positive strategies for the operationalisation of trans-affirming language, particularly focusing on gender labels, pronoun use, and how to critically establish when gender is and is not relevant. However, there has been a lack of explicit, contemporary guidance on how to avoid language often positioned as problematic by trans people. While used frequently by some community members, 'transgendered' has been heavily criticised for risking the implication that trans is something 'done to' an individual ('gay' versus 'gayed' illustrates the jarring difference effectively). 'Transgenders' or 'a transgender' is likely to cause offense and alienation through the flattening of trans people to this single aspect of being (through the alteration of an adjective to a noun), ringing 'alarm bells'. A further subtlety lies in the difference between 'trans women' (or men) as opposed to 'transwomen'. By attaching trans as a prefix, trans men and women are relegated to third categories, distinguished and excluded from being sub-populations of men and women. Use of the term cisgender (abbreviated cis, the antonym to trans) is also important whenever one wishes to specify individuals who are not trans, rather than using 'men' and 'women' in a manner which excludes trans people a priori.

The increasing recognition of non-binary people, who identify as neither male nor female[vii] (Yeadon-Lee, 2016) adds nuance through recognising gender-variant people who lack cultural intelligibility (Butler, 1993). Non-binary also functions as an umbrella term, and is often taken as roughly synonymous with the older term genderqueer – although this risks erasing the specific, complex, and differential ways in which both terms can be deployed by different people. In resistance to having

gender identity defined in terms of what one is not, some non-binary people describe themselves as an 'enby', or 'enbies' (inspired through homonymy with 'NB'). While most non-binary people identify as transgender (Vincent, 2016), complex relationships with the category of transgender may be individually apparent, including disidentification. This can also be true for people who articulate their identities aligned within the gender binary, such as those who describe themselves as being a woman or man 'of trans history', rather than cis or trans. Older work has discussed the limitations of transgender as a monolithic category (Valentine, 2006), however a more detailed discussion of tensions between 'transgender' and other gendered identities – such as non-binary people not identifying as trans, or the 'I am not a Hijra' campaign by Transgender India (2016) are beyond the scope of this paper, but underscore the potential complexity of language. This latter example does point to the importance of how language may differ cross-culturally in relation to gender diversity and identity (Herdt, 1993). For example, Ochoa (2008) effectively discusses how the term *transformista* is deployed in Venezuela, using 'transgender' as an umbrella category which includes (rather than replaces) *transformistas* for empirical purposes, but does not erase or collapse specific cultural associations or self-descriptions.

Non-binary people also heighten the necessity of pronoun awareness by researchers. It is an opportunity to demonstrate awareness and respect when, upon introductions, to state which pronoun(s) one uses for oneself, and ask for the participant's. Researchers should avoid talking of a trans person's 'preferred' pronouns (rather than simply, their pronouns, as one is likely to with a cis person) – a common response being that using an individual's pronouns is a mandatory element of respect rather than a lukewarm 'preference'. A similar microaggression can be experienced if 'gender' and 'gender identity' are used differentially for cis and trans people, respectively. Many non-binary people use singular they/them/their, however familiarity with neopronouns (such as ze/zir, or per) allows a researcher to demonstrate their commitment to inclusive practice and community awareness, should they have contact with someone who uses them. Understanding the impact of iterative linguistic microaggressions on a trans person's wellbeing is important for

researchers, as this contextualises any negative responses which may otherwise seem disproportionate (Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012).

Transgender participants can also raise unique situations in relation to anonymity/recognisability in research. While the classical view assumes that the potential vulnerability of the trans population would create a strong ethical imperative to guarantee anonymity for all participants, this can deny agency to participants who may wish to be recognisable. Further, due to the majority of trans people using and identifying with a name different to that which they were given at birth (whether changed by deed poll or not), a trans person's name (defined as that which they choose) may not make them identifiable to those people from whom anonymity may be preferred – such as an employer, or family. This can create a circumstance where a trans person's name can function to make them anonymised and identifiable simultaneously, to different audiences. Researchers can benefit from considering the risks (and benefits) of visibility on a case-by-case basis, in dialogue with participants. This should include the risk non-anonymity may pose to any other people in the participant's narrative who become identifiable.

