

Transgender women's experiences of their sexualities during gender transition

Dr Luke Ward (he/they) @lukewrd

Dr Alastair Pipkin (he/him)

Claudia Kempinska (they/they)

& Gianni Frary (he/him)

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Introduction

- 'Sexuality' used broadly to encompass multiple domains (WHO, 2006)
- Changes in sexual satisfaction and sexual orientation (Bradford & Spencer, 2020; Meier et al., 2013)
- TGNC people may face additional barriers to sexual experiences (Doorduyn & van Berlo, 2014).
- TGNC people often experience their sexualities as more fluid and contextual (Dozier, 2005; Nagoshi et al., 2012)
- TGNC people are more likely to have considered the nature of gender and sexuality (e.g., socially constructed, and embodied) and tend to use more nuanced labels and language to describe them (Nagoshi et al., 2014)

Previous Literature Review

- Thurston and Allan (2018) review of TGNC people's experiences of their sexuality during gender transition
- Two themes: re-negotiating previous 'norms' and establishing identity
- 4/7 of the papers reviewed focused on the experiences of cisgender partners of TGNC people

- Meta-ethnography to build on the above review (Pipkin et al., under review)
- Focus on TGNC people's perspectives, rather than partners
- Lack of representation for trans women and gender non-conforming people

Method

- Qualitative, IPA
- 29 online individual interviews – 12 trans women, 17 gender non-conforming people
- Interview schedule structured around constructed themes from meta-ethnography findings:
 - Intersectionality between gender and sexuality
 - Re-writing of labels (identity, the body, relationships)
 - Relationships
 - Community and belonging
- Community involvement – schedule, services, and analysis



Participants

Age

12 trans women between 22-68 years old, average age 43

Ethnicity

11 white, 1 Asian

Sexuality

Queer, lesbian, pansexual, bisexual, asexual; romantically lesbian, straight, heterosexual, and transbian

