

A STUDY ON GENDER NON-CONFORMING SUBJECTS IN CURRENT SOCIETY.

SELF-PERCEPTION OF BODY AND IDENTITY

*Ariel Martínez **

Abstract

This article presents the results of a research to be included in a PhD Thesis on Gender non-conformity. Behind the results there is bibliographic research and fieldwork with 11 subjects over 18 years-old from La Plata and La Plata metropolitan area. The theoretical framework doesn't look into the specific realities of gender non-conforming subjects. I attempted to explore the subjects' narrations on themselves and their self-perception with a quantitative view. From a diversity standing point, all narrations shed light on key aspects about social and subjective construction of gender and its naturalization as gender conformity. In addition, the results of empirical research are shortly laid out. Research had a focus on the ways gender non-conforming subjects name themselves, how they recreate categories from a singular point of view and the place of the body in self-perceptions about gender identity.

Key words: gender, identity, sex, body

Introduction

* PhD in Psychology. Scholarship Researcher at *Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas* (CONICET) / Universidad Nacional de La Plata. . E-mail: arieles21@hotmail.com

This research is part of a bigger research project with a qualitative-descriptive focus on self-perceptions in gender non-conforming subjects about their identities and bodies. From a diversity standing point, all narrations shed light on key aspects about social and subjective construction of gender and its naturalization as gender conformity. In addition, the results of empirical research are shortly laid out. Research had a focus on the ways gender non-conforming subjects name themselves, how they recreate categories from a singular point of view and the place of the body in self-perceptions about gender identity.

Even though there is much research done on multiple sides of gender non-conformity (at times naming it differently) and from multiple areas of knowledge and theoretical standing points, the absence of such research from Psychology standing point in La Plata — particularly from La Plata metropolitan area (*Gran La Plata*)— is remarkable. Many research articles include in their frameworks the concept of diversity in the study of transvestites and transsexual people, non-normative masculinities and subjects' perception on gender norms. However, there are no articles exploring the singular means in which people who express a non-conventional gender unrelated with their biological sex perceive themselves. Identities tend to be defined in their social or collective dimension, that is, there is no interest in knowing the significations, ways of understanding and singular arguments put forward in justifying and rationalizing the chosen identity category by each subject to give an account of themselves.

Thus, the theoretical construction of gender non-conformity needs an analysis of the gender identity and body categories, together with the possible relations among them.

Gender Non-Conformity

Approximations to gender non-conformity research vary according to the area of knowledge and standing point chosen. Currently there is a general agreement on that the complexity of the issue calls for a multidisciplinary approach. Accordingly, attempts made at studying the issue are collected in a wide range of approaches from Gender Identity Disorder GID (DSM-IV) and Gender Dysphoria (DSM V) to Performative Identity, from Judith Butler's philosophy (1990/2007, 1990). Both approaches have taken severe criticism for their treatment of the issue. The first resorts to the familiar pathologization inherent to thinking that any gender identity removed from the biological and natural body is atypical. The second perspective explains that all expression of non-conformity among gender identity and the biological body is a depiction of diversity which erases the body as essentialized rationale for gender. In this second theory, the body in its materiality beyond discourse seems not to be taken into account; and its identity is a delicate articulation of unstable, ongoing identifications allowing for other possible shapings.

There are different ways of conceptualizing gender non-conformity, since its analytical boundaries depend on how we mark the abovementioned underlying categories and the links among them.

Theoretical background is thus organized according to three approaches, either away from the previous or classic perspectives.

Authenticity Approach. This approach assumes a necessary and authentic relation between the *body* and a naturally corresponding *gender identity*. The authenticity character is given by objective data taken from reality in the shape of *nature*. The key point in gender non-conformity lies in the notion of a stable, fixed, natural and immutable body. Put in

another way, it is based on sex as quintessential indicator of sex difference and a matching gender identity, be it as direct expression of the biological body or as social interpretation. Much North American psychoanalytical research is done under this framework, very close to psychiatry research (North American Psychoanalytic Feminism and Feminist Theory). Even though having some discrepancies, the organization of bodies in two natural categories remains unquestioned, and they simultaneously suggest—or assume—that each gender identity has a specific body operating as a rationale far from being contingent, is *authentic, real, true* and *original*.