Research can risk conflating the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people under the LGBT moniker, flattening differences of experience between populations. Quinn et al. (2015), for example, titled their work 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Perceptions and Healthcare Experiences', yet as the complete cohort of 632 LGBTQ people only included 11 transgender people, 'these categories were not included in subsequent analyses' (Quinn et al., 2015, p. 251). Further, the study confusingly offered 'transgender: FTM/MTF' (female-to-male, male-to-female) as reportable options for *both* sexuality and gender identity to their sample. This creates problems: without further clarification, it is unclear what the researchers were inferring from any individual who reported 'MTF/FTM transgender' as a sexuality. If this was for participants to indicate exclusive attraction to transgender men or women, this essentialises trans men and women as 'other' from the (cisgender) men and women that gay/lesbian/heterosexual participants are

attracted to. This carries damaging implications, such as notions that trans people are universally recognisable on sight, or that objectification and fetishisation (particularly of transgender women who have, or are assumed to have, a penis) be constituted as a discrete category of sexuality (Tompkins, 2014). Further, the terms 'MTF' and 'FTM' have been criticised for implying that a person 'changes' their gender, rather than gaining recognition and affirmation of their gender through coming out (and for many, a medical and/or social transition). The terms MTF/FTM risk implying a validity to the status of the assignation made at birth, which AMAB/AFAB (assigned male/female at birth) avoids.

Linguistic nuance depends upon avoiding prescriptivism – for instance, many trans people still use MTF/FTM to describe themselves. Researchers benefit from appreciating that the above points do not imply that different trans people use 'right' or 'wrong' language about themselves. This would construct regional, generational, and classed biases into research interactions, through failing to appreciate the different availability of linguistic discourses, which correlates with the availability of social and economic capital. Additionally, due to differential accessibility of contemporary trans-related language and its potential complexity (Zimman, 2017) class, non-fluency in English, or neurodiversity may factor into the reproduction of language that has been problematised. If a researcher begins to police language, rather than reflexively deploy it, this may risk the exclusion of particular subpopulations of trans people.

Consider Feminist Methodological Contributions

Trans-sensitive working practices can be improved when feminist epistemology and methodology are drawn upon. The value of feminist methodology to transgender research comes in transferable contributions – challenging ossified research paradigms that took no issue with power imbalances between 'researcher' and 'researched', problematising objectification and research paradigms constructed as 'objective', and recognition that methods of data production shape the ways data can be interpreted (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1989; Oakley, 1981). The goal of producing increasingly

nuanced models for understanding and challenging gender inequality led to the conceptualisation of transfeminism (Koyama, 2003), which continues to develop, and synergises with earlier outputs.

One does not need to necessarily base the theoretical paradigm of an empirical project within feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987) in order to appreciate that any researcher claiming the possibility of value-free, 'neutral' research is more likely to be uncritical of their own positionality (Harding, 1992). Ann Oakley's influential account of interviewing women (Oakley, 1981) engaged with similar issues, but so as to show disjunction between theory and practice. Oakley exposes the contradictory nature inherent to a classical methodology that demands an interviewer be friendly enough to elicit engagement, but not 'too friendly' so as to supposedly corrupt scientific integrity. This logic would position research subjects as agents to be carefully manipulated, to maximise what can be usefully extracted – which not only dehumanises participants but also the researcher themselves, as supposedly only concerned with participant wellbeing insofar as it facilitates data access. Honest altruism for research participants is a feminist enterprise.

Therefore, I am not suggesting that a specifically named feminist methodology is the only possible framework for empirical, gender-based research. Rather, there is an onus to be mindful of not reproducing gender-based inequality when conducting research, and that familiarity with feminist contributions can make that easier to achieve by influencing researcher choices, even if feminism is not explicitly featured in research questions or interactions. An example from my own work which was guided by feminist scholarship was the decision to allow the trans participants in my doctoral research to be referenced by their real first names, if they wished. This required careful consideration not only of risk of harm to participants, but to their friends and families who could be potentially affected without any part in the decision-making process. I justified this decision through respect for each participant's autonomy, and ability to assess personal risk in context (through dialogue where desired). Ten out of eighteen participants elected to be identifiable – some citing their relationship to activism as a reason (Giordano, O'Reilly, Taylor, & Dogra, 2007). Others were

glad of the opportunity to exert agency through choosing their own pseudonym – which may be a simple but positive allowance in contexts where self-identification is undesirable or untenable.

