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The changing public and private experience of transgender people

Aristegui, Ines

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**The changing public
and private experience
of transgender people**

Ines Aristegui

**university of
 groningen**

The changing public and private experience of transgender people

PhD thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
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on the authority of the
Rector Magnificus Prof. C. Wijmenga
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the decision by the College of Deans.

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by

Ines Aristegui

bom on 15 May 1976
in Chascomus, Argentina

Supervisor

Prof. A.P. Buunk

Co-supervisor

Dr. A. Castro Solano

Assessment Committee

Prof. M.C. Timmerman

Prof. R. Zurriaga Llorens

Prof. J. Arcelus

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Chapter 1

General Introduction

Boys don't cry (Hart, Kolodner, Sharp, Vachon & Peirce, 1999), All about my mother (Almodovar, Ruben & Almodovar, 1999), Transamerica (Bastian, Dungan, Morgan & Tucker, 2005), Tomboy (Couvreux & Sciamma, 2011), The Danish Girl (Bevan et al., 2015) ... What all these films have in common? They depict some aspects of transgender people's lives, creating public awareness of their experiences and challenges they face every day. As the American Psychological Association (APA) explained in a special report on gender identity and gender variance (APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance, 2009), visibility of transgender issues has considerably increased due to the growing number of movies, books, and television programs featured by transgender individuals or illustrating their facts of existence. However, scientific knowledge on the topic, particularly in psychology, was some steps behind.

Transgender is an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse array of individuals who do not identify with the sex category assigned to them at birth (APA, 2009; Coleman et al., 2012). This term embraces a diverse population and gender identities, including transsexuals, transvestites, transgender women, transgender men and those whose gender identities and expressions do not fit within a binary women/men classification system. Being a transgender person does not signify any history of, or desire for, genderaffirming interventions, such as surgeries or hormone therapy, nor any particular sexual orientation. Gender identity refers to one's internal psychological sense of being a man, woman, transgender or some other diverse gender identity.

What do we know about transgender people?

During the last two decades, in a growing number of countries, the transgender community has been strongly advocating for de-pathologizing their identities and achieving legal rights (Bockting, 2009; Winter et al., 2016). In this pathway, the community have sought social support from different groups, particularly academia, understanding that research on transgender issues is an essential component in the recognition their community. In this line, several worldwide organizations - such as, APA (2009), Institute of Medicine (2011) and World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH, 2010)- have called for a critical and urgent need of research regarding transgender health status and health needs.

According to a review of the literature on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT), between 1950 and 2007, the empirical body of research on transgender issues represented just 2.66% of those studies (Snyder, 2011). However, the number of transgender-specific articles has dramatically increased since 2005 (Sweileh, 2018): the growth rate of publications was 30.9% from 2015 to 2016, and 27.5% from 2016 to 2017. Not only the number of studies but also the topics that these studies explored have changed over the years. While early studies focused on psychiatric diagnoses and outcomes associated with gender-affirming interventions, such as genital reassignment surgeries; as the AIDS epidemic expanded, research increasingly focused on the prevalence of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and on factors associated with risk behaviors, such as stigma and discrimination (APA, 2009). To date, empirical research on adult transgender population is mainly grouped in seven areas (Sweileh, 2018): HIV and other STIs; gender-affirming procedures; mental health and substance use; social acceptance and human rights; health disparities; psychotherapy and counselling; and stigma and discrimination. Still, topics related to positive psychosocial functioning have received limited coverage (Moradi et al., 2016).

From pathology to diversity

Since the first publication on transgender health in 1913 (see Sweileh, 2018), academia, and consequently society, are moving from understanding transgenderism as a mental disorder to considering diversity in gender identities and expressions (Bockting, 2009; Winter et al., 2016). Since Transsexualism appeared as an independent psychiatric disorder in the ninth version of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9), developed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1975), and in the third edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III), developed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1980), there has been a consistent shift in the paradigm from a pathology-focused model to an identity-understanding approach. In 2010, the WPATH released a statement urging the de-pathologization of gender variance worldwide, understanding that these types of diagnosis reinforce stigma and discrimination, making transgender people more vulnerable to social and legal marginalization, and therefore, diminishing their mental and physical well-being (WPATH, 2010).

As it has happened with homosexuality in the 1970's, both the APA, in May 2013, and the WHO, in June 2018, has ceased categorizing gender variance as mental illnesses in their mental disorders or diseases classifications. In the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) the diagnostic name gender identity disorder was replaced by gender dysphoria, noting that gender nonconformity is not in itself a mental disorder and the critical element of this diagnosis is the presence of clinically significant distress associated with this condition. In the same line, in the ICD-11 (WHO, 2018), gender incongruence was moved out of the chapter on mental and behavioral disorders and relocated into sexual health conditions. These taxonomies center less on individuals' gender incongruence, and more on the associated distress, than earlier definitions. Although there is a strong debate regarding the complete removal of transgender diagnoses from these classification lists, the rationale for keeping these conditions coded in the ICD and the DSM, was to meet the health care needs of these populations (Sánchez & Vilain, 2013).

Legal recognition of transgender identity

There are different pathways in which transgender individuals engage to develop and affirm their gender identity (Coleman et al., 2012; Sevelius, 2013). The most common dimensions of gender affirmation are: social (being called by a name and pronouns that are aligned with one's identity), medical (cross-sex hormone therapy, surgical procedures), and legal (changing one's legal name or gender markers).

Legal recognition of transgender people is growing worldwide (Winter et al., 2016), and currently, approximately 20 countries have moved a step forward in this direction. However, there are differences in how these legal gender recognitions are implemented. Although the WPATH (see Knudson et al, 2018 for review of statements) recommends countries to base their procedures solely on the self-determination of the person, many countries still have mandatory requirements in order to adapt identity documents, such as self-presentation requests, that is, two years living in line with one's new gender (e.g., United Kingdom); some gender-affirming procedures -genital surgeries or hormone treatment (e.g., Portugal); a medical statement from a psychiatrist or mental health diagnosis as gender dysphoria (e.g., Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Spain); or even sterilization procedures (e.g., France, Italy, Finland, Japan).

In line with the WPATH's advices against mandatory mental health treatment or diagnosis for a legal gender recognition, as it relies on the false notion that being transgender is a (mental)

illness, several countries are adopting the so-called declaration model, in which transgender people are able to self-determine their gender through a simple administrative procedure (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Denmark, Malta, and Ireland). Moreover, other countries, such as New Zealand, Australia, Nepal, Pakistan, and India, have introduced, or are introducing in their passports or governmental documents, a third gender (“X”), providing opportunities for transgender people who do identify outside the gender binary or who are transitioning (Winter et al., 2016).

Legal gender recognition has been identified as a key determinant to enjoy rights and opportunities, such as access accommodation, education, employment, and health care, and a critical and protective factor for optimal physical and mental health of transgender individuals (Knudson et al., 2018; Winter et al., 2016).

Gender identity related stigma and discrimination

The aforementioned advances in de-pathologization and legal recognition of transgender identity have not eliminated stigma and discrimination. Many transgender people not only experience an inner sense of not belonging but also encounter social stigma attached to their gender nonconformity (Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton & Coleman, 2013; Poteat, German, & Kerrigan, 2013; Lombardi Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002). Several studies describe how chronic exposure to stigma and explicit forms of maltreatment, also known as transphobia -ranging from harassment and verbal abuse to hate crimes- can have deleterious effects in this population, contributing to poor living conditions and physical and mental health outcomes (Bariola et al., 2015; Reisner et al., 2016). Stigma and discrimination are partly the reason why transgender people face family rejection and drop out of school at an early age, depriving them from completing their education and forcing them to live in temporary or precarious housing (Fundacion Huesped, 2014; Grant et al., 2011). This situation limits their employment opportunities as well as the possibility of achieving a stable economic situation, which leads many transgender women to engage in survival sex work (Sausa, Keatley & Operario, 2007). The result is a heavy burden of mental and physical problems, including depression and anxiety (Bockting et al., 2013; Bouman et al., 2016; Witcomb et al., 2018); substance abuse (Benotsch et al., 2013, Socias et al., 2014), suicidal behavior (Clements-Nolle, Marx & Katz, 2006; Grant et al., 2011; Marshall et al. 2016), nonsuicidal self-injury (Claes et al., 2015; Arcelus, Claes, Witcomb, Marshall, & Bouman, 2016) and risk behaviors and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), particularly HIV in transgender women (Baral et al., 2013; Poteat, Reisner & Radix, 2014).

The relationship between stigma and mental and physical health challenges among transgender individuals is consistent with Meyer’s (2003) minority stress model. According to this model, individuals who belong to socially devalued groups, such as gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people, are vulnerable to chronic exposure to stigma and discrimination. Consequently, the resulting internalization of this social stigma, may over time, compromise their psychological coping resources and may thus lead to mental health problems and well-being disparities (Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008; Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

Resilience and protective factors in transgender people

Despite the high levels of stress and its related health risks, many transgender

individuals appear to have the ability to overcome difficulties and to develop satisfying lives (Grant et al., 2011; Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, Pascale-Hague, 2011). The capacity that individuals have to positively adapt and maintain stable psychological functioning after experiencing significant adversity, is known as resilience (Bonanno, 2012). Resilience is not limited to a specific type of stressor nor to a particular area of adaptation, which makes it very adequate when studying vulnerable groups that are exposed to various forms of chronic social stress (Bariola et al., 2015). There are certain factors, known as protective factors, that make individuals to be more resilient and to improve their ability to cope (Bonanno, 2004). This association between resilience and psychological functioning and well-being has also been documented among transgender individuals (Bariola et al., 2015; Bockting et al., 2013; Riggle et al., 2011). A recent metaanalysis (Johns, Beltran, Armstrong, Jayne & Barrios, 2018) showed that research on resilience and protective factors among transgender people indicates the importance of self-esteem at the individual level, healthy relationships at the relationship-level, and gay straight alliances at the community level.

In general, healthy relationships are one of the main factors in individuals' life as they are central to identity formation, are a key source of support, and may provide economic, social and psychological benefits (Feeney & Thrush, 2010). Although social relationships comprise bonds with parents, children, sibling, friends, and colleagues, in adulthood, intimate relationships seem to be the most important type of relationships. Especially for transgender people, intimate relationships are fundamental determinants of feeling accepted and thus, potential sources of resilience (Meier, Sharp, Michonski, Babcock, & Fitzgerald, 2013). Partners may provide support when other sources of support are lost, particularly for individuals who suffer from family rejection and lack of connectedness at school or work as is the case of many transgender individuals. An intimate partner is not only a source of companionship, but also a source of social validation of one's gender identity (Sevelius, 2013, Johns et al., 2018) by providing support in different ways, from accepting transgender's partner name and pronouns to being sexually intimate.

Intimate relationships in transgender people

As for most people, achieving a committed intimate relationship is one of transgender individuals' goals in life (Meier et al., 2013). Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation (APA, 2009; Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011). Transgender individuals may be attracted to people of any gender (men, women and other transgender people) and have various sexual orientations (e.g., heterosexual, lesbian/gay, bisexual, asexual). Transgender individuals typically define their sexual orientation based on their gender identity, rather than on the sex they were assigned at birth (APA, 2009; Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011). Thus, for example, a transgender woman who is attracted to men most likely identifies herself as heterosexual, while a transgender woman who is primarily attracted to women most likely identifies herself as lesbian. Research on transgender individuals' intimate relationships is very limited (APA, 2009; Dierckx, Motmans, Mortelmans, & T'sjoen, 2016), and has focused primarily on transgender women who have sex with men in the context of HIV risk (e.g., Operario, Nemoto, Iwamoto, & Moore, 2010; Reisner, Gamarel, Nemoto, & Operario, 2014). Some studies have also examined the implications for the nature of an intimate relationship of individuals who have a transgender partner who is transitioning (e.g., Bischof, Warnaar, Barajas, & Dhaliwal, 2011; Platt & Bolland, 2017). More recently, it has been shown that very few individuals,

especially heterosexual and non-transgender people, consider transgender persons as potential future partners and that those who belong to sexual minorities groups are the most likely to include transgender persons within their pool of potential dating partners (Blair & Hoskin, 2018). Despite the increasing visibility of transgender and gender nonconforming people in society, much remains unknown about intimacy and relationships in transgender research.