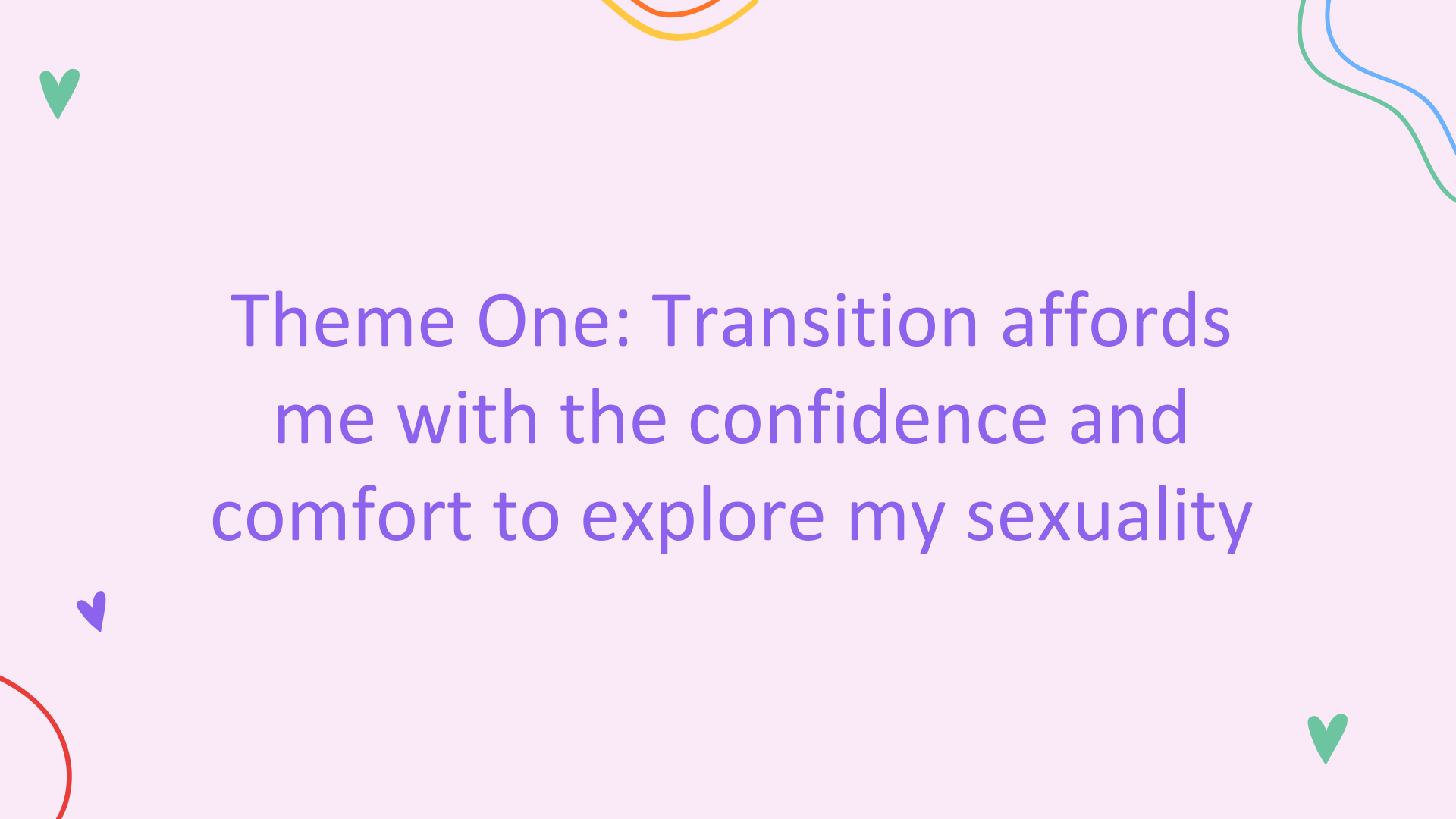
Disability

ADHD, ASD, BPD, bipolar disorder, Chron's Disease, CPTSD, depression, and EUPD

HRT

10 had started HRT, 2 had not





Theme One: Transition affords
me with the confidence and
comfort to explore my sexuality

Being Trans Shrinks My World and Restricts My Sexuality

“I don’t have any local trans friends. It’s like a hidden world, to be honest.

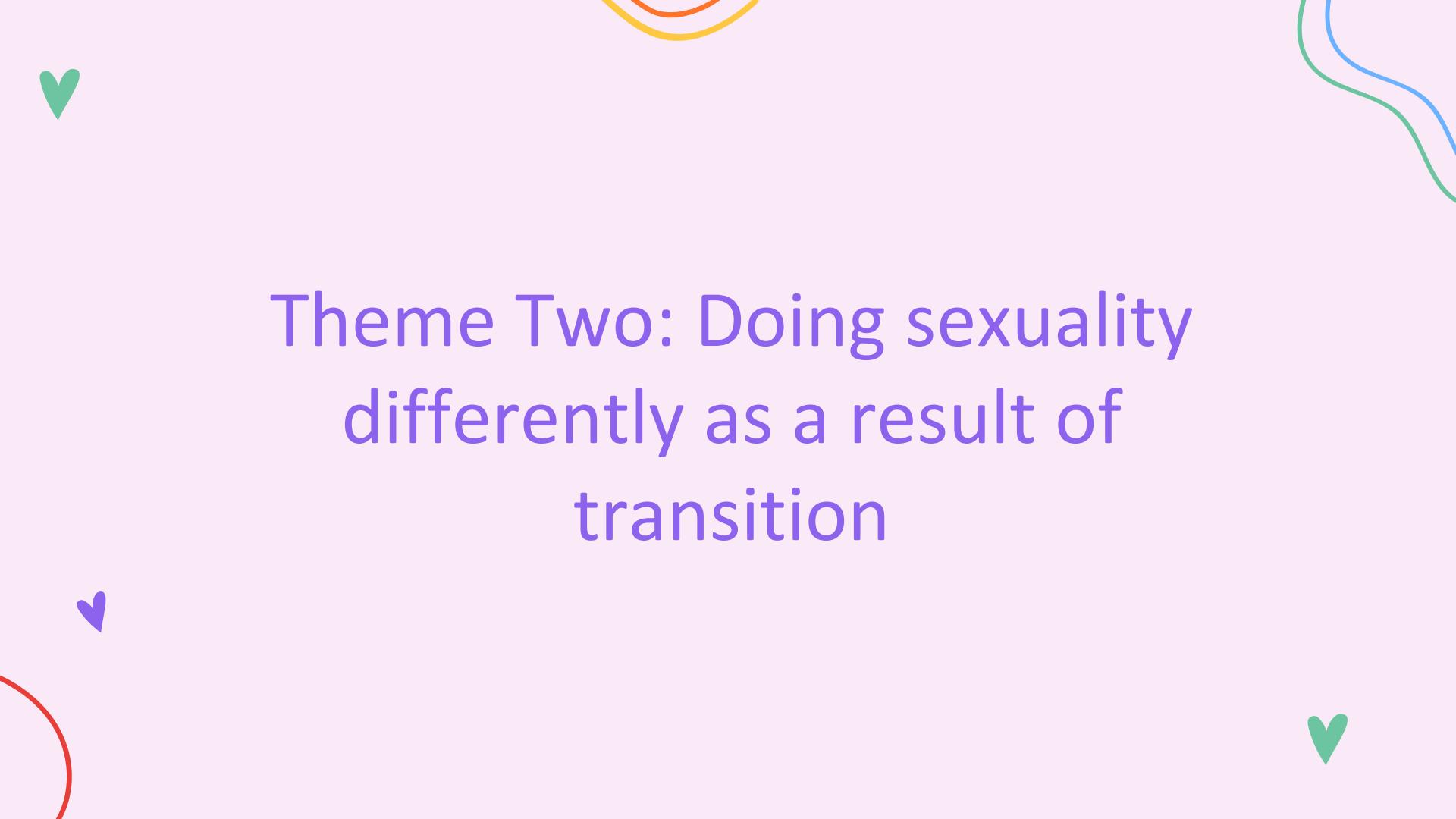
Trying to get any support from a local person, I don't know where I'm going to get that. It's digging deep, really.