These feminist methodological highlights are distinct from feminist analysis of trans people, either to interrogate the constitution of sex and/or gender (Butler, 1990, 1993), or explore making feminism more inclusive (Heyes, 2003). Namaste has argued that 'articulations of Anglo-American feminist theory are inadequate for understanding the complexities of women's lives' (2009, p. 21) – such as how a logic of 'transgender is queer is subversive' (Prosser, 2006, p. 262) risks fetishisation of trans as radical performance. Namaste draws from trans activist Mirha-Soleil Ross, who interrogates the remembrance of murdered trans women who were sex workers (Namaste, 2011). The specific circumstances of the different murders cast significant doubt on trans-hatred being the motivation behind the killings. For instance, in one case, multiple cis women were also killed at the same time (and the killer made it clear he targeted female sex workers). In at least one further case the killer did not know the trans status of his victim until reading a news headline which outed her. It is well-understood that trans status hugely contributes to experiences of violence and social marginalisation, especially for trans women of colour (Balzer, Hutta, Adrián, & Hyndal, 2012; Harrison et al., 2012). However, recognition that abuses suffered by trans people should be analysed in a context-specific fashion, in order to pay due attention to misogyny, class stratification, racism, and other axes of oppression is vital for the production of analyses that adequately recognise the complexity and heterogeneity of trans experiences. Lamble's (2008) analysis of the cleavage of race from trans status in the memorialisation of victims of violence advises (by demonstrative case study) how to avoid flattening intersectional circumstances.

Address Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical product of black feminist thought – so while strongly related to feminist methodologies, is also distinctly important in its own right. Many trans people are highly aware and sensitive to the value of intersectionality. For example, the group Action for Trans Health

has protected roles on its national committee for people of colour, women, non-binary, and disabled people, and has organised protests in support of the vulnerabilities particularly experienced by prisoners, and immigrants[viii]. Further, the National Center for Transgender Equality (in the United States) makes specific commitments to racial and economic justice[ix]. That intersectionality is valued by many trans people should, however, not be the guiding motivation for the prospective researcher, else one risks constructing research from a position of self-interest. Much research on trans people has been on predominantly white[x] (Vidal-Ortiz, 2014), middle class (de Vries, 2012), and non-disabled (Clare, 2013) populations. Recognising and giving voice to trans people impacted by multiple oppressions produces knowledge that can empower the most marginalised. Addressing this in dialogue with trans communities may allow researchers to conceive of nuanced ways to support more marginalised community members to be able and comfortable to participate in research.

The concept of intersectionality was named by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), when addressing a lack of attention to gender in non-white subjects, and lack of attention to race by feminists. Crenshaw highlights how structural disadvantages cannot be regarded in a simple, additive fashion using the case of DeGraffenreid v. General Motors. Brought by a group of black women for discriminatory lack of employment opportunity, the case was dismissed on the basis that progress by black men, and white women, disproved racial and gender biases respectively. In constructing an intersectional 'multifaceted prism' model through centring trans people of colour, de Vries (2015) highlights how the tendency towards binary conceptualisations in sociology (such as white/non-white, man/woman, straight/gay) results in a lack of nuance or attention towards experiences outside of a dominant bimodality – even if acknowledged to exist. The vast heterogeneity of gender variance, with different aspects of identification, presentation, transition, and renegotiation cutting through the trans population suggests a potential 'intrasectionality' (Katri, 2017) – that lessons from intersectional theory about the mixing of multiple factors to create particular experiences of the social world can be seen even when focusing within transness itself.

While beyond this paper to discuss questions of sample size, population heterogeneity calls for a nuanced recruitment process. Snowball sampling is a classic tool used to access 'hard to reach' populations, but results in the limitation of increased homogeneity among participant perspectives and experiences. Intersectional *analysis* assists in the capturing of nuance where multiple forms of oppression meet and mix, however the formulation of diverse and inclusive recruitment practices is necessary to heighten the possibility of accessing such experiences. Transgender support groups and charities that are publicly visible are the most obvious potential sources of trans participants – and are heavily saturated with requests for assistance or the circulation of calls for participation from researchers. It is vital to remember that trans people are far more than their trans status, such that any and all manner of other groups or mailing lists may be potential sources of trans participants – particularly those under-researched individuals who have limited or no contact with any trans-specific group. Further, intersectional practice must carefully consider how to construct methods of data production to maximise accessibility. This does not imply the (impossible) task of exhaustively pre-empting potential needs (such as material for participants with visual impairments, simple English versions of consent forms, step-free access for research venues, etc.) but that researchers should ensure and make clear they are prepared to make their research accessible for those who offer to be involved.