Evolutionary psychology

According to evolutionary psychology, there are sex differences in the way that individuals engage and interact in personal relationships (Buss, 2005). These inherited sex differences in behaviors and cognitions reflect mechanisms that had served our ancestors to successfully solve the complex tasks of reproduction. Men and women differ in their reproductive potential and invest different amounts of resources, time and energy in caring for their offprints, consequently they tend to use different strategies for selecting an adequate mate, out-competing same-sex rivals in attracting a mate, preventing the mate from leaving, and engaging in sexual and social behaviors required for conception, child-birth, and child-rearing (Buss, 2005, Symons, 1979, Trivers, 1972).

As research in this area grows, the notion that the human brain has a solo mechanism that controls the adaptive system of male or female reproduction is being replaced by the hypothesis that these cognitive and behavioral mechanisms are independent modules designed to perform particular functions (e.g. Kenrick, Keefe, Brian, Barr & Brown, 1995; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). Modern evolutionary theorists believe that human mating psychology consists of domain-specific rather than domain-general processes, that may be traced back to different brain structures. Therefore, a change in one of these biological mechanisms would not be accompanied by changes in all related mechanisms. For instance, studies among gay and lesbian people show that a change in sexual orientation and thus sex of partners one is attracted to, does not necessarily imply a reversal of sex-typing characteristics that one prefers in sexual or romantic mates (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Kenrick et al., 1995).

From the neuroscience field, there is considerable evidence that aspects of human sexuality, such as gender identity, is a cerebral programming that shapes human behavior from early age and is linked to brain structures developed when individuals are still in the womb (Savic, Garcia-Falgueras, Swaab, 2010). While for most individuals this sense of being a woman or a man coincides with their biological status, that is sex chromosomes, hormones and genitalia, in transgender individuals this is not the case. Although transgender people provide a unique opportunity to examine the effect of biological sex versus gender identity on the mating arena, little attention has been paid to intimate relationships in this population from this evolutionary perspective.

Outline of the thesis

The shift in the research arena from a deficit to an identity-recognition model opens the opportunity to adopt a strength-based approach, integrating resilience processes and a more positive approach when studying transgender people. Therefore, the first section of this dissertation introduces two qualitative studies, one that explores the perceived effects of the legal recognition of the transgender identity in Argentina and another one that explores the resources

that people use to cope with experiences of stigma and discrimination in a sample of gay men and transgender women. In a context of stigmatization and as members of a small minority group, intimate relationships are a challenge for transgender people, and finding a partner and maintaining a relationship may be even more complex than for the rest of the population. As transgender people are gaining in visibility in society, a better understanding of intimate relationships among this population is timely. Therefore, the second part of this dissertation presents two quantitative studies that explore relationship issues in a large sample of this unique population, from an evolutionary psychology perspective. The first one focused on relationship formation, by exploring the characteristics that transgender individuals value on a potential partner, and the second one centered on relationship maintenance by studying the characteristics that evoke jealousy when transgender individuals confronted with a romantic rival.

Chapter 2 – Impact of Gender Identity Law

In Argentina, the Gender Identity Law was enacted in May 2012. This is deemed as one of the most progressive laws, as it not only considers self-determination, changing legal gender without state or medical intervention, but also explicitly affirms the right of transgender people to appropriate healthcare (Winter et al, 2016). As this law was considered as a tool to improve transgender individuals' quality of life, Chapter 2 presents the results of a qualitative study that aimed to describe the impact of the Argentinean gender identity law on the living conditions of the transgender people from the point of view of a group of transgender women who were recognized as community leaders. Additionally, this research also explored improvements and barriers to the law's implementation in areas such as health, education, employment, security, and political and civil rights.

Chapter 3 – Resources to cope with stigma and discrimination

As some researchers suggested (Bockting et al., 2013; Johns et al., 2018), studying experiences of stigma and discrimination in transgender people is not only about identifying risk factors and its negative impact on health and well-being, but also about recognizing the individual and collective abilities through which individuals cope with these situations, overcome difficult life conditions and follow a resilient trajectory. Therefore, Chapter 3 describes a study that examined the resources that stigmatized groups -such as people with HIV, gay men, and transgender women - recognize as tools to cope with situations of stigma and discrimination and also serve to sustain their levels of psychological well-being.

Chapter 4 – Mate preferences among transgender individuals

There is ample evidence of sex differences in mate preferences for a long-term relationship in both, heterosexual and gay and lesbian groups (Buss et al., 1990; Lippa, 2007). Regardless of their sexual orientation, in general, men tend to value physical attractiveness more than women, whereas women tend to value social status and resources more than men. However, no study has explored this topic in transgender individuals, a group that provides a unique opportunity to study the interaction of sex and gender on mate choices. Therefore, Chapter 4 presents the results of a study that aimed at identifying the mate characteristics that are most and least valued by transgender individuals who define themselves as heterosexuals and to examine to what extent their biological sex or their gender identity determines their mate preferences.

Chapter 5 – Rival characteristics that evoke jealousy in transgender individuals

As research has shown human beings feel distressed when facing rivals that possess sex-typical characteristics that are believed to increment their mate value, physical strength in men and physical attractiveness in women (e.g., Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002; Buunk, Castro Solano, Zurriaga & González, 2011). Acquiring a physical appearance congruent with their gender identity is an important component of gender affirmation for transgender individuals (Sevelius, 2013; Coleman et al., 2012) and thus, secondary sex-typical features is a dimension on which they compare themselves with others. Therefore, Chapter 5 introduces a study that examined the hypothesis that gender identity and biological sex represent independent modules, and that transgender individuals respond to romantic rivals in line with their gender identity, and not with their biological sex. Additionally, I also examined to which extent jealousy responses depended on individual differences, in particular social comparison orientation and intrasexual competitiveness.

Chapter 2

Impact of the Gender Identity Law in Argentinean Transgender Women

Aristegui, I., Radusky, P.D., Zalazar, V., Romero, M., Schwartz, J., & Sued, O. (2017). Impact of the Gender Identity Law in Argentinean Transgender Women. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 18(4), 446-456. doi: 10.1080/15532739.2017.131479

Abstract

In May 2012, collective efforts led to the enactment of a Gender Identity Law in Argentina. This is a particularly progressive law, based on human rights principles, as it is the first in the world to recognize a person's gender identity without any preconditions. However, studies that evaluate its impact on the transgender community (positive outcomes as well as barriers to implementation) have been scant. Thus, the following study investigated the impact of the implementation of the Argentinean Gender Identity Law on the living conditions, plus it explored stigma and discrimination (S&D) experiences of transgender women. Two focus groups, with 20 transgender women, were conducted. Recordings were transcribed and a thematic analysis of the transcripts was performed according to the following categories: general perceived impact of the Law, work and education, security and civil rights, health services, and perceived differences among regions and provinces. After the Law's enactment, participants mostly perceived positive changes, in general, and in particular domains such as education, health care, work, security, and civil rights. A general empowering effect on the community can be inferred. However, barriers to full implementation were identified, both internal and subjective (age, internalized stigma) and external (lack of trained professionals and public servants, reluctance to implementation in conservative provinces). This study provides the first evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Gender Identity Law in Argentina from the point of view of transgender women. The empowering effect and the improvements achieved provide preliminary information on the importance of adopting this type of policy. Additionally, the barriers to be overcome and recommendations for the future are discussed.

Keywords: Argentina, Gender Identity Law, impact, stigma and discrimination, transgender

In May 2012, collective efforts led to the enactment of a Gender Identity Law in Argentina. It was conceived as a tool to reduce the marginalization and exclusion that transgender people endure as a consequence of transphobia. This is a particularly progressive law, based on human rights principles, as it is the first in the world to recognize a person's gender identity without any preconditions. However, studies that evaluate its impact on the transgender community and the progress in its implementation have been scant.

The enactment of Argentina's Gender Identity Law in May 2012 (Law N° 26,743) was the result of the fight of the Argentinean transgender population for legal recognition of their gender identities. This Law promotes human rights and equality between transgender individuals and the rest of the Argentinean population by recognizing the right to a self-defined gender identity. Additionally, it allows individuals to change their names and gender on birth certificates, previously-granted educational diplomas and awards, as well as on all government-issued forms of identification. In contrast to similar laws in other countries, gender recognition is guaranteed without arbitrary preconditions and barriers, as recommended by international organizations. This is a very straightforward administrative process that does not require any kind of proof of partial or total genital reassignment surgery, hormonal therapies or any other psychological or medical treatment, nor the need to have psychiatric or judicial approval (Law N° 26,743, 2012; United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2013). This is one of the main reasons why this Argentinean Law has been described as particularly progressive (UNDP, 2013; Winter et al., 2016; Lo & Horton, 2016) and as "a shift in international best practice, based solidly on human rights principles" (Byrne, 2014, p. 10). The amendments in the records do not change the legal entitlements to rights nor the legal obligations that the individual had before the change of identity. The only case in which judicial authorization is required is when a person asks to change back to their previous gender identity. Another novel aspect of this Law is that it extends the right to change gender identity to children and adolescents, with explicit agreement by the minor, taking into account the evolving capacities and best interests of the child - as expressed in the Convention of Children's Rights - and the requirement of previous consent of their legal representatives.

The Gender Identity Law was proposed within the context of high marginalization and an exclusion of transgender people from widespread acceptance due to the prevalent transphobia in Argentinean society (Aristegui & Vazquez, 2013; Fundacion Huesped, 2014), and conceived as an instrument to promote a better quality of life among transgender people, diminishing their social vulnerability and restricted access to basic human rights. The Law was introduced after a series of legal changes that have promoted the rights of the LGBT community in Argentina, such as the Comprehensive Sexual Education National Law, that establishes sexual diversity issues as mandatory contents for all levels of the educational system and prevents discrimination in schools based on gender identity and sexual orientation (Law N°26,150, 2006); and the Equal Marriage Law, which extends marriage and adoption rights to same-sex couples, making Argentina the first country in Latin America guarantee in this right (Law N° 26,618, 2010). Particularly, in 2010, the debate around same-sex marriage created not only a strong division within Argentinean society, but also generated social awareness of the needs of the LGBT community. That crucial and decisive debate was a landmark that generated a favorable environment towards sexual diversity issues among policymakers and society in general. Additionally, during that time, the transgender community also increased their visibility and political influence. As the central debate had already been held, when the

Gender Identity Law was proposed two years later, following the same strategy that was used with the Equal Marriage Law, little resistance was found. The proposal, which was promoted initially by transgender activists and organizations, later received support and impulse from the national government in office at that time. Finally, it was voted upon favorably in both chambers of the National Congress, after several weeks of debates and consultations with experts and community leaders.

It should be also highlighted that the National Constitution of Argentina recognizes health as a basic human right and guarantees universal free access to public healthcare to everyone within the national territory, including non-permanent residents and occasional visitors. Consequently, the Gender Identity Law, by guaranteeing individuals' development of their gender identity, also guarantees free and universal access to comprehensive health care, facilitating gender-affirming medical procedures such as hormone treatment and surgeries, by including them in the National Compulsory Medical Plan. Although this Argentinean Law is the second one of its type in the region, after its neighboring country Uruguay (Law N° 18,620, 2009), this is another of the strong features that makes this recognition very progressive and strengthens Argentina's position as an international leader in the promotion of sexual diversity rights (Byrne, 2014; Lo & Horton, 2016; Pan-American Health Organization [PAHO], 2013; Winter et al., 2016).