From a biologicist approach, psychiatry has abandoned this idea of authenticity. Sexology, born towards the end of the nineteenth century, is rapidly growing as a subarea between medicine and psychiatry (Elkins, 2005). Philipp Gutmann (2004) points out that the peak at the nineteenth century clearly comes from an increasing number in medical publications on abnormal sexual behavior or abnormal genitalia conditions, seen under the label of psychiatric disorders. These publications are rooted on an anti-onanist discourse born in the eighteenth century (Laqueur, 2003/2007), with many authors whose only reason for psychiatric disorder were somatic conditions. During the eighteenth century hegemonic medical discourse set the first cultural lens in charge of instituting sexuality as we know it today (Elkins & King, 1999). At the beginning, sexology focused on homosexuality and, later on, it was labeled as a biological disease instead of a crime (Frignet, 2003). The approach was bluntly positivist—von Krafft-Ebing measured the hips, the ears, faces, pelvis and skulls; he also performed autopsies in order to find a congenital cause. With this background the somatic cause for expressions such as transexualism has been widely addressed through psychiatric arguments. Playdon (2000), for instance, says that

transsexuality is considered as a disorder located in the brain from the findings of feminine patterns in a sexually dimorphic part of the brain of six transsexual women. Anyways, in the consulted bibliography, this kind of line of research doesn't present further development in psychiatry contemporary productions on transsexuality.

In 1973, John Money (quoted by Frignet, 2003) monopolizes research on *transsexualism* and manages to push away the old term and replace it by Gender Dysphoria (Frignet, 2000/2003). Back in 1955 Money imports the category of gender which would later be crystallized by Robert Stoller (1968) as a sophisticated explanation for differences between biological sex and its ways of inhabiting socially preexistent shapes for each *sex*.

The concept of gender triggered controversies over the innate / acquired distinction. In the middle of it all, Money took it as his life's work to make an ongoing attempt at proving the radical independence of the *social habitus* regarding the biological sex. Based on doubtful observations, guided more by the need of proof than by the assumed objectivity in them, he successfully convinced the medical community of the 1960s that masculine and feminine behavior are governed by education and not the biological body. In Money's system, thus, *gender* is given priority and determines *sex*, which can be adapted through technical means to *gender*. Despite gender primacy over sex, Money's theory keeps the need of strict adequacy between both (Mercader, 1997).

Following the same line of thought, in APA 1980s edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical *Manual* of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) *transsexuality* turned into a mental disorder. According to the most recent DSM-V, the category of *gender dysphoria* (not *transsexuality*) is defined as: 1. a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or, in young adolescents, the anticipated

secondary sex characteristics), 2. a strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one's experienced/expressed gender (or, in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex characteristics), 3. a strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender, 4. a strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender), 5. a strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender), 6. a strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender).

On the other hand, North American psychoanalysis —far from criticizing the diagnostic category of Gender Identity Disorder (Abell & Dauphin, 2009; Timimi, 2009)— is a neverending source of theoretical explanations on the braking of authenticity underlying *gender non-conformity*. Stoller (1968) posed that transexuality is the result of unconscious identifications which unfold during upbringing and end up creating a gender identity not matching the child's sex. Robert Stoller and Gilbert Herdt (1982) are very specific when they explain their etiological thesis; even though they don't rule out biological factors they focus on another dimension in the conflict triggering transexuality. Stoller's approach focuses on the category of *gender identity* and remains close and even overlapped with the precedent notion of *distorted body image*. From this point of view Stoller is a scholar of *authenticity* and his contributions can't be framed in social constructivism. This concept has a clearly disruptive potentiality sparked by its post-structuralist polaroids. In spite of it, Stoller's approach (1967) keeps on being closely linked to biology. Gender identity, according to the author, is set on the basis of anatomy and the physiology of external