Intersectionality has a precedent of being deployed in the study of sexuality and transgender studies (Baril, 2016; de Vries, 2015; Johnson, 2013; Monro & Richardson, 2010). As a result, caveats and limitations have been discussed which form a vital dimension for researcher consideration. Erel, Haritaworn, Rodríguez, and Klesse (2010, p. 64) discuss how 'intersectionality describes a system of interlocking power relations, but it does not necessarily conceptualise the production of hierarchies among the different relationships of power and dominion in place'. Hines (2010) similarly cautions against opaque or individualistic applications of intersectionality which risk claiming an intersectional approach through the diversity of participants, without performing the necessary analytical work to make this so. Therefore, intersectional practice depends upon adequate analysis

in addition to recruitment. Should this not manifest, discussion as a significant limitation is considerably preferable to the overextension of who a data set may speak for (as illustrated by Quinn et al.'s article title, which unjustifiably conflated 'T' in with 'LGB'). Morris and Bunjun summarise well: 'making a commitment to intersectional feminist frameworks means making a commitment to thinking carefully about placing the experiences and perspectives of people with the least social, economic and political power front and centre throughout the research process' (2007, p. 23).

Be Respectful of Spaces

This paper was conceived in part due to the frustration of trans community administrators being inundated with requests for circulation of underdeveloped calls for participation. On occasions where these requests were denied, some researchers persisted in attempting to persuade their community contacts to publicise or grant access, in some cases becoming defensive, or presenting a demeanour that trans people should be grateful that the researcher has taken an interest. Not only is this unprofessional and counterproductive, but has the additional impact of alienating community gatekeepers from researchers in general. Researcher microaggressions (Chang & Chung, 2015) can impact unrelated research enterprises that may be of great benefit to the community if community members learn, by experience, that academic interactions are 'not worth the effort'.

When in contact with trans community groups, it is important for researchers to neither expect nor require education by the community, regarding the politics of trans respect. Recruitment of transgender researchers may significantly aid in building community relationships, as evidenced by the Los Angeles Transgender Health Study (conducted in 1998-99):

> Four interviewers were hired for the study, all of whom were MtF transgenders
> [sic] and ethnically mixed to reflect the demographic profile of the clients served
> by the collaborating CBOs [community-based organisations]. All interviewers

were trained in interviewing techniques and certified as pre- and post- test HIV

counsellors. These transgender interviewers were viewed as an important

ingredient in building trust and rapport with the participants as well as to

increase participation in the study. (Reback & Simon, 2004, p. 121)

The support this offers trans colleagues is also valuable beyond economic capital, due to the

importance of factors such as experience, and authorship in relation to further employability. This

remains a valuable consideration in circumstances where researchers are receiving collaborative

assistance from other trans people or organisations, or where a principle investigator or members of

a research team are trans themselves. For example, trans men, trans women, and non-binary

researchers may all have specific insider knowledge of sub-communities that isn't necessarily

transferable. Willingness to attain a heterogeneity of (especially trans) people involved, particularly

on a non-voluntary basis, increases the likelihood of accessing a variety of spaces. For example, the

National Transgender Discrimination Survey (as analysed in Harrison et al., 2012), which received

6,456 respondents, reported collaboration with 800 trans (specific or related) organisations. As a

further example, the *Engendered Penalties* report (Whittle, Turner, Al-Alami, Rundall, & Thom, 2007)

commissioned by the Equalities Review, had access to private archives of "approximately 86,000

emails [and]… over 16,000 messages" from trans people seeking legal advice or support. This was a

direct result of being trans led. Highly visible, well-attended public events such as LGBTQ pride

events necessitate specific consideration. Whilst offering the opportunity to meet a potentially large

number of people face-to-face and engage in a transparent discussion about the research

framework, such events may be closely protected in terms of time as well as space (as the only time

that some community members get to connect with other trans people). It is thus strongly advised

not to attend such an event uninvited *if* one would be unlikely to go except to advertise research.

Dialogue with event organisers with sufficient time in advance may allow for invitation, yet

researchers must recognise the potential for their presence to be viewed by some as an unwelcome

intrusion. This is not to imply a generalisable hostility among the trans community to research enterprises, as indeed many community members are very accommodating, and others still eager to share their stories. Simply, trans community spaces can be an essential reprieve from disciplining cis-centric structures of the social world, and thus reverence is called for.