Background

In Argentina, as in many countries, transgender people are highly marginalized. Marginalization of transgender people is the consequence of familial, social and institutional stigma and discrimination (S&D) experienced from a very early age (PAHO, 2013; Reisner et al., 2016). As soon as they begin their transition, many individuals are rejected from their homes. In addition, transgender people tend to be expelled from, dropout of or avoid attending school (Fundacion Huesped, 2014). As a consequence of the lack of formal education and of legal recognition of their gender, transgender people lack opportunities to access formal employment, social security and housing (Aristegui & Vazquez, 2013; Socias et al., 2014). In particular, transgender women live in an unstable and precarious situation, and most are involved in sex work as a way to make a living (Kenagy, 2005; National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism [INADI], 2012; Loza, Beltran, & Mangadu, 2017; Sausa et al., 2007). Because of S&D based on gender identity, transgender people usually do not access education, employment, healthcare, housing opportunities, and basic human rights (Aristegui & Vazquez, 2013).

Living with social vulnerability can lead to a high prevalence of substance abuse, psychological distress (anxiety and depression) and suicide attempts; increased risk of acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STIs); higher exposure to physical violence, among other negative physical and mental health outcomes (Bockting et al., 2013; Marshall et al., 2016; Reisner et al., 2016; Warren, Bryant Smalley, & Nikki Barefoot, 2016), that largely contribute to a harmful cycle reinforcing and perpetuating stigmatization and marginalization (Brennan et al., 2012; Operario & Nemoto, 2010). All these factors negatively affect transgender people's overall quality of life, and reduce their life expectancy. For instance, in Argentina, this is estimated at approximately 35 years old for transgender women (Berkins, 2007), compared to 79 years for women in the general population.

Such a situation is exacerbated by laws and policies that deny this population gender

recognition (Winter et al., 2016), leaving this population invisible to social public policies that otherwise might benefit them (Lo & Horton, 2016). Documents that reveal birth-assigned sex of transgender populations worsen the risk of S&D in education, healthcare, workplace and other settings (PAHO, 2013; Reisner et al., 2016). Conversely, legal gender recognition has been identified as a key determinant for access to basic rights, and a critical and protective factor for the health and well-being of transgender people (Winter et al., 2016). For instance, studies on access to gender-affirmative healthcare have shown a positive impact on general physical and psychological functioning as well as on overall quality of life (Bockting et al., 2013; Gorin-Lazard et al., 2012; Murad et al., 2010; Newfield, Hart, Dibble & Kohler, 2006; Reisner et al., 2016).

Studies examining the impact of legal frameworks on a population's health and well-being have shown their influence (Clancy, Uchendu & Jones, 2014). The macroenvironment, including the political conditions and social-cultural norms in which individuals live, influences people's micro-environment, such as personal health and risk-taking habits (Rhodes, Singer, Bourgois, Friedman & Strathdee, 2005). These macro-environmental factors may have an adverse impact on people's health either directly, by producing chronic stress and other negative feelings, or indirectly, by restricting access to health care because of overt S&D or self-exclusion (Bockting et al., 2013; Hatzenbuehler, Phelan & Link, 2013). Legal changes positively impact people's health, as they have a fundamental role in limiting discrimination, dismantling social prejudices, and reducing stigmatization. Ultimately, improvements on a legal and cultural level might have an impact on domains other than healthcare, like housing, employment, education, and the overall quality of life. In conclusion, assessment of the impact and the advancement that new social laws have on specific populations are needed in order to determine if the expected effects are generated on the target population or beneficiaries, and to identify obstacles as well as unexpected positive outcomes.

Although available findings suggest that gender recognition can have a positive effect on transgender people's quality of life (Aristegui et al., 2014), research that evaluates its impact and potential effects on health and well-being of the transgender population has been scant (PAHO, 2013; Reisner et al., 2016; Winter et al., 2016). Thus, this article describes the initial and qualitative results of a larger study that aimed to investigate the impact of the implementation of the Argentinean Gender Identity Law on the life conditions of the transgender population and to identify perceived improvements and barriers to the Law's implementation in areas such as health, education, employment, security and political and civil rights.

METHODS

This study was part of a larger project that aimed to create an instrument to evaluate the impact of the Gender Identity Law on the living conditions of the transgender population (Fundacion Huesped, 2014). The project included a quantitative component (a national survey with 498 transgender participants) that aimed to provide a baseline of living conditions of transgender people; and a qualitative component, presented in this article, that explored the perceptions of transgender activists on the changes that the Law has been producing during the first years of its implementation.

Participants

The sample consisted of 20 transgender women of a non-governmental transgender organization of Argentina, named Association of Transvestites, Transsexuals, and Transgender People of Argentina (ATTTA), who served as representatives from different regions of the country.¹ Originally, one transgender man 1 Note: Argentina is a large country that presents profound regional disparities in distribution of wealth, population and public services availability. The Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires and the Central participated in the focus group, depicting the lack of social visibility of this subgroup, even within transgender organizations. As conclusions cannot be drawn from a sole experience, this male participant was not included in the analysis.

Participants' mean age was 40.85 years ($SD=10.38$; range: 25-61 years) and age at beginning of the gender affirmation process was 14.79 years ($SD=3.20$). As shown in Table 1, most participants have changed their gender on their official identity cards. Regarding education, the majority had not completed high school, and only four participants had achieved some university education.

Information on gender-affirmative medical procedures was not gathered as it was a very sensitive issue at the moment of the study. Since the community was celebrating that the Law has no requirement on this matter and it was not the objective of the study, the decision was made not to inquire about this point.

Instruments

Based on the results of a previous qualitative research on S&D, prior to the implementation of the Law (Fundacion Huesped, 2012) and on the objective of this study, a discussion guide for the focus groups was designed to address the following topics: areas and situations of S&D; perceptions regarding the impact of the Law on these experiences; perceived progress in the living conditions and the quality of life; and observed barriers throughout the Law's implementation.

Procedure

This study was approved by the institutional Ethics Committee of Fundacion Huesped, an Argentinean NGO dedicated to providing support services to HIV-affected people. It is also the most important research agency regarding HIV in the country, with more than 3,000

¹ Note: Argentina is a large country that presents profound regional disparities in distribution of wealth, population and public services availability. The Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires and the Central region have the highest concentration of resources and population. In the Northwestern and Northeastern regions, public education and healthcare services are scarce and reduced in quality due to the lack of economic resources. These latter regions are generally the most socially conservative. The Southern region (Patagonia) is wealthier, though largely unpopulated. The geographical vastness of this entire region compromises access to more specialized healthcare services, usually located in larger cities, as people must travel extremely long distances to attend.

participants in different social and clinical studies. For ensuring the protection of the research subjects, Fundacion Huesped has its own accredited Ethics Committee.

The focus groups were conducted in May, 2013, one year after the enactment of the Law. The 1.5-hour sessions were carried out in Spanish, and led by a coordinator and an observer. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the information provided. Signed informed consent was obtained in order to participate and to allow the session to be recorded so as to capture the speech and actual words and expressions of the individuals.

Table 1.

Socio-demographic information of participants

Participant	Age	Age of transition	City - Province / Region ^a	Educational Level ^b	ID Change
1-WGD	27	19	Córdoba, CR	IU	Yes
2-YZD	25	15	Formosa, NER	IHS	No
3-KEH	41	20	Buenos Aires City, MR	CHS	Yes
4-QB	25	-	Greater Buenos Aires, MA	CHS	No
5-NS	51	13	Salta, NWR	CES	Yes
6-HS	32	16	San Luis, WR	CES	Yes
7-MMQ	49	15	Santiago del Estero, NWR	IHS	Yes
8-ZSP	34	17	Catamarca, NWR	IHS	Yes
9-SJT	46	6	La Pampa, SR	IU	Yes
10-SPJ	36	17	Río Negro, SR	IHS	Yes
11-BCD	57	15	Tucumán, NWR	IU	-
12-LNS	40	14	Córdoba, CR	IHS	-
13-EB	37	12	Chubut, SR Yes	IU	Yes
14-QS	48	16	Mar del Plata, CR	CHS	-
15-KS	61	16	Buenos Aires City, MR	IHS	No
16-TET	36	13	Greater Buenos Aires, MR	CHS	Yes
17-HFP	46	18	Buenos Aires City, MR	IES	Yes
18-WJB	30	12	San Juan, WR	IES	Yes
19-SC	46	16	Greater Buenos Aires, MR	IHS	Yes
20-NNR	50	11	Santa Fe, CR	CES	Yes

Note.

^aMR: Metropolitan Region, CR: Central Region, SR: Southern Region/Patagonia, NWR: Northwestern Region, NER: North-eastern Region, WR: Western Region/Cuyo

^bIES: Incomplete Elementary School, CES: Complete Elementary School, IHS: Incomplete High School, CHS: Complete High School, IU: Incomplete University

Data analysis

Recordings were transcribed and a thematic analysis of the transcripts was performed following previously defined categories: perceived impact of the Law; experiences on the realms of work and education; security and civil rights; experiences with health services, and perceived differences among regions and provinces. These categories were in line with the

indicators of life conditions and access to basic human rights explored in the national survey. Three researchers read the verbatim transcripts and coded them independently. Bilingual researchers translated the selected fragments for the manuscript, which were reviewed by a native English speaker.

RESULTS

General perceived impact of the Gender Identity Law

When participants were asked whether they perceived changes since the implementation of the Gender Identity Law, their responses were mostly assertive and positive: *'many changes... numerous doors have opened'* (L.N.S., 40 years-old, Córdoba). Participants highlighted that the legal recognition of their identity is considered as the acknowledgement of their existence, and it also has increased visibility and social acceptance of their population. *'Today, I see how my mates, through the Gender Identity Law and with an ID card, stand in a different place to face society'* (S.P.J., 36 years-old, Rio Negro).

A generational difference was noted on how the Law has impacted transgender people's lives. The younger population has rapidly assumed a different position in society. *'They take a stand against their families' rejection, arguing their rights in front of their parents'* (S.P.J., 36 years-old, Rio Negro). However, the Law is received differently by older individuals who might decide not to change their identity to maintain emotional and instrumental family support. One participant explained this trade-off in the following way:

'I'm sacrificing my identity; I'm not changing my ID as a way to 'pay' my sister who provides me a home. She doesn't want a sister (she wants a brother) and I don't want to live on the streets at this age'. (K.S., 61 yearsold, Buenos Aires City)

Similarly, another participant explained that older transgender women might be afraid of changing their name and gender on their documents as they have lived like that their entire lives. They expressed that although that identity was often painful, it was the familiar one, the known one.

'Older women usually do not want to change their identity... they are already hurt and afraid... We fear losing our identity, what will happen to our documents? What will happen with our things?' (N.S., 51 yearsold, Salta)

Most participants recognized that the Law will not immediately reduce discrimination. Nonetheless, many considered it is *'a tool, a resource to use'* (Z.S.P., 34 years-old, Catamarca). One participant explained, *'The Law will not change me, but it gives me a legal warranty'* (Z.S.P., 34 years-old, Catamarca). Although many interviewees mentioned lacking access to the full force of the Law, they explained:

'Our perception of the world and of our own lives has changed 100%.'

What has changed is not the world's perception of us, but rather our perception of the world' (W.G.D., 27 years-old, Córdoba).

Therefore, the Law is perceived as a resource that has empowered the transgender community by providing them with an essential tool to decrease levels of internalized stigma and to face situations of S&D.

Education and work

When participants were asked what aspect of their lives have had the greatest change since the Law's implementation, most noted the improvements in education. Transgender women are exercising their rights (*'the women are returning to high school'*) (Q.S., 48 years-old, Mar del Plata), and schools, teachers, and principals are developing a different attitude towards transgender people due to the new legal framework (*'the director called me and asked if I want to re-enroll in the school'*) (Y.Z.D., 25 years-old, Formosa).

'I returned to the school that had previously rejected me... where one of my professors slapped me for being trans(gender). I waited in fear for a week before going back. There, I returned to the walls, noises, troubles, and uneasiness of my memories... the pain, the anguish... but today they called me to discuss the Gender Identity Law and sex education, and to me, this is a big step forward. I love the idea that the same school, the same director is welcoming me back' (T.E.T., 36 years-old, Buenos Aires City).