genitalia, and on the influence of parents' attitudes towards them. In any case, apart from the author explicitly recognizing the significance of biology in the making of *gender identity*, his way of standing for the legitimate and necessary link between gender identity and body, a notion that leads him to characterizing transexualism as an *aberration*. Even though he highlights relational aspects, they are always framed in nature deviations. As a result, identities are endowed with an authentic reference.

To sum up, the notion of authenticity is based on three assumptions: (1) there are two different levels, sex and sex expressions —be it as direct consequence of body biology or as gender; (2) both sex and its expressions/interpretations are measurable features; and (3) there is “normal” population whose expressions masculinity and femininity match the supporting sex as authentic y substantial rationale.

Performativity Approach. The notion of performativity sets a radical turn when thinking gender non-conformity. It suggests the discursive production of any version of reality based on sex. As such, it gives a key opportunity to analyze the mechanisms and strategies through which sex and gender are naturalized and essentialized. Post-structuralist and post-modern criticism to post-feminist theory (Butler, 2007) sustains that we never experience or know ourselves as a pure and simple body, that is, as our *body*, since we can't access our sex outside its gendered expression. Butler inverts the natural understanding regarding the existence of sex prior to gender and maintains that sex is a product or effect from gender:

“...acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is

performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.” (Butler, 1990, p. 136)

Following Foucault, the author explains that the dominant discourses reinforce the idea that nature has already determined the truth about our body, and that our bodies define our gender. On the contrary, she maintains that sex is but an effect. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler resorts to the image of transsexuality to illustrate the idea that sex is nothing but a gender performance. Later on, in *Bodies That Matter (2008)*, though a bit more cautiously, she keeps on operating under the assumption that transsexuality is a hyperbolic enactment.

The butlerian notion regarding the production of sex through a gender performance is a contemporary contribution that, in spite of deep discrepancies, becomes rooted in symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. The notion of performativity allows us to distance ourselves from a meaning of oneself as totality within an individual, not taking into account the interactive aspects of identity. Butler’s ideas on performativity (2007) is related to symbolic interactionism, among other referential framework most of the times hidden in her texts, by previously highlighting the way in which the subject constantly negotiates social action.

In short, contributions referring to performativity bring arguments that allow us to question the authenticity approach. As Butler (2008) points out, within our field of study all the preexistent modes of being a man or a woman take sex as the norm from which subjects become a legitimate and intelligible being. Maybe this could explain, in part, why a significant number of transsexual people keep on demanding sex reassignment surgery in spite of sex and gender are seen and judged through varied

signs such as hairstyle, clothes, the shape of the body, movement, gestures and facial expressions, voice and ways of speaking; and not by the appearance of the genitals (MacKenzie, cited in Hird 2002).

Multiplicity approach: our theoretical framework. To understand gender non-conformity from multiplicity we must reconsider the categories of *gender identity* and *body*. We thus compare the contributions from the abovementioned approaches to define the tension where they touch, so that we get closer to the issue in all its complexity. The authenticity approach has been focused on the terms transvestism and transexualism, and have taken up most of twentieth century discussions. These terms show, depending on the context, the mismatch between *gender identity* and *body*, under the assumption that continuity of sex and gender is necessary and essential. At the same time, fixed categorization of body identities remains unquestioned. Queer theory and queer social movements, mainly thanks to Butler, have popularized transgenderism as a central notion. The meanings surrounding gender non-conformity have triggered a significant turn due to the resignification —answering to these frameworks— the core categories have suffered. Transgender people have become emblematic figures of mixed boundaries who question fixed notions and medical intervention in transexualism in search of an alleged natural conformity or a true gender in which trans people want to live. Transgenderism is becoming more and more into a privileged point of view from which sexual difference is deranged (Fernández and Siqueira Peres, 2013). From this on, gender is questioned in terms of a

normative system managing bodies under arbitrary and contingent claims of authenticity, whose functioning is pathological and excluding (Cabral, 2009).