You don't come up against a lot of trans females. I don't know where they all are. There could be one in my street, I really don't know. But it's like a secret world.

But when you're in a rural area, the middle of [name of midlands hometown county], you can even take Lincolnshire, that's even more rural, or Norfolk, I don't really know—if you're isolated, it's very very difficult.” (Rachel)

Unlocking Sexual Confidence

- “Pre-transition, whilst I did have reasonably regular sex, I never felt completely comfortable with it or that I was doing it very well [...] I felt it was a lot more freeing having sex post-surgery, because it felt far more what I should be having.”
- “Discovering, or rediscovering what I need to do to give myself pleasure [...] it’s still a work in progress. I’m still finding out where the best places are to touch, and how to touch myself.” (Hannah)
- “I used to do anal and be penetrated, because that feels very feminine, to be the person that’s penetrated, and it was kind of like a necessary evil – not “evil”, evil’s too extreme – but now I don’t do that anymore, because I have this custom place for that to happen. And I find that really interesting, that – you know, it was all consensual, but it was kind of the only way to get to that feminine kind of feeling. And now it’s not really something I enjoy anymore.” (Essex Girl)



Theme Two: Doing sexuality
differently as a result of
transition

Kinky Communities and Sex

- “It [BDSM] wasn’t something that I was really massively into before coming out, so it’s something I’ve kind of gotten into as I’ve been more accepting with exploring my gender identity, I’ve been more happy exploring my sexual identity as well. [...] It allowed me to open up onto areas that I wasn’t sure of before. So, I think it’s been a positive experience, it’s given me the ability to say what I do and don’t like, set those boundaries and being more confident in setting boundaries.” (Jess)

Shifting Sexual Roles and Desires

- “I've developed a much better sense of self-esteem, and so now I feel empowered to look beyond those initial things and I now enjoy other things that involve having to be confident, because being dominant requires an amount of confidence [...] I do really see that link between becoming more comfortable in my body, in who I am on a physical level, and then the resulting confidence that comes with that mentally as well.” (Essex Girl)
- “I find myself much less comfortable with doing various things. Much less settled with all sorts of activities, especially stuff that involves penetration and all that kind of stuff. I much prefer to not really do that anymore. I would much prefer to be different in that regard, so when I do want to have sex, I mostly like more intimate stuff. [...] So, pre-transition I was quite happy, quite comfortable being the penetrative partner, I guess, the partner who would top, essentially, but I would not do that now. And so that's the way that I would use my body differently.” (Laura)

Conclusion



- Participants experienced a ‘shrinking’ of their world due to their trans identities.
- Participants experienced heteronormative sexual scripts as limiting and restricting as they often reinforced penetrative sex based on gender norms, which, for many, brought about gender dysphoria.
- Transitioning enabled an ‘unlocking’ of self-confidence and comfort.
- Kink and BDSM sex and communities can help expand aspects of sexuality that were previously limited and restricted due to identity-based shame and heteronormative sex scripts.
- Sexual acts and preferences changed for some due to increased self-confidence and/or a shift in the prioritisation of sex.



THANKS!

@lukewrd

Luke.ward2@northampton.ac.uk



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