Today, there are some settings of different educational levels targeted at transgender students. For example, one secondary school was open exclusively for transgender people and other institutions have been training staff and students on transgender issues to promote a more receptive environment of diversity.

Regarding work, most participants have experienced personal changes in their working status. As activists, many of them currently hold a position in government organizations that focus on human rights or sexual diversity: *'We are working with the city council on improving gender policies'* (S.J.T., 46 years-old, La Pampa). They also reported frequent invitations to give lectures and to participate in training sessions on the new Law and its implications. In particular, as a result of the implementation of this research project, several transgender individuals have entered the formal employment system, receiving a social security tax number and obtaining a bank account: *'Now we're bank customers'* (Y.Z.D., 25 years-old, Formosa).

Security and civil rights

Very important advancements have been achieved in relation to political and civil rights. An increased freedom of expression in the streets, such as using public transport or walking through public venues during the day; and decreased police violence have been reported.

'I'm no longer afraid of walking down the street. Before, you could not walk outside because the police grabbed you; you could not take the bus

because they kicked you off... Now, you can see girls on the bus, in the street...' (W.J.B., 30 years-old, San Juan)

According to participants' narratives, having an ID card in accordance with one's gender identity results in fewer police arrests: *'Since the Law's implementation, I have not experienced a violent or discriminating situation with police harassment'* (K.E.H., 41 years-old, Buenos Aires City).

Through transgender community's greater visibility, our whole society has the opportunity to better know this population, acknowledging individuals rather than stereotypes, and thus, the chance to avoid feeding the cycle of stigmatization. Being out and visible, and collaborating in self-esteem and self-confidence, are improvements that allow some of them to be considered as role models by their peers. As activists, visibility also implies the responsibility of acknowledging and acting on the negative consequences of their own internalized stigma and discriminatory behavior within the community.

"This is a right and an obligation... because it is the same society that listens to us when we are teasing each other... we have to be careful when we go out in the street, sit in a meeting, talk in public... otherwise, people will say: 'they are fighting against discrimination but they don't treat themselves well and say terrible and derogatory things to each other'" (S.C., 46 years-old, Greater Buenos Aires).

In addition, exercising the obligation and the right to vote has positively changed and expanded: *'today, trans(gender) women want to vote with their new ID'* (E.B., 37 years-old, Chubut). Many of the interviewed transgender individuals have also actively participated in politics, supporting candidates in the country's recent elections or with roles as public servants, themselves.

Health services

Despite having a resolution affirming the respect of self-perceived gender identity in healthcare facilities since 2007 in the City of Buenos Aires, transgender women have postponed or avoided medical care based on their previous experiences of being called by their masculine name or hospitalized in men's wards (Fundacion Huesped, 2012). They continuously reported denial of care, harassment, and lack of competent and sensitive providers with adequate knowledge of their specific needs. The new national Law, guaranteeing comprehensive health services, has prompted the empowerment of transgender people, facilitating and strengthening the general access to healthcare.

As the groups mentioned, a new ID card has motivated many people to *'change their names in medical records'* in health centers (E.B., 37 years-old, Chubut).

'Now, they will ask for a consultation and go to the appointment... because they feel more comfortable when they are called by the feminine name on their ID'... 'Today, trans(gender) women can be admitted to a hospital ward for women, and this is a breakthrough that we have

achieved since the Law' (N.N.R., 50 years-old, Santa Fe).

In addition to these improvements, the search for gender-affirmative medical care has increased the number of people who seek consultations for or to undergo genderaffirmative medical procedures. However, this point also illustrates a shortfall in the proper implementation of the Law. Although it guarantees access to comprehensive healthcare, there is a lack of medical and vocational training regarding the particular characteristics and needs of transgender people:

'I have had silicone implants for 30 years that I wanted removed, but the hospital told me they do not have trained physicians' ... 'the hospital does not know how to enforce the Law because it does not have the trained staff' (Q.S., 48 years-old, Mar del Plata).

Differences among regions and provinces

Participants' accounts illustrate that there are large differences between the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires and the interior provinces in the implementation of the Law. While in the Buenos Aires suburbs, some municipalities began offering hormone therapies and surgeries to remove industrial silicones, or providing genital reconstructive surgeries; in some provinces, it is challenging to motivate professionals to obtain the necessary training to care for transgender people or to find institutions to teach such care. More conservative-minded healthcare providers and governmental persons in distant provinces seem to experience resistance or lack of training to acknowledge the existence of the Law and its implications, making its full implementation difficult.

'We had to carry brochures and present information on the Gender Identity Law to the Civil Registry staff that were supposed to change our birth certificates' (L.N.S., 40 years-old, Córdoba).

Therefore, it is necessary for the activists and representatives from each region to continue to monitor and ensure the enforcement of the Law at a local level: *'Thanks to the Law, our work as representatives is more important'* (H.S., 32 years-old, San Luis), and to ensure that the Gender Identity Law becomes effective: *'We have devoted ourselves to the cause'* (M.M.Q., 49 years-old, Santiago del Estero).

The need for working to guarantee the full endorsement of the Law has consequently reinforced the social role of the activists.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived impact of the implementation of the Argentinean Gender Identity Law on the living conditions and S&D experiences of transgender women. After one year from the enactment of the Law in Argentina, it was found that transgender women consistently agree on perceiving a generally positive impact of this legal framework on their lives and hold an optimistic view regarding future

outcomes. Largely, results reveal a major empowering effect of the Law on this community, associated with the Law's full recognition of individuals' identities that are perceived by transgender women as the acceptance of their existence. In this sense, the Law is deemed as progress that challenges the previous lack of civil rights. This empowering effect also mediated other positive outcomes both at the subjective and individual level (identity pride, visibility, reduced internalized stigma, etc.) and at the social and institutional level (improvements in education, work, security and civil rights, healthcare access and quality of life in general). However, some regional differences and persisting barriers were identified.

In accordance with previous studies (Aristegui & Vazquez, 2013; Winter et al., 2016), it was found that the inadequate legal recognition of citizens' gender identity or the complete lack of it, largely contributed to the transgender population's frequent S&D and invisibility, which have impeded their access to basic human rights (Byrne, 2014; Lo & Horton, 2016; PAHO, 2013; Rhodes et al., 2005). Fortunately, the new Law in Argentina has introduced several changes, mainly increasing transgender women's access to education, work, and health services as well as an expansion of civil and political rights. Even though S&D related to gender identity persists in almost all domains, positive changes and improvements were described by participants one year after the Law's enactment. Consequently, an overall current and future improvement in quality of life can be inferred. Consistent with what is suggested by Winter et al. (2016), it was found that laws play an important part in ensuring social inclusion, with consequent effects on quality of life of transgender women.

The Law has had a positive impact in two different but complementary ways. The first, and more tangible one, is by directly facilitating people's endorsement of civil rights and access to institutions by legally recognizing their identities in official documents. The second, and broader one, is the impact of the Law on the macro-environment, by making gender identity issues socially visible and, thus, initiating a process of cultural change. In line with scholars' expectations (Bockting et al., 2013; Lo & Horton, 2016; Reisner et al., 2016; Winter et al., 2016), this Law has created a social atmosphere of higher acceptance, limiting discrimination, dismantling social prejudices, and reducing stigmatization. This, in turn, facilitates access to basic needs and in a more indirect way, improves their quality of life.

Interestingly, the most important and major impact of the Law in transgender women's lives can be identified at the subjective and individual level. The legal recognition of their gender identities promoted a collective and individual empowerment against S&D. Such empowerment provides an increased sense of control over the micro- (family, neighborhood, local institutions) and macro-environment (social, political and cultural level). The sense of control is associated with psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), as well as with increases in self-esteem and a decrease in internalized stigma. As Bockting et al. (2013) found, self-acceptance and pride of identity act as protective factors that moderate the relationship between feeling stigma and psychological distress. Additionally, by supporting transgender people's rights, the Law can also favorably impact on their significant others, such as family, friends and allies (SOFFAs), who may also experience S&D owing to their relationship with a transgender person. Greater recognition and visibility of transgender people leads SOFFAs to experience fewer situations of S&D which, in turn, helps to increase acceptance and social support of their transgender loved ones (Whitley, 2013).

With the Law's enactment, transgender individuals may no longer live with an incessant fear of discriminating situations, but rather seek novel opportunities and ways to

exercise their new rights. In this sense, it might be expected that the perceived reduction of S&D due to gender identity may be more an effect of the new subjective position to cope with those situations as well as the individual and collective empowerment rather than a deep change in society and civil institutions, which may take longer to occur. As an immediate effect of the Law, transgender women feel they can count on a new tool to face, control and overcome S&D situations and reduce their negative impact.

Nevertheless, some internal and external obstacles to the Law's full implementation could be identified. Among the internal and more subjective barriers, age and self-stigmatization were mainly mentioned by participants. Some transgender women may be reluctant to embrace full identity change after a whole life of using a different identity for public and institutional purposes. Likewise, others may tend to reduce visibility to adapt to other people's demands and thus, preserve their access to basic rights, like housing or employment. Although the Law has had a strong empowering effect, self-stigmatization or internalized stigma may persist, especially among individuals with a long background of social rejection and discrimination.

Among the external obstacles to the full implementation of the new Law, cultural, social and institutional aspects were mentioned. One of the first barriers to consider is related to applicability and jurisdictions: while the Law is national, the civil registries in charge of modifying birth certificates and issuing new identity cards, as well as most health and educational services, are provincial. As conservative-minded governmental people from distant provinces may be less collaborative or enthusiastic, and even reluctant to modify their civil registry procedures and educational and healthcare services according to national demands, profound differences among regions and provinces were identified in the implementation. Additionally, although many healthcare services are willing to enforce the Law, there is a lack of trained professionals to perform gender-affirmative procedures like specific surgeries and hormonal therapy. As stated by Winter et al. (2016), this is one of the main obstacles for the access to healthcare, highlighting the need for integrating knowledge of transgender issues in the training of all health care providers. Similar results were observed in educational institutions. Besides the willingness of teachers, professors and principals to endorse the new Law in their settings, there is a strong need for training in gender identity issues to obtain a better inclusion of the transgender population in the educational system. In conclusion, as noted by experts previously, the mere enactment of the Law does not guarantee social change by itself. It simply prepares the ground so that more profound and necessary changes can be realized (PAHO, 2013). In this sense, further actions are required to make implementation of the Law and social change effective.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of the study has inherent weaknesses. Firstly, the results cannot be generalized to transgender populations living in other contexts and countries. The Law, itself, is a limitation to generalization. Quite a few countries in the world have laws providing for gender recognition, but very few laws are as progressive as the Argentinean one. Even among those which are, significant differences such as administrative, medical or judicial requirements and approvals can be detected, implying variations in implementation and impact on populations. Secondly, the sample was self-selected and relatively small, consisting entirely of transgender women that worked as activists in a single organization. Therefore, opinions may not reflect the perceptions and experiences of the Argentinean transgender population

as a whole. Transgender people with less social visibility, or who never attended a group or organization, may have a different perception. Furthermore, conclusions cannot be drawn about the experiences of transgender men as the number of male participants was not significant to be included. This fact may depict the lack of visibility of transgender men, even within the transgender organizations, which is an issue that should be addressed in future research. Nonetheless, as local representatives, participants may have a broader view of the situation of transgender communities in each province and thus, they may be considered key informants who provide insight into how the transgender population might perceive the changes introduced by the Law, as well as the barriers encountered. Thirdly, because the focus groups were conducted only one year after the Law's enactment, participants' perceptions may have been overly optimistic as an immediate effect of its enactment. The cross-sectional nature of this study does not allow assessment as to whether the current optimism, hope and empowerment can be considered a long-lasting effect of the Law or these effects are just an ephemeral immediate impact, which may dilute with the passing of time.