Jeffrey Weeks (2012) remarks that transgenderism, far from attempting to denote a fixed identity, opens in a wide range including infinite localizations. Among them we find cross-living, cross-dressing, cross-dwelling, drag queens, drag kings, trans male, trans women, bigender, gender queers, androgyny, intersex, gender ambiguity, genderfluid; together with many other modes out there which point to the fact that the gender constellation isn't binary but multiple and fluid.

Gender non-conformity comes as a space that works with potentiality in order to disturb traditional categories and the essentialist notion that makes them be, all parodies of a true original nature operating as necessary rationale. From this approach, gender non-conforming extends to all social subjects who subjectivize in terms of gender norms. Following Butler (2007) *gender* is an unattainable ideal, thus all subjects are constituted based on a failed operation revolving around an ideal. *Gender non-conformity* is a condition of subjective articulation. This approach, then, doesn't suggest an overwhelming proliferation of non-hierarchical categories, but a different way of reading the particular modes of subjectivizing in an arena of constant clashes. Within it gender identity and body get tangled in a constant negotiation process from which the human subject arises, in multiple shapings, under what we may call multiple body agentivity.

In the same line of thought as Darío Sztajnszrajber (2013) sexual subjectivity is a plexus of variables that is always in play and reshaping. In this sense, he mentions that identity is an open book that rewrites itself on the go, though with words that had constituted us in the

past. It is urgent that we focus on the very means of production of subjectivity through theoretical development on the emergence of the subject that question the relation and difference between psychology and body, as well as the notion of psychological continuity as personal identity. In other words, we are talking of reference frameworks worried about corporeal nature, discontinuity, and social construction of identity (James, 2001) singularly recreated (Chodorow, 2003).

In the end, the multiplicity approach found in the suggested alliances calls us to caution when “dealing with signifying processes as foundations to understand how different subjective formations arise” (Sabsay, 2011, p. 35). This approach should ease the constructionist and anti-essentialist wave, sign of postmodernism, which did away with political subjects when questioned three cornerstones of the subject category: universality, autonomy and identity. This is, according to Sabsay (2011) about “thinking of a subject who [keeps on] having a certain amount of ‘agentivity’ but at the same time, stops being a control and self-determination centre.” (p. 34). The author points out that deconstructivism has changed an idea of representation as reflection of an independent reality for representation as a structure of reality. This last sense is problematic since it has crystallized as the only analytical paradigm from which to all social reality is seen as meaningful discourse. As a consequence, it is now a boundary of criticism itself and has absorbed all within it.

That is the origin of our interest in slowing the radical deconstructivism in Queer Theory of the first Butler, linked to the poststructuralist version of representation (and leaving out aspects of the body which don't take the signifying route). However, this doesn't mean we have to adopt an essentialist view. According to Rodriguez Magda (2003):

[...] the fact that the subject is not an essence doesn't mean that it may dissolve in a fluid mechanic. We acknowledge that we are not an essence, an immortal and fixed soul; and neither are we nature if it is a theoretical construct subject to historical paradigms and unfolding. We thus accept that we are not a biology-as-destiny, nor a radical difference or social agents strictly determined by class of economic conditions. However, at the same time, all this is part of ourselves in a more intimate manner than just an accident. The self is a permanent creation through our intimate circumstances, torn by power strategies aimed at restricting it, always escaping through freedom practices, subversion practices in a Foucaultian constant-subjectivizing process. This is a subject who makes decisions among and against the traces of the powers that build it and the discourses spoken through it, always changing its survival and resistance strategies" (Rodríguez Magda, 2003, pp. 168-169).

