

TRANS* IDENTITIES AND NARRATIVE INTERVIEW: A DIALOGICAL AND SHARED ENCOUNTER

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INTRODUCTION

In Italy, as in other states of Europe, processes of gender transition are bounded to a diagnosis of **mental disorder**.

Diagnostic process can permit or impede access to medical treatments and other forms of social recognition. This practice also increases the **pathologisation** of personal experiences, considering **cultural norms** as if they were **natural** (Salvini, 2011).

This theoretical standpoint considers it possible to separate normal and pathological, by appealing to a biological or a psychological order and neglecting the **historical and socio-cultural foundations** of phenomena and normative universes.

CRITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Several implications may emerge through the interactions between people in transition and mental health professionals:

- ❖ The data collection in order to evaluate the "clinical case" **overlooking the interlocutors' biographical peculiarities** (Kessler and McKenna, 2000), considering -for example- rhetorical elements about "living in the wrong body", "doing games of the opposite sex in childhood" and "trying to reach the behaviour and appearance of the opposite sex" as characteristics of **gender dysphoria** (DSM-5).
- ❖ The introduction of predefined discourses **to insert one's story into the professional's categories** (Spade, 2003), without any room to other possible biographical elements or narratives.

THEORETICAL PREMISES

Starting from a social constructionist perspective, identities are intended as social and personal constructions, strictly connected with **narratives and performances** (Denzin, 2003; Austin, 1955).

According to these theoretical assumptions, the research methods follows the conception of **language** as a tool for construction and negotiation of situated meanings (Bakhtin, 1986).

Narratives of reality are intended as **forms of social action** which not just represent it but which contribute to its creation (Gergen and Zilke, 2006; Harré, 1980).

OBJECTIVES

- **Analysing the discursive processes of identity construction** related to gender transitions, valorising agency, the complexity of stories and texts and their pragmatic implications.
- **Reflecting on those implications in psychological and psychiatric discourses**, in light of trans* stories peculiarities and needs.



NARRATIVE INTERVIEW AS DIALOGICAL AND SHARED ENCOUNTER

Narrative interview is here privileged as practice of texts construction, considering the particular context and the interactive and shared situation engages the interlocutor and the researcher in "**special conversations**" (Castiglioni and Faccio, 2010; Gergen and Gergen, 2006; Hermanns, 2004; Sugiman et al., 2008).

Interview became **dialogue** and **co-construction** of local and situated interpersonal and individual narratives and meanings.

It do not consider the possibility to capture the **essential identity**, the **true self** or to identify a **psychopathology**, on the contrary it consents to highlight the **identity work and meanings construction** when people tell stories and talk in interaction. For these reasons the researcher plays a relevant role with his/her positioning, symbolic system of reference and the competence to create a dialogical and shared context.

Questions and actions are "**cut out**" for every story and interaction. They have in common the objectives **to generate narratives, to stimulate telling biographical peculiarities, critical aspects and lived exigencies, different positions and voices in time and space** and to **call into question the researcher's role and positioning**.

- I would like to ask you the story of your transition. You can start from the moment you retain more appropriate. You can tell every thing you consider important and together we can take all the time required.
- What could be your exigencies at the beginning of transitions? And in this moment?
- What would you say to a person at the beginning of his/her transition?
- Did my questions touch central aspects of your path? What questions could be more useful for you?
- From your point of view, how could I be useful?

CONCLUSIONS

Through these encounters, we can create a flexible context in which could be possible to tell every thing is relevant for the interlocutor and that emerges in the interaction, in a space chosen by him/her.

This way of considering the interview permits to avoid naturalistic, reductivist and pathological perspective on trans identities, but to promote free story telling and to valorise **agency and biographies**.

This particular practice also valorises **reflexivity, situatedness and multivoicedness** implied in the collection, co-construction and interpretation of texts and it promotes collaboration and sharing in every moment of the research.

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