The aforementioned weaknesses simultaneously indicate the direction of future studies. It is important to monitor the Law's impact to determine whether these results are sustainable and long-lasting. A longitudinal study would detect the direction of any changes, progress and future barriers in the implementation. Studies should also combine qualitative and quantitative methodology to compensate the shortcomings of each methodology. Future research should also consider expanding the sample size and making it more representative through the inclusion of participants with more diverse backgrounds and occupations. Moreover, it is particularly relevant to include a significant number of transgender men to explore their particular experiences and to make a contribution to reduce their lack of visibility. It would also be beneficial to conduct cross-cultural comparisons, either with countries having similar laws and/or with cultures where transgender people also lack access to basic human rights.

Contributions and recommendations

The primary strength of the current study includes its originality and applicability, as it can be used by lawmakers, experts and community leaders for the development of similar laws in other countries. This is the first study to monitor the advances and difficulties perceived after the enactment of the Gender Identity Law in Argentina, an imperative aspect for evaluating new social legislation. The study provides an objective and concrete way to observe the Law's successes and potential shortcomings. On a similar note, this research employs a sample that included national representation, reflecting variations in opinions due to geographical reasons. As a whole, the study provides a unique perspective on transgender women's experiences. While previous studies have primarily focused on public health, the prevalence of HIV, or satisfaction with hormone treatments or gender-affirmative surgeries, the current study maintained a social perspective focusing on everyday experiences and the quality of life of transgender women.

Even though the Law produced immediate positive changes (modifications in identity cards were rapidly and robustly implemented, for example) deeper social changes are still needed. For instance, although police harassment towards transgender women decreased since the enactment of the Law, a change in police officers' attitude and acceptance of transgender people cannot be inferred. Therefore, future actions to ensure the effectiveness of the Law are needed. In this sense, training of public servants and professionals on transgender issues

should be increased. Such action would reduce stigmatizing attitudes that still persist, as well as frequent questions related to the effectiveness of putting the Law into practice. Information and training should be distributed equally to reduce regional disparities. Furthermore, specific groups, such as children, adolescents and their families, would benefit from greater guidance. Additionally, the inclusion of psychological support and guidance in gender-affirmative services, although not as a requirement to access procedures is recommended.

The addition of the Gender Identity Law to the already existing legal framework on sexual diversity issues strengthens Argentina's position as an international leader in the promotion of sexual diversity rights. However, despite its contribution and its highly progressive spirit, this Law also has shortcomings that require future considerations, especially for lawmakers contemplating similar laws. Firstly, the administrative processes for specific groups, like foreigners who reside in the country, should be clarified before implementation, as they cannot amend their birth certificates in their country of origin. Although the Law guarantees the continuity of civil rights and obligations, some enquiries might arise around topics and entitlements such as age of retirement (would it be based on sex at birth or on gender identity?; should a minimum of years living with a new identity be required?). Secondly, a concrete and detailed plan of action should be developed simultaneously with the proposal of laws of this kind. Specific and progressive steps of implementation might help to increase the feasibility of the full enactment of the law, particularly on issues such as access to comprehensive healthcare for transgender people.

Conclusion

Transgender women consistently agree on perceiving a general positive impact of the Gender Identity Law on their lives and holding an optimistic view regarding future outcomes. These results reveal a major empowering effect of the Law on these women associated with the full recognition of individuals' identities and the acceptance of their existence. This empowering effect also mediated other positive outcomes both at the subjective and individual level (pride of identity, visibility, reduced internalized stigma, etc.) and the social and institutional level (improvements in education, work, security and civil rights, healthcare access and quality of life in general). However, some barriers to implementation were identified that are both internal (age, self-stigmatization) and external (persisting transphobia, lack of trained professionals, regional disparities in implementation). In this sense, despite the optimism and hopefulness following the Law's enactment, there is still a long way ahead in order to achieve its full implementation.

Chapter 3

Resources to Cope with Stigma Related to HIV Status, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Gay Men and Transgender Women

Aristegui, I., Radusky, P.D., Zalazar, V., Lucas, M. & Sued, O. (2018). Resources to cope with stigma related to HIV status, gender identity and sexual orientation in gay men and transgender women. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(2), 320-331. doi: 10.1177/1359105317736782

Abstract

The stigma related to HIV status, gender identity, and sexual orientation has negative implications for the quality of life of individuals. A qualitative study was conducted to explore the resources that these stigmatized groups recognize as tools to cope with stigma and maintain their psychological wellbeing. Four focus groups were conducted with gay men and transgender women divided by HIV status. A thematic analysis revealed that individual, interpersonal, and institutional resources are commonly recognized as coping resources. This article discusses the importance of enhancing selfacceptance, social support, and a legal framework that legitimizes these groups as right holders.

Keywords: coping strategies, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender, psychological well-being, stigma and discrimination

Stigma is the co-occurrence of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination in a power situation that allows these components to unfold (Link & Phelan, 2001). This process is based on the existence of an attribute that is socially perceived as less valued, and produces an identity that degrades the person who possesses it (Goffman, 1963). The stigmatization can result in acts of discrimination, that is, the unfair treatment of a person based on their membership, or perceived membership, to a particular group (Petracci & Romeo, 2011). As stigma and discrimination are social processes, they are reflected on individual, interpersonal and institutional levels (Corrigan, Markowitz, Watson, Rowan, & Kubiak, 2003). When individuals internalize the disparaging social attitudes, they might be psychologically and socially affected (Earnshaw, Smith, Cunningham, & Copenhaver, 2015; Livingston & Boyd, 2010; Molina & Ramirez-Valles, 2013). This internalized stigma can generate feelings of shame, disability and guilt, and/or the anticipation of negative social reactions that lead to maladaptive behaviors, such as self-exclusion (Simbayi et al., 2007). Thus, internalized stigma might threaten some of the fundamental human needs, such as sense of belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Crocker, 1999; Jeffries et al., 2015; Williams, 2007). Again, internalized stigma is a possible consequence of social stigma, thus, it should not be considered merely as a problem of the affected individual, nor a denial or minimization of the current stigma present in the broader society (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013).

In Argentina, being a gay man or transgender woman is a highly stigmatized attribute (Pecheny, 2008). As these populations are particularly vulnerable to HIV, having the highest prevalence rate (Argentine Ministry of Health, 2015), and HIV-related stigma derives from a pre-existing structure of prejudices related to sexual orientation, gender identity and promiscuity (Pecheny, 2008), the association of HIV with these previous stigmatized identities might maximize the stigmatization. This has been conceptualized as layered or compound stigma (Earnshaw et al., 2015). Consequently, the knowledge or assumption of an HIV-diagnosis arouses prejudices against the affected persons, generating social disapproval associated with those prejudices (Chambers et al., 2015).

The resulting interaction between the HIV diagnosis and the previously stigmatized identities can be analyzed within the intersectionality theory framework. In this sense, HIV related stigma is a negative outcome that does not represent the simple addition of identities or social positions but rather, the particular interaction between them (Bauer, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989; Hancock, 2007). This layered or compound stigma is one of the main reasons why HIV-related stigma is still that strong in many countries (Earnshaw, Smith, Chaudoir, Amico, & Copenhaver, 2013; Earnshaw et al., 2015).

A study conducted in Argentina with 1,200 people with HIV revealed that the vast majority (94%) had experienced a situation, feeling or attitude colored by stigma, but mostly internalized stigma (Petracci & Romeo, 2011). In this way, the HIV-related stigma constitutes a factor of social vulnerability. However, it affects in a distinct way to subgroups of people who are members of other stigmatized populations. For instance, in comparison to a general sample of HIV people, the intensity of the stigmatization experienced by transgender women was much higher, as it was possible to predict from an intersectionality theory point of view.

Stigma has a direct negative effect on social well-being (Fundacion Huesped, 2012; Logie & Gadalla, 2009). People belonging to stigmatized groups are often victims of acts of discrimination, ranging from gossiping and teasing to threats and physical aggression. Particularly, in transgender women, stigma and discrimination lead to poverty and social

exclusion. Consequently, stigmatized people can also adopt behaviors of selfdiscrimination, such as excluding themselves from social situations or giving up personal projects (Aristegui & Vazquez, 2013; Fundacion Huesped, 2012; Socias et al., 2014).

In recent years, there is an increasing tendency to investigate personal resources that promote people's potential for better health (Castro Solano, 2010). This movement emphasizes the study of the factors that explain individual differences in the capacity to constructively cope with adversity and to overcome it resiliently (Antonovsky, 1988; Bonanno, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmyhalyi, 2000). The most recent approaches conceptualize resilience as a relatively stable trajectory of healthy functioning and positive adaptation that an individual managed to maintain after having experienced an extreme adversity (Bonanno, 2012, p.755). This approach differs from others that conceive resilience as the process of adapting successfully after trauma (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003) or as a set of personality traits (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

In any case, resilience is associated to positive health outcomes. Specifically, in relation to HIV, resilience was positively associated with increased odds of having undetectable viral loads and higher levels of adherence to treatment in a study of 138 women living with HIV (Dale et al., 2014a; Dale et al., 2014b). On the other hand, the association between resilience and psychological functioning and well-being is also well documented (Bonanno, 2004), particularly among sexual minority groups (Herek & Garnets, 2007).

Psychological well-being is understood as a result of one's cognitive and emotional assessment of one's life "as a whole", and therefore, far more than the merely sum of positive emotions (Ryff, 1989). Researches have consistently showed that several psychological and social factors promote resilience and well-being. For instance, finding meaning and purpose in life (Bonanno, 2004; Park, 2013; Ryff, 1989); having sense of control over one's environment and future outcomes; counting with quality social support; experiencing positive emotions, optimism and sense of humor (Bonanno, 2004; Ryff, 1989), among others.

Resilience is not only one of the possible trajectories following adversity, but is also the most common one (Bonanno, 2004). In this sense, Herek and Garnets (2007) highlight that most non-heterosexual people cope successfully with the stress of stigma and do not show high levels of depression, anxiety, suicidality and/or substance abuse. In the same way, Saewyc (2011) noted that most LGBT adolescents achieve similar levels of health and well-being than their heterosexual peers, despite the stigma and discrimination they face. These important findings emphasize the relevance of exploring how LBGT individuals positively cope with stigma and thrive as well as which are the protective factors against it.

Shih (2004) notes that stigmatized individuals have resources to handle stigma, seen as a chronic stressor, and these resources help them develop resilience. Meyer (2003) indicated that sexual minority individuals draw on personal and group resources in order to cope with stigma and minority stress. In this line, previous studies have shown that some indicators of resilience, such as family and peer support, identity pride, and self-acceptance, are protective factors that moderate the impact of enacted and perceived stigma and reduce psychological distress in transgender populations (Bockting et al., 2013). Similar results were found for gay men and lesbian women. Supportive relationships with family and friends, connection and affiliation to the LGBT community, sexual minority identity and disclosure of one's sexual orientation to others proved to be protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of stigma for these groups (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Saewyc, 2011). Therefore,

working with situations of stigma and discrimination is not only about identifying risk factors, but also about recognizing the individual and collective abilities to cope with these situations and follow a resilient trajectory.

Thus, this study aimed to examine the resources that stigmatized groups – people with HIV, gay men and transgender women – recognize as tools to cope with situations of stigma and discrimination and to sustain their levels of psychological well-being.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 35 individuals: 18 gay men (Gay) and 17 transgender women (Trans), with age ranging from 18 to 63 years. Participants were recruited through LGBT organizations. The majority of the transgender participants were activists, whereas the gay men were members of peer support groups and not all of them openly expressed their sexual orientation. Gay men were residents of the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires City, whereas transgender women represented different regions of the country.