Having said this, the author suggests the term *transidentities*. This category would allow us to think the fluxes as changing unstable and mutating transformations, organized a constant path without there being a fixed potentiality. Transsexualism thus arrives as a model that, in lack of a precise choice, refers to "... the vague way in which sexes intertwine their signs, project themselves, choose, outgrow biological and normative conditioning, and open themselves to a shade of possibilities governed more by seduction than reproduction" (Rodríguez Magda, 2003, pp. 169-170). A new model seems to be at sight in which sex gets fragmented in innovative combinations, without following the adequacy precept of a predestined homogeneity. In such a model, genitalia gets desexualized, allowing for new practices that go beyond the characteristic phallogocentrism in stereotyped heterosexuality; and where clearly the diversity of subjectivities fails to be grasped by the *masculine/feminine* dichotomy. In short, gender non-conforming subjective positions which we are studying don't necessarily refer to antinatural or inauthentic inadequacies, but to new subjective locations that attest the way in which gender is no longer anticipated as the ideal we must adequate. We are talking about subjects who no longer give ontological and coherent density to gender norms, at least, not like before.

When questioning gender as unattainable ideal, the gender non-conformity spectre expands and reaches all of us. This shows the chaos regarding gender everyone deals with in constant subjective articulation. The challenge is to think trans, transvesti, intersex, transgender identities, among others —and ourselves— in terms of subjective locations claiming for understanding while always subverting the monolithic categories of gender we have at present.

This look takes us back to an analytical level of an “active subject who institutes meaning and, when renewing social ways of doing, feeds the very process in that anonymous system by which we accept that it is only partly ‘spoken’ ” (Cháneton, 2007, p. 52).

Up to here, I have attempted to shed some light on the particular ways of subjectivation that happen —following Bhabha (2007)— in interstitial spaces, laminar spaces, in-between areas that charge up at historical transformation times, and bear the right to signify from the periphery. There is a question that arises: from the exposing of mimetic sex/gender structure made by Butler, in which sense the notion of centre and periphery takes an unbearable existence for some lives, and in which other sense such a difference doesn't exist, being the idea of centre an ideological artifice? No doubt, Bhabha says (2007), representing difference shouldn't be hastily read as the reflection of given features... , that is, if we want to think in terms of multiple and diverse ways of existing.

At the same time, related with the diversity of perspectives and lack of research on the issue, some questions arise on how the own gender non-conforming subjects are perceived in our context.

Research

According to what we have been saying, it becomes interesting to assess self-perceptions of gender non-conforming subjects about gender identity and the body. Our interest is focused on inquiring diversity. As a result, and starting from the multiplicity approach, it was decided to study the perspectives and conceptions that gender non-conforming subjects at La Plata and La Plata Metropolitan Area have on their own gender identity and their bodies in relation with gender social norm. The research aims at an exploration of the categories and designations applied by the subjects. Such interest needs a few specific considerations in order to limit a methodology that aids the feasibility our research.

Ken Plummer (2012) offers some tools to reconsider methodological aspects when conducting researches following Critical Humanism and Queers Theory, two of the approaches to which this paper ascribes. The approximation to diversity needs no initial introductions of identity categories (Transvesti, Transsexual, Trans, Man, Woman), that is, it mustn't create a classification system that gives *a priori* identity to the subjects. Following Plummer, "Yet the languages we use bring with them all manner of tensions. Whilst they help us chart the ways we do research sometimes, they often bring their own contradictions and problems" (Plummer, 2012:344). In this sense, the general and descriptive category of *gender non-conforming subjects* is applied, which from a more objective point of view allows us to establish a criteria in the selection of the subjects: subjects whose gender expressions aren't a match with the traditionally expected as their biological body. Terminological considerations avoids using conventional and normative *a priori* categories which blocks the emergence of novelty aspects accounting for a reality made in a different way (Plummer, 2012). We try to avoid "the discourse of diversity which reontologizes the varied configurations of identity from the moment when they are

conceived as a range of discrete and strictly separated identities, which would be included, more or less successfully, in a representation model that doesn't acknowledge itself as such" (Sabsay, 2011, p. 38).