The conceptualisation of 'community space' as a location where individuals who belong or are connected to a particular group may meet, bond, resist oppression, share resources or find a sense of connection, extends beyond physical geography. For many, digital community spaces are highly significant. These create their own ethical and practical circumstances – and due to their ease of construction, and access for potentially disparately located community members, are significant in number and sometimes size. Digital spaces can therefore be an appealing potential resource for researchers, yet should be treated with no less respect than physical spaces. Many groups operate via social media networks (most notably, Facebook), with different security settings possible. Some of the more open examples do not require moderation prior to joining, or posting, yet researchers should refrain from taking this to mean that joining (particularly if one is a cisgender researcher) to post a template recruitment message is acceptable. Rather, through reaching out to group administrators to ask permission and/or engage in discussion, one can demonstrate a commitment to respectful engagement. Additionally, whilst requiring a modicum more work, distinctly tailored introduction messages are considerably more effective, through suggesting group-specific interest.

Material that is publicly visible online (such as YouTube, or unprotected message boards) also pose ethical questions. Researchers should approach such material in good faith, recognising that online content from trans people may be highly personal, and may be deeply uncomfortable with it being subject to academic use. Falling back on claims of fair use due to being within the public domain sends a message that access to material matters more to the researcher than the trans person's wishes, reinforcing a discourse that trans people cannot place material online they would not be content

with being used for research (or journalism). The ethical researcher does not rely on technicality or omission of refusal in order to access trans narratives.

Conclusion

As already acknowledged, the six arenas of discussion which formed this paper were non-exhaustive, non-hierarchical, and overlapping. Key meeting-points include how transparency and intersectionality function as feminist enterprises – the latter with origins linked to feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 2002), and how appreciating how and why trans-related language may be received differently by different community members depends upon contextualising historical knowledge. The point that the accessibility of language requires recognition of the heterogeneity of trans people (in relation to other potential sites of disadvantage or oppression) illustrates the value of an intersectional approach to the consideration of language use.

Ultimately, a discursive commonality to these recommendations and reflections is a commitment to harm reduction, emancipatory politics, and self-improvement. It is never possible to definitively guarantee that no-one will be negatively impacted by a researcher's presence, or words, yet there is an ethical imperative to reflexively engage to minimise this. Further, it is important to note that this paper has been conceived in the context of qualitatively driven, social scientific research. I welcome others to adapt the suggestions made in this paper for different research contexts. It is perhaps comforting that well-designed research may have a marked capacity to improve participant's lives, not only through the hope of application through, say, policy recommendation, but through the cathartic process of speaking one's truth and feeling heard (Plummer, 1995). In closing, researchers can benefit from considering that the re-framing of participants as co-producers of knowledge (Orr & Bennett, 2009) opens up what the researcher can potentially learn. In addition to data, and perspectives on its interpretation, participants are the experts on how to effectively engage with them, and their communities – listening is the most powerful tool of the emancipatory researcher.

[i] Perhaps most notably, the increased recognition of non-binary gender identities under the trans umbrella.

[ii] Throughout this paper I use 'trans' (and transgender, synonymously) as an umbrella term for any individuals who do not identify with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth. This is inclusive of people with non-binary or genderqueer genders, or those who are agender. While this choice raises its own difficulties, such as non-binary people who do not identify as transgender, my intention is to capture the disjunction between assignation and identity (partial, fluctuating, or complete) that is a centrally defining factor for the trans population – who are otherwise extremely heterogeneous.

[iii] The Digital Transgender Archive can be accessed at: https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/inst/0611cd89-5b24-4237-b11b-e63939a9bb76 [accessed 01/12/2017].

[iv] Most research then focused on people assigned male at birth. By contemporary standards of language use and identity classification, some might have been analogous with gay or bisexual cisgender men, while others heterosexual transgender women.

[v] Gender Identity Clinic.

[vi] Sex Reassignment Surgery.

[vii] Some non-binary people may identify as partially male or female, or male and female at the same time, or as male and/or female some of the time. Others may have no gender, or a neutral gender. A hugely complex multiplicity of idiosyncratic senses of gender beyond the binary are possible.

[viii] Information available on the Action for Trans Health website: http://actionfortranshealth.org.uk/

[ix] For the full statement, please see: https://transequality.org/issues/racial-economic-justice

[x] With notable exceptions – such as the May 2017 special issue of Transgender Studies Quarterly, 'The Issue of Blackness'.

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