Procedure

Qualitative methodology was selected to uncover and achieve a deep understanding of the feelings and interpretations that participants have about their own experiences of stigma and discrimination and the resources to face such situations in daily life (Leninger, 2003). Participants were divided into four focus groups based on their stigmatized attribute and their HIV status (gay men HIV+, gay men HIV-, transgender women HIV + and transgender women HIV-). The focus groups were conducted in Spanish in June 2011. Each group was led by coordinator and an observer, and the duration was about two hours.

These groups were part of a larger study that aimed to explore the experiences of stigma and discrimination related to gender identity and sexual orientation and the differential effect of adding HIV as another stigmatized attribute. A guide with exploring questions around four main topics was developed to conduct the focus groups. One of the themes included in that instrument particularly explored the resources or tools that participants perceived they counted with in order to cope with stigma and discrimination. The data analyzed and shown in this article was obtained from the answers to the questions from that specific topic.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Fundacion Huesped. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the information provided. Participation was voluntary and approximately a US\$10 (about \$150 in local currency) were given, as reimbursement of transportation expenses. Signed informed consent was obtained in order to participate and to allow the session to be recorded. Confidentiality and anonymity of collected data was guaranteed to participants and specific procedures were implemented. The importance to respect confidentiality was explained to group members at the beginning of each session. Participants were allowed to use pseudonyms and the names mentioned during the discussion were changed in transcripts in order to protect their identities. The procedures implemented to guarantee confidentiality during the analyses were explained explicitly and in detail.

Data analysis

Recordings were transcribed and a thematic content analysis of the transcripts and the observers' notes was conducted. Firstly, three members of the research team, two psychologists and one social worker, read the verbatim transcripts and coded them independently. The categories, generated by each coder, were compared and new categories or themes were created. Secondly, as these resulting categories were found to be consistent with Ryff's (1989) theory of well-being, themes were labelled based on the dimensions of that theoretical framework (Figure 1 shows the themes obtained in the analysis). Finally, a coding manual was developed and applied to revise the verbatim for a final adjustment. Bilingual researchers translated the selected fragments for the manuscript, which were reviewed by a native English speaker.

RESULTS

Regardless of the stigmatized attribute, whether gay, trans or HIV+, all the groups evaluated similar resources to cope with stigma and discrimination in a resilient manner. Therefore, results are presented according to the different levels on which these processes operate: individual, interpersonal, and institutional (refer to Figure 1 for a description).

Figure 1.

Levels of Stigma & Discrimination, Identified Resources to Cope with it and their Effects on Dimensions of well-being

Individual processes

Acceptance of oneself is mentioned as a principal resource and the first step towards coping with stigma and discrimination, particularly internalized stigma. It is described as process that involves “removing the drama” and “not remaining in the role of the victim”, which requires time and is realized “from the inside out.”

“When one learns [that has HIV] one must go through a process... because if one doesn’t accept oneself, it is difficult to be accepted by others...” (gay +)

Assuming sexual identity also has a liberating effect that allow people to take control over their lives as they truly are and to continue with their personal growth, changing lives significantly and increasing self-confidence: “it eases the emotional burden...of having to pretend.”

“The acceptance of a gay man who is HIV+ is a double work, coming out of the closet saying “I am gay” and afterwards, coming out of the closet saying “I am positive, I am infected” ..But it’s liberating...a heavy load was lifted from me...” (Gay+)

For some participants, self-acceptance begun after they experience the feeling of “hitting rock bottom.” Reaching this extreme situation, or the fear that one could arrive there, awakens the need to look for new resources, take control over one’s life and feel competent. In this way, it constitutes an opportunity for thinking about a future purpose and finding meaning in life.

“I don’t want to end up with AIDS at age 40...(or) an alcoholic, drug addict...I have seen it in others that are older than I. Thus, I started to do other things” (Trans-)

Interpersonal processes

Participants described that, once they had accepted themselves with their stigmatized attributes, the power of sharing it with their loved ones and significant others, and being accepted by them, helped them rise above suffering and feel better.

“I had the luck of always having my mother’s support...when you have your family backing you up, it already seems like you have a higher degree of recognition as a person” (Trans+)

Acceptance by a third party seems to contribute to the generation of a greater sense of self-confidence and provides strength to continue forward with personal projects.

“What does help me to endure stigma? ... when they recognized me... at school when the teacher looked for me on the students list, and said ‘...so, you are called with a different name, right?’ ...’Yes, Carolina’ I answered and the teacher said ‘good, for me you are Carolina then’ ..he helps me to feel proud...(and with) the desire to keep studying” (Trans-)

Peer groups and self-help networks appeared in all groups as other resources to cope with stigma and to generate feelings of well-being. They also provide a space for modelling, for a “vicarious learning” - the nurturing power of the experiences and knowledge of others - whether to learn what life is like with HIV or how to defend one’s rights as a citizen.

Particularly, for people with HIV, knowing another person in the same situation has a psycho-educational role in their lives. Firstly, it helps them sharing reliable information about the disease and knowing how other people, who have been under treatment for years and are in good health, live. Secondly, it also helps them by facing the stigma itself and starting to overturn prejudices surrounding HIV.

“...I was barely diagnosed when I started to meet people that were also infected...and they said to me, don’t worry about it ...those very simple things...they give you the spark of life that, in that moment, you do not have.” (Gay+)

For a large number of participants, activism has been a resource for moving forward, as the identification with a collective – a group of belonging – and the fight for the group rights has helped them to develop a sense of self-competence, usefulness, and provided purpose in life.

“[activism helped] to grow, I feel that I can not only fight for myself, but also for others ... I believe that it helped me to realize that I am a person that has capabilities, when I thought that I was only a homemaker...” (Trans-)

In this line, some people mentioned that they started to “have meaning in life,” thereby generating a strong commitment not only with themselves but also a “social commitment”, a need to help others, to “pass on information,” to prevent that “the same (things) happens to another,” and “to pave the way for the younger generations.”

“I am going to work for people that come after me, so they don’t go through the same situations I am going through, or live what I am living and I have still to live” (Trans+)

In particular, activism in the transgender community allowed them to achieve a new social status, a possibility of growing and attaining a formal job recognized by society, such as a political official in government organizations. This social ranking becomes a means for being respected and listened to, thus generating the chance of social inclusion.

“As if activism was the doctrine of life that would allow you to carry on after receiving the diagnosis...and today look at where we are...many of us working at INADI (National Institute Against Discrimination), we are public servants, we defend our peers...” (Trans+)

Public visibility seems to be a valuable resource for reducing stigma and discrimination, as it gives others the chance to learn about members of vulnerable groups’ pasts and current

lives and dismantles stereotypes. Enhancing visibility creates an environment where “the other stops making comments”.

For the members of the gay and transgender communities, increasing visibility on public debates and mass media has played a major role in the construction of social and cultural changes.

“There were cultural changes...mass media informing about gay people situation and gay individuals showing themselves as they really are, ...in this way, they were accepted in a distinct manner...gays weren’t scared of being visible.” (Gay+)

“Current families are more accepting of young transgender women. It is because we are coming out more...we are going out into the streets during the day.” (Trans-)

Institutional and contextual processes

Socio-political changes have a fundamental role in limiting discrimination, overturning and dismantling social prejudices, and reducing stigmatization. The legislative framework empowers people as subjects of the law, thereby increasing their feeling of control of the context.

In the case of the gay community, the advances achieved by laws such as the “same-sex marriage” enacted in Argentina in 2010, have been changing the situation of this group from “highly stigmatized” to citizens that exercises their rights to the fullest. Legislation, as well as social debates that emerge around it, contribute extensively to the reduction of the situations of stigma and discrimination.

“...now, it seems to me that it was good, because [the debate about the law] brought a lot of issues to the surface...it made people reconsider their opinions.” (Gay-)

In particular, the Gender Identity Law passed in Argentina in 2012– that enables people to live according to their gender identity and have identification documents according to it - was for the transgender community the recognition of their existence. This law rises as the foundation for thinking social policies as a response to people’s needs, to guarantee them the exercise their rights and to gain full citizenship. That is, the opportunity to improve their lives conditions by satisfying basic needs, such as access to education, health care, employment, and housing, among others.

“The recognition of our transgender identity, that our documents change our name and gender, is not going to take away the stigmatization and discrimination, but it will give us legal recognition so that we can say who we really are.” (Trans+)

DISCUSSION

The objective of this article was to explore the resources that people belonging to stigmatized groups recognize as tools to resiliently cope with situations of stigma and discrimination and to maintain a general sense of psychological well-being. Some theoretical frameworks, such as the intersectionality theory, predict that the possession of more than one stigmatized attribute maximizes the possibility of negative outcomes, as they interact (Crenshaw, 1989; Earnshaw et al., 2015). In line with salutogenic or positive psychology approaches (Antonovsky, 1988; Castro Solano, 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), participants have resources and protective factors for coping resiliently with stigma in their daily lives. This is also in line with Bonanno's (2004) recent approach which states that resilience is actually the most common trajectory following adversity. In this sense, it is not entirely surprising that participants displayed a variety of positive resources to successfully deal with the stress of stigma.

No matter the associated stigma – HIV, gay man, or transgender woman – all the groups in this study mentioned personal (e.g., such as self-acceptance); interpersonal (e.g., networks of social support), and institutional (e.g., socio-political changes) processes. The resources most frequently mentioned were consistent with the multidimensional model of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) that emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance; the ability to have control over situations; the quality of psychosocial bonds; and the importance of having projects in life.

At the personal level, self-acceptance was described as the first step for coping with stigmatization, as a liberating process that helps to avoid situations of self-exclusion and to increase the feeling of control that one has over life and personal projects. For some people, the process starts with the feeling that everything could be lost; for others, with the need to stop hiding part of themselves in order to avoid being rejected. To feel safe and a sense of coherence with themselves creates a state of satisfaction or general wellbeing that impacts the ability that people have to resolve problems (Livingston & Boyd, 2010; Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

Regarding interpersonal processes, social support networks are the fundamental pillar for confronting stigma both internally and externally. As reported for other stigmatized identities (Weisz, Quinn, & Williams, 2016), higher levels of outness may boost the health benefits of social support in gay men and transgender women, living or not with HIV. Acceptance by significant others, such as family and friends – after sharing an HIV diagnosis or revealing one's true self – allows people to recapture a feeling of selfconfidence and control over their lives, and therefore, to continue with personal projects and goals (Baiocco et al., 2016). As known, human beings need to be accepted by others, belong to a group, and have affectionate and pleasant exchanges with other people in a context of stability (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007).

In the same vein, identification with a group to which one belongs – whether transgender women, gays, or people with HIV – and the possibility of being part of a network of peers facilitate the construction of one's social identity. This identification helps to diminish the impact that perceived stigma and discrimination has on one's psychological well-being (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). Likewise, peer groups create a psycho-educational space to learn coping strategies from peers, to continue with the process of self-acceptance, and to establish positive ties with others. Having goals to work towards and working for and with others – through peer groups and activism – make possible to find collective responses to situations of stigma (Schmitt et al., 2003) and to add meaning to one's life, a fundamental

resource for coping with stigmatization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007). In congruence with previous studies that showed that family and peer support and identity pride were protective factors against psychological distress in transgender people, these resources emerge as factors of resilience in the present study (Bockting et al., 2013).

At the contextual level, the influence that social and cultural changes have on individuals' psychological well-being and how it is perceived as a resource to cope with stigma have been observed. As argued, stigma hinges upon the shared meanings in a particular historical moment and cultural context (Link & Phelan, 2001). In particular, the legislative framework, such as the Equal Marriage Law (Law N° 26,618, 2010) and the Gender Identity Law (Law N° 26,743, 2012), plays a pivotal role in legitimizing or breaking down prejudices, limiting discrimination, and decreasing stigmatization. Furthermore, by recognizing civil rights, the legislative framework empowers people, increasing the feeling of control over one's circumstances and reducing the instances of social exclusion or self-exclusion (Aristegui et al., 2017).