We are attempting to identify the varied ways in which each subject inscribes him/herself in the complex gender map without leaving aside the bodies' resilience and their inscription in the subject's experience and the roads of their self-perception. Thus, how gender inscribes itself in self-perception becomes relevant (Segato, 2003); the key is how subjects represent themselves through followed gender categories in one way or another, and how they are introjected from perceptions of their own bodies and their identity/difference relations among their body features and the depicted identity. Thinking the subject in this way—as someone able to retrieve categories with a personal signature—is only possible when conceptualizing the subject in terms of agency. Only from the notion of a subject who is able to retake the norm can we apply the method aiming at "trusting the narration", in Juan Carlos Gorlier's words (2008). With this in mind, this paper has the following aims:

Main Goal

- Contributing to gender non-conforming studies through categories born in the subjects' self-perception.

Specific Goals

- Defining the categories used by subjects to name themselves.
- Shedding some light on the location of the body in subjects' self-perceptions.
- Researching the ways in which the subjects justify their gender stance.

Methodology

Structure. This research is framed on a mixed quanti-qualitative study. In qualitative research textual exegesis is combined with a two-staged case study structure.

The first stage focused on further developing the main lines of research and theory core. In the second stage and based on previous analysis, the instruments to be applied in field-work were built.

Subjects. We selected 11 gender non-conforming subjects following a relevancy criterion which focuses on building a heterogeneous sample according to the expressed gender and the presence/absence of desire of a sex reassignment surgery. Case selection was conducted by choosing subjects who don't express the traditionally expected gender according to their anatomy, who are adults (over 18 years old) currently domiciled at La Plata or La Plata Metropolitan Area. They were given informed consent and anonymity was guaranteed.

Instruments. We conducted in-depth interviews focused on the research topics with all subjects and we asked them for narrations on their life stories. In addition, a short questionnaire was designed to elicit socio-demographic data.

In-depth Interviews. (Marradi, Archenti & Piovani, 2007). They were aimed at researching the singular significations subjects have of the cultural categories they use to give an account of themselves.

The gathered data allowed us to look into identity as “the unfolding of a repertoire of introjected narrations showing a relatively unified and hierarchical organization” (Gorlier, 2008:79).

Life Stories. They are an instrument of great help to this research. They are the subjects' narration of their existence through time, through which they attempt at rebuilding events in

their lives and transmitting experience. Narrations are linear and individual, they take into account the significant aspects for the subject (Zuss, 1997).

Tracing if the identities adopted by *gender non-conforming* subjects had an essential unvarying meaning became relevant for the aims of the present research. Life stories are a key instrument when exploring possible transformations in self-perceptions at different stages of their lives.

Methods

Data collection. Firstly, participants were given a short questionnaire in written in order to obtain demographic and contact information. In every case subjects from a medium socio-economic stratum (all of them own or rent a place, they have completed primary and secondary education, with tertiary or university studies either completed or ongoing). At the first stage in field-work a pre-test of selected and especially designed instruments was conducted for two subjects in order to adjust their relevance to the researched topic, regroup data, adjust categories and detect possible original aspects unaccounted for in subjects' narrations, which may become of value later on. Following this, the instruments were applied to the selected participants.

Each subject was individually interviewed, mostly at their home, except in two cases when they were at work. All interviews were recorded in audio format, files were then transcribed in full and analyzed by the researcher using the chosen methods.

In the end, in some cases a life story narration following some thematic core was asked.

When possible, information was enriched by personal productions by the subjects:

autobiographies, personal diaries, mailing, pictures or any other iconographic design (including personal objects).

Data Analysis and Building. Data received a qualitative content analysis in order to clarify and/or infer the abovementioned goals. To this end, Atlas-Ti software was used for building analytic categories, segmenting the information corpus recorded on interpretative criteria, building a comparative chart to optimize data treatment and analyze narrations comparatively, contrasting different answers, interpreting results, building new data on the initial records, and summarizing theoretical final results and conceptual findings. The analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) taking into account a fractal data treatment aimed at more than a single descriptive classification of events, ideas or beliefs (Wasserman, Clair & Wilson, 2009). The purpose is to develop ideas at a pre-theory, abstract stage accounting for the relations and processes within discourse findings. The general aim of our analysis was to explore the uniqueness at each case instead of building generalizations. Further research is needed for a more thorough verification.

Results

Instruments allowed a wide unfolding of self-perceptions and meanings towards the researched categories, and simultaneously, didn't obdurate the emerging of further singular unpredicted categories which, depending on the case, related with the initial interest focus. The main issues on gender conformity had to do with the way subjects name themselves regarding existing categories about gender, the meanings associated with the selected category, that self-perception permanence or change through time, the location of the body

in self-perception and the way they name their sexual identity. With this in mind, results are classified according self-naming, identity and body.

Self-naming

The interviewed subjects resource to different categories when naming themselves and their gender. According to their own words:

Subject 1: *I would define my identity as transsexual (F2M¹, aged 22).*

Subject 2: *My identity is...first of all, trans. I also understand 'trans' as a gender. Also, a masculine, intersex, gender. (F2M, aged 22).*

Subject 3: *I define myself as trans women (M2F, aged 32).*

Subject 4: *I don't identify myself as a woman but as a trans woman (M2F, aged 36).*

Subject 5: *I am a transvestite (M2F, aged 57).*

Subject 6: *What you see, I am. I respect different stances, there are different categories. I don't assume any category because I think that leads to type-casting ourselves in one place (M2F, aged 47).*

Subject 7: *I see myself as a heterosexual man (F2M, aged 30).*

Subject 8: *I am a woman (Bio-woman², aged 22).*

Subject 9: *I am a homosexual man (Bio-man, aged 28)*

Subject 10: *I am trans, with aspirations towards transsexualism (M2F, aged 47).*

Subject 11: *I am a woman (M2F, aged 23).*

¹ In specialized literature, F2M or M2F refer to the transition through hormonal and eventually partial or total surgery, female to male or male to female respectively.

² We use this term descriptively. It belongs to Beatriz Preciado (2008) and refers to the sex assigned at birth based on genitalia. The author opposes bio-woman and bio-man to the terms *techno-woman* and *techno-man*, used for gender chosen through hormonal and surgical interventions. The author uses these terms in a descriptive manner, since her/his thinking framework doesn't include bio-men or bio-women.

Identity

Even though subjects resort to categories such as trans and transvestite when naming themselves, in the end they refer to themselves using normative cultural categories (man, woman, masculine, feminine). It becomes clear that subjects think themselves using gender binarism. The applied categories, including what initially may seem alternatives (transvestite, trans, transsexual) depend on the current gender organization. Dichotomist categories remain at the heart of gender non-conformity in all cases.

Though subjects perceive themselves by quoting gender norm, meanings vary in each case. Thus, there are singular appropriations accounting for a union between what Nancy Chodorow names personal gender and cultural gender (Chodorow, 2003).

The cultural meaning hegemonizing *trans* sense in the subjects' discourse doesn't refer to a place *beyond gender* but to a traffic, a passage from one gender to another, most noticeable in subjects 1, 3, 4, 10 and 11.

Body

Body operates implicitly as a naturalized gender rationale. In spite of using alleged alternative categories to the binary trans (transvestite, transsexual), in the end all interviewed subjects resort to sexual dimorphism and to essentially different bodies in order to make their stances intelligible and give meaning to their own experiences.