This study has inherent weaknesses and limitations. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, results cannot be generalized to other contexts, as the samples of gay men and transgender women may not be representative of their own populations as a whole. On the other hand, the fact that participants were out and visible may limit the generalizability of results to members of the community who have not achieved full selfacceptance and visibility yet. Particularly, given that these two latter factors actually work as resources to successfully cope with stigma according to participants' narratives. A longitudinal study that explores coping with stigma before and after acceptance of oneself and disclosure to significant others would make an interesting contribution to understand the role of these two factors as resources.

Additionally, only the transgender sample included representatives from different regions of the country, even though they all belonged to the same organization. The sample of gay men was limited to participants living in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires. In this sense, their experiences may not reflect those of gay men living in other regions of the country, which may be more conservative and less tolerant with sexual diversity than the capital city area.

Secondly, this study explored the effect on stigma of institutional and cultural processes, which involve a legal framework that is specific to our local context. At the time of this study, a series of changes promoting the rights of the LGBT community in Argentina, were already in process. The Equal Marriage Law (2010), which extends marriage and adoption rights to same-sex couples, had already been enacted; and the Gender Identity Law, which recognizes the right to a self-defined gender identity, was already being a focus of debate at that moment (this Law N° 26,743, was enacted in 2012). This legal framework limits the comparison with other countries as well as the generalizability of these results. Nevertheless, results can be regarded as evidence of the important role that legal changes have on promoting individual and social changes. Particularly, public policies can have an impact at two levels: at the individual level, they directly empower individuals and thus, promote abilities to cope with stigma and discrimination. At the social and institutional level, policies draw social attention to these populations, making them and their needs visible and tangible for the rest of the society (Aristegui et al., 2017).

Despite these limitations, these results show the importance of fostering investigations that continue exploring the resources that people have, both individually and in groups, for coping with adverse situations and for maintaining a high quality of life, from the perspective of positive psychology. Interventions and public policies that guarantee basic human rights to gay men

and transgender women can benefit from these results. This study provides further evidence on how legal changes positively impact people's lives as they have a fundamental role in limiting discrimination, dismantling social prejudices, and reducing stigmatization (Aristegui et al., 2017).

For instance, the Gender Identity Law entailing official recognition of transgender people's existence, serves a precondition for visibility and inclusion. Thus, a more inclusive legal framework can have a positive impact on society in general, promoting a propitious environment for the implementation of stigma reduction programs at a social level. Higher visibility and outness, on the other hand, can lead to positive outcomes in different ways. Firstly, it allows heterosexual and cisgender people to perceive and take into account the attributes of the individual over those of the group he or she belongs to. This can lead to dismantle stereotypes and prejudice in general population, breaking the cycle of stigma and promoting positive social change. Secondly, one's individual visibility, as an activist, for example, serves as a positive role model to others who are also stigmatized, helping them in their path to self-acceptance. Therefore, results from this study suggest that interventions based on peer groups methodology may be particularly effective, even more than individual psychotherapeutic interventions. Peer groups seem to have a double function. They provide support, a sense of belonging and they give the opportunity for vicarious learning. Members serve as role models for others and the experiences they share can be seen by others as examples on how to cope with specific situations. Groups also provide a sense of meaning in life as members tend to feel they can help others by sharing their experience. Future research would make a great contribution by exploring whether group over individual strategies, are more effective to promote resources to cope with stigma. Nevertheless, this kind of interventions focused on stigmatized individuals should be complemented with broader interventions that aim to reduce stigma in the social environment. Given that the cycle of stigma begins with actual stigmatizing situations in the social context, stigma reduction interventions oriented towards general population, should not be abandoned or underestimated. Among these, those which provide training and information to public servants, health and education workers, are particularly important, as they are a fundamental link to facilitate the access of transgender women and gay men to basic human rights.

Conclusion

In summary, resources to cope with stigma were identified in gay men and transgender women, according to Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being: acceptance of oneself and of significant others; participation in peer groups and activism; and, legal, cultural and political changes. Results suggest that programs, interventions and public policies designed to reduce stigma should consider and enhance the resources that stigmatized populations possess to cope with stigmatization and successfully achieve psychological well-being.

Chapter 4

Mate Preferences in Argentinean Transgender People: An Evolutionary Perspective

Aristegui, I., Castro Solano, A., & Buunk, A.P. (2018). Mate preferences in Argentinean transgender people: An evolutionary perspective. *Personal Relationships*, 25(3), 299-458. doi: 10.1111/pere.12247

Abstract

Transgender people provide a unique opportunity to examine the effect of biological sex versus gender identity on mating preferences. This study aimed at identifying the mate characteristics that are most and least valued by transgender people and at examining to what extent their biological sex or their gender identity determined their mate preferences. A convenience sample of 134 transgender women and 94 transgender men from Argentina rated Buss's list of 18 mate attributes. Compared to transgender men, transgender women placed significantly more emphasis on attractiveness and socioeconomic status, whereas transgender men, more than transgender women, valued partners with a dependable character. Although biological sex differences were present in both groups, providing support to the evolutionary theory, transgender women valued the same characteristics as both biological male and female individuals do.

Keywords: Argentina, evolutionary psychology, gender identity, sex differences, mate preferences, transgender

In recent years, an increasing number of transgender people have been willing to identify themselves openly as such. Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity—the sense of themselves as male or female - or whose gender expression differs from that usually associated with their sex at birth, regardless of which, if any, medical interventions they have undergone or may desire in the future (APA, 2009). Research among transgender people has mainly been conducted in the field of public health, particularly on HIV (e.g., De Santis, 2009; Socias et al., 2014). From a psychological perspective, studies have centered on psychiatric assessments before and after medical interventions for sex reassignment (e.g., WPATH, 2011), and on topics such as stigma and discrimination (e.g., Bockting et al., 2013; Mizock & Mueser, 2014). Consequently, very little is known about this minority group on topics such as personal relationships and intimacy (APA, 2009; Operario, Buron, Underhill, & Sevelius, 2008).

Given that the gender identity of transgender persons is different from their biological sex (APA, 2009), and that most transgender people have partners of the opposite gender identity but same biological sex (Fundacion Huesped, 2014; Operario et al., 2008), this population provides a unique opportunity to examine aspects of mating, such as the effect of biological sex versus the effect of gender identity on mating preferences, and to understand whether mate preferences vary as a function of one's sex or the preferred partner's sex. Therefore, this research studied transgender people's mate preferences and examined to what extent one's biological sex or one's gender identity determines one's mate preferences.

Evolutionary psychology and mate preferences

Although Darwin (1871) suggested in theory of sexual selection, the issue of discriminative choice of mating partners, this issue has only been widely explored in the past decades. According to most evolutionary psychologists, reproductive success in the evolutionary past may be the force behind many sex differences in mate selection strategies (Buss, 1989; Symons, 1979). These evolved mate choice strategies are assumed to result from individuals choosing mates who might contribute to their reproductive success by bearing and rearing viable offspring, as apparent from these mates' potential level of parental investment (Trivers, 1972); and reproductive potential (Geary, Vigil, & Byrd-Craven, 2004). As a result, men and women tend to use different sexual strategies and to value different characteristics in potential mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

As female fertility peaks in their mid-20s and sharply declines in their 30s, and women need to invest more time and effort to produce viable offspring, such as their own bodily nutrients, men would prefer young and physically attractive partners as these characteristics would indicate fertility and the opportunity to maximize one's reproductive potential (Buss, 2005; Geary et al., 2004; Symons, 1979; Trivers, 1972). In contrast, as a male's fertility declines at a slower rate across the life span, there is less pressure for women to select partners with youthful features, and women would be more likely to prefer men with the ability to provide indirect resources for the survival of their offspring, such as food and protection, favoring features related to social status and ambition.

In the past decades, cross-cultural studies have indeed provided evidence for the universality of such sex differences (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005; Ubillos et al., 2001). Although the assessments of ideal mate characteristics have shown that men and women rate, in a similar order preferences such as mutual love and personality dispositions like a dependable character and a pleasing disposition, these studies have also consistently revealed two key sex differences: Men, more than women,

value physical attractiveness, youth and health for potential partners. On the other hand, women prefer, more than men, attributes related to a partner's resources – for example, financial prospects, ambition, industriousness, social status, and power – and to a mate's character traits – such as, emotional stability, maturity, education, and intelligence. The relative importance of attractiveness for men and status for women has been shown to apply to various populations and replicated in many countries and cultures, including Argentina (Casullo, 2004), Brazil (Souza, Conroy-Beam, & Buss, 2016), China (Chang, Wang, Shackelford, & Buss, 2011), Jordan (Khallad, 2005); Netherlands (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Ha, van den Berg, Engels, & Lichtwarck-Aschoff, 2012); Portugal (Neto, Pinto, & Furnham, 2012); Serbia (Todosijević, Ljubinković, & Arančić, 2003); Spain (Ubillos et al., 2001); and Russia (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995).

Although male and female differences in mating psychology have been traditionally explained from an evolutionary perspective as the result of physical specialization of the sexes (Buss et al., 1990; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Geary et al., 2004), sociocultural theorists argue that many of these sex differences and variation in the importance placed on some partner preferences are the result of the economic and social structural aspects of societies, as well as sex role socialization process (for a review see Buss & Barnes, 1986; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Wood & Eagly, 2002). For instance, in countries with a high socioeconomic development, individuals tend to place more importance on features such as attractiveness, trust and sociability, whereas in countries with low socioeconomic development people tend to value attributes such as social status and good health more (Ubillos et al., 2001). Moreover, the value that women place on men's capability for emotional intimacy and kindness have been considered by some authors as luxuries rather than necessities as these preferences are more frequent in affluent Western cultures than in poorer and traditional cultures (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002).

Despite the sex differences in mate preferences, researchers have consistently found that when it comes to long-term relationships, men and women generally agree on which characteristics are the most important in desirable partners: love, trust, emotional maturity, and sociability (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Khallad, 2005; Shackelford et al., 2005; Todosijević et al., 2003; Ubillos et al., 2001). Perhaps these characteristics are highly valued as they serve as cues for future investment in committed relationships. In addition, the studies cited here also showed that attributes such as chastity and similar religious and politic opinions are the least sought in a potential mate, likely because these traits do not feature a potential mate's reproductive or relationship investment capabilities.

Gays and lesbians

Given that gay and lesbian people seek partners of their same sex, the study of sex differences in gay and lesbian intimate relationships has rapidly grown, exploring, for example, if they exhibit different mate preferences than their heterosexual counterparts (Bailey et al., 1994; Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Lawson, James, Jansson, Koyama, & Hill, 2014; Lippa, 2007; Russock, 2011; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008). Regarding the attributes valued in ideal partners, gay and lesbian individuals appear to be quite similar to their heterosexual counterparts as they also value, as the most important characteristics in a potential mate, attributes such as intelligence, humor, honesty, kindness, good looks and dependability (Ha et al., 2012; Li et al., 2002; Lippa, 2007).

Considering that gay men, more than heterosexual men, reported some behaviors

associated with a feminine sphere while lesbian women, more than heterosexual women reported some behaviors associated with a masculine sphere, researchers have questioned whether gay and lesbian strategies of mating psychology are intrinsically sex typical or opposite-sex typical in terms of partner preferences (Bailey et al., 1994; Bailey et al., 1997; Lawson et al., 2014). In line with Symons' (1979) conclusion that gay and lesbian people do not necessarily differ from heterosexual individuals in any way other than their sexual orientation, there is considerable evidence that gay men and lesbian women resemble their same-sex heterosexual counterparts in the emphasis placed on partner physical attractiveness relative to partner personality (Bailey et al., 1994; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Lawson et al., 2014). Like heterosexual men, gay men rank looks and facial attractiveness as more important overall (Ha et al., 2012; Lippa, 2007; Russock, 2011). In contrast, like heterosexual women, lesbian women tend to place more emphasis on character traits, emphasizing partners' personality traits and taking a person -and relationship-centered approach to mate choice, such as expressive traits (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993) and dependability (Lippa, 2007). In addition, research has found that gay men often show male-typical mating behavior, including a focus on partners' youth (Kenrick et al., 1995); a visually-orientated style of sexual selection (Bailey et al., 1994), an interest in casual sex (Bailey et al., 1994; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993), and specific mate retention tactics, such as derogation of competitors and threats to punish infidelity threat (VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008). Lesbian women, on the other hand, also display female-typical sexual behavior such as less interest in casual sex (Bailey et al., 1994) and more interest in commitment (Russock, 2011).