Subjects perceive themselves from their implicit assumptions based on biological grounds, linked to coherence and authenticity principles. This means that subjects not only think that there are two dimorphically sexed bodies and that both are places of different identities, but

also that each identity is authentically anchored on the body which is its natural foundation.

This is the case for subjects 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11.

At an explicit level, the breaking or discontinuity between sex and gender is shown, thus the body doesn't operate —from the subjects' point of view— as a basis for the gender they want to arrive to; though it *is* an unavoidable reference. This becomes evident in subjects 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11.

The realization of a *felt gender* in *gender non-conformity* involves the materiality of bodies (hormonal and surgical interventions). There were no cases where trans identity moved exclusively through discourse by resignification, except in subject 8.

In an explicit level, genitalia in particular and the body in general are not natural basis for *felt gender* in subjects 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10. It operates as naturalized foundation for sex, which blocks acknowledgement through the transition to a coherent gender. That is, there is an essentialist view of the body at play in subjects 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11.

Conclusion

Field work has not only given us original findings in relation with the researched issue, but it also opens up new reflections that go beyond the findings.

The cases under the category of *gender non-conformity* shed light on naturalized aspects of *gender conformity* in the multiple dimensions (social and agencial) lived everyday by each subject, whether conforming or non-conforming to hegemonic gender. Thus, gender non-conforming subjects' self-perceptions depict features and mechanisms of how naturalized genders are (con)formed.

Subjects' self-perceptions and narrations in general illustrate not only normative demands for gender conformity, but also the existence of a pathologized, excluded and belittled population group in non-conformity with the hegemonic gender which highlights rules and places towards where identifications should not go.

Most of the interviewed subjects show either explicitly or not, a natural inclination towards gender. Their self-perceptions account for a sense of gender feasibility, i.e. gender as essential basis or objective truth. They want to be and unfold as coherent men or women to such an extent that they evidence what is usually assumed: the contingent welding between sex and gender; or the imitative structure of gender (Butler, 2007).

In order to multiplicity and diversity create reference frameworks to organize subjectivation processes, we need a prior and necessary radical resignification of the terms in hegemonic, binary and excluding gender. When looking through these normative frameworks, the naturalization of dimorphically sexed bodies operates as the main epistemic obstacle to reconfiguring gender *non-conformity* beyond authenticity principles.

This research is but a first impulse offering emergent research lines for future explorations on the issue. Several lines of research hinted in the interviews have been left out for not falling into the focus of our investigation, even if they could be empirical emerging aspects in future explorations. On the other hand, it becomes urgent to repeat this research with new cases that solve the sociocultural inconsistencies and marks. There is also a possible opportunity of using methodological designs allowing access to a wider case group as long as it allows for a diversity-centered view. We obviously need to widen our study, since there are multiple trans narratives showing higher level of criticism regarding normative gender frameworks than the criticism depicted here. There are narrations where binarism

dissolves and bodies become resignified, opening an identification game where new locations are built regardless of the sameness/difference organization featured in conventional gender identities (Benjamin, 1997).

We must once again clarify that each gender *non-conforming* location hereby depicted shows such a singularity that in no way can it be taken as representative of a whole. After all, gender non-conforming category was not included here as a restrictive identity category but as a range of diverse and many subjective stances.

When summarizing our final thoughts and reflections, we are faced with an additional complexity about the absence of categories to depict what we found. Researchers are constantly facing the challenge of catching subjective attempts and stances going in and out of the instituted and instituting boundaries. In order to account for it, our only resource was describing thoroughly the specificity of what was being said through conventional and insufficient terms and categories. We struggled with words in an attempt to catch agency features within each stance and thus glimpsing a horizon beyond normative discipline.

Finally, current society is concerned with widening the margins of what is human and going further towards the path of equality. This requires that gender non-conformity stops being a movement from one extreme to the other in gender binarism. It should refer to something beyond gender, where bodies stop operating as epistemic obstacles to diversity. If that possibility flows through cultural and collective political actions, then our current research aims at contributing to this second view.