Although sex has a considerably greater impact on mating psychology than sexual orientation, gay men and lesbian women differ from same sex-heterosexuals in the importance assigned to specific traits (Lawson et al., 2014; Lippa, 2007). For instance, in studies that analyzed gay and lesbian personal advertisements, it was observed that gay men tend to emphasize physical characteristics like body attractiveness and youth, as well as sexuality, more than heterosexual men (Bailey et al., 1994; Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Kenrick et al., 1995; Russock, 2011), whereas in those advertisements, lesbian women tend to offer physical attractiveness and seek resources and status in a mate less than heterosexual women do (Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Ha et al., 2012; Russock, 2011; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008). Moreover, some sex-atypical behavior has been observed in lesbian women. For example, in personal advertisements, to attract potential partners, lesbians offer commitment and instrumental traits, and display resources more often than heterosexual women do (Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Russock, 2011; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008). This type of findings suggests that some gay and lesbian strategies of mating might be more a function of the sex of one's partner (sex of the targeted partner) rather than of one's own sex (sex of the chooser).

Purpose of the present study

Besides all the outlined differences based on the interaction of sex and sexual orientation, evidence strongly suggests that, independent of sexual orientation, evolutionary mechanisms underlying adaptive mate choices tend to operate similarly for all humans. However, very little is known about transgender experiences in intimate relationships and particularly, no study has been conducted from an evolutionary perspective particularly in this population. Therefore, as previously stated, the aims of this study were to identify the mate characteristics that are most and least valued by transgender people, and to examine to what extent their biological sex or their gender identity determines their mate preferences.

METHOD

Participants

The convenience sample consisted of 228 transgender people who - on the basis of the Kinsey scale (Chivers & Bailey, 2000) - considered themselves heterosexuals based on their gender identity. There were 134 (58.8% of the sample) transgender women who mated with men (e.g., a male-born participant with male partners) and 94 (41.2% of the sample) transgender men who mated with women (e.g., a female-born participant with female partners). As a requirement of the study, all participants had to self-identify as a transgender person -that is, to have a gender identity different from their biological sex and to be over 18 years old (range= 18-61), with a mean age of 29.21 ($SD = 7.99$). Transgender women were significantly older than transgender men, $t(223.65) = -4.74, p < .001, d = .62$ (Table 2).

Table 2
Demographic Information by Gender Identity

	Transgender men <i>n</i> (%)	Transgender women <i>n</i> (%)
Age, mean (<i>SD</i>)	26.46 (6.51)	31.13 (8.38)
Age of awareness TG identity, mean (<i>SD</i>)	8.77 (5.16)	8.47 (3.87)
Age of transformation, mean (<i>SD</i>)	18.44 (4.26)	15.98 (3.15)
Body Interventions		
Hormone therapy	72 (76.6)	111 (82.8)
Sex Reassignment Surgery	9 (9.8)	8 (6.3)
Industrial Silicone Injection	--	73 (56.2)
Top surgeries (mastectomy/breast implants)	34 (36.6)	72 (54.5)
Education		
some or completed elementary	3 (3.3)	46 (36.5)
some high school	37 (39.8)	55 (43.7)
complete high school	25 (26.9)	22 (17.5)
some or completed college/tertiary	28 (30.1)	3 (2.4)
Sex work		
Currently	--	51 (40.8)
In the past	6 (6.7)	60 (48)
Never	84 (93.3)	14 (11.2)
Relationship status		
Single	46 (48.9)	59 (44.4)
Casual relationship	6 (6.4)	21 (15.8)
Stable relationship (not cohabitating)	16 (17)	25 (18.8)
Cohabitation	21 (22.3)	22 (16.5)
Married	5 (5.3)	6 (4.5)

Table 2 displays demographic information and status of hormones and surgeries. As shown in this table, regarding gender identity, on average, participants reported that they became aware before the age of 9 of having a sense of being a man or woman different from the sex assigned at birth (transgender men: $M = 8.77$, $SD = 5.16$; transgender women: $M = 8.47$, $SD = 3.87$), and began their process of transformation to have an appearance congruent with their gender identity during adolescence (transgender men: $M = 18.44$, $SD = 4.26$; transgender women: $M = 15.98$, $SD = 3.15$). Transgender women began that process significantly earlier than transgender men, $t(160.27) = -4.67$, $p < .001$, $d = -.65$. In terms of body interventions, less than 10% of the sample had undergone any type of sex reassignment surgery (transgender men: 9.8%, $n = 8$; transgender women: 6.3%, $n = 8$), but half of the transgender women (54.5%, $n = 72$) and slightly more than a third of the FTM (36.6%, $n = 34$) participants reported top surgeries, such as mastectomies and breast implants. Interestingly, most people in the sample had taken or were taking hormones at the time of the study (transgender men: 76.6%, $n = 72$; transgender women: 82.8%, $n = 111$), demonstrating that this is a widelyspread practice within the community.

Transgender men were better educated, in general, than transgender women, with at least some level of high school being the modal level for both groups (Table 2). As shown, there was a significant difference between transgender women and men in terms of sex work. The vast majority of transgender women reported being involved in sex work at some point in their lives (88.8%, $n = 111$), whereas only a few transgender men had done this type of work (6.7%, $n = 6$). Finally, in terms of relationship status, almost half of the sample was single at the moment of the study, and the rest was in some kind of relationship.

Materials

Elements of the questionnaire were drawn from previous published research in this area. On the basis of 12 try-out interviews, and after consultation with transgender activists, the questionnaire was adapted to make the questions more comprehensible to the respondents, and the language of certain scales was modified where necessary to make them appropriate for the transgender population.

Mate preferences. Participants valued 18 attributes (e.g., good health, sociability, good looking) that might be desired in a potential intimate partner on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*unimportant*) to 3 (*very important*). These items were originally developed by Hill (1945) and were introduced by Buss (1989) in the evolutionary literature on mating. The Spanish version, adapted by Ubillos et al. (2001) and applied in Argentina by Casullo (2004), was used. Following Casullo, and considering the importance of sexuality in adult intimate relationships, an additional item was incorporated: ‘satisfying sexual relationship’.

Additional *demographic information* was also collected, including birth sex, age, hormone and surgery status, education, work, location, sexual orientation and relationship status.

Procedure

As transgender people belong to a very rare population, usually hidden due to stigma and discrimination, participants were recruited by a snowball sampling technique, a widely-used method to recruit “hard-to-reach” and vulnerable populations (Magnani, Sabin, Saidel,

& Heckathorn, 2005). Community-based organizations and specialized health care services were contacted in order to ask for referrals. Selfidentified transgender people were recruited by outreach efforts coordinated by two transgender interviewers who were hired in order to reach potential participants who do not feel comfortable talking with non-transgender researchers.

The objectives of the study were explained to the participants, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no explanation. Acceptance of participation was taken as an informed consent. An incentive of ARG\$150 (US\$10 approximately) was given per participation. Data collection occurred continuously for a period of 6 months in 2015.

All data were analyzed with SPSS (version 21.0). As the sample only consisted of transgender individuals, results were compared to the results from previous studies with non-transgender heterosexual and gay and lesbian samples (refer to Table 3 for a summary of prior studies).

Table 3

Summary of Results from Previous Studies on Mate Preferences

Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Men & Women*	Buss, D. M. (1989)	Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypothesis tested in 37 cultures.	10047 individuals (4601 men, 5446 women)	Mate questionnaire based on Hill 1945. Preferences concerning potential mates questionnaire from Buss & Barnes (1986)
Men & Women*	Buss, D. M. et al. (1990).	International preferences in selecting mates: A study of 37 cultures.	9474 individuals (4360 men, 5114 women), mean age 25,27 (men and 25.83 (women)	Hills 1945 Survey to assess mate preferences & preferences concerning potential mates (Buss & Barnes, 1986)
Men & Women*	Casullo, M. M. (2004).	Elección de pareja en adolescentes y jóvenes.	900 teens and young adults 13-30 years old. (450 women, 450 men)	Mate Preference Scale (Buss, 1989) adapted, including an item “satisfactory sexual intercourse”

Findings	Location
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Women valued good financial prospect, ambitiousindustriousness more than men did, while men valued physical attractiveness more than women. Men preferred younger mates, and women preferred older mates. Cultures varied in the valued places on chastity. South American, North American, Asian and African samples valued earning capacity more than Western European.	37 cultures on six continents
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Good financial prospects and good earning capacity are the largest sex difference: women value these characteristics, and ambitious-industriousness more than men. Men value appearance (good looks and physical attractiveness) more than do women. Of small magnitudes, women more than men value educational background, emotional stability, favorable social status and education and intelligence. The ordering of the rated mate values is highly similar for men and women. Mutual attraction-love is the most value, next personality dispositions - kind and understanding, intelligent, exciting personality and healthy- and the least valued are chastity, similar religious background and political background. The effect of culture is more important than the effect of sex on mate references.	37 cultures on six continents
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The four-principal preferences are the same for both men and women: attraction-love, trustworthy, sociability, maturity and emotional stability. Men place 5th physical attractiveness and women the desire to have a family. Chastity and similarity of political and religious beliefs are the less important across all ages.	Argentina
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Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Men & Women*	Chang, L., Wang, Y., Shackelford, T. K., & Buss, D. M. (2011).	Chinese mate preferences: Cultural evolution and continuity across a quarter of a century.	1560 individuals. 500 from 1980 sample (265 men, 235 women) and 1060 modern sample (475 men, 585 women)	Preferences Concerning Potential Mates Scale (Buss & Barnes, 1986). Factors in choosing a mate (Hill, 1945)
Men & Women*	Shackelford, T. K., Schmitt, D. P., & Buss, D. M. (2005).	Universal dimensions of human mate preferences.	9809 (4499 men, 5310 women) age 17-30.	Hills (1945) Survey to assess mate preferences
Men & Women*	Souza, A. L., Conroy-Beam, D., & Buss, D. M. (2016).	Mate preferences in Brazil: Evolved desires and cultural evolution over three decades.	1816 (630 from 1984 Brazilian sample, 355 women, 275 men) 1186 modern sample (719 women, 467 men)	Mate Preference Scale (Buss, 1989)
Men & Women*	Todosijević, B., Ljubinković, S., & Arančić, A. (2003).	Mate selection criteria: A trait desirability assessment study of sex differences in Serbia.	127 (74 women, 53 men), 80% teens (age 17-19)	Close end list of un/desirable traits in potential mates (Buss, 1989; Townsend, 1989; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992)

Findings**Location**

Men preferred younger and women older spouses. College graduate rose in importance from 1983 to 2008 especially in woman. Dependable character rose for both sex, from 1983 to 2008 being indispensable. Chastity, good heredity, pleasing disposition, ambition, education and intelligence decrease in value with time. Women place more importance in good earning capacity, good financial prospects, social status, ambition and industriousness, education and intelligence than men. Men preferred good looks and physically attractive. Women prefer emotional stability and maturity pronouncedly more than men, also place greater value in exciting personality, sociability, and dependable character.

China

Men score higher on love vs. Status/resources, while women score higher on Dependable/Stable vs. Good Looks and Education/Intelligence vs. Desire for home/children.

37 cultures

Men prefer younger spouses while women prefer older spouses. Women put more importance in good earning capacity, good financial prospect, social status, ambition and industriousness than men in both moments. Men value good looks more than women in both moments.

Brazil

Men perceived thinness, aggressiveness, self-pity, fragility and beauty as more desirable than women. Women value strength more than men. With less difference, men value good look, attractiveness, seriousness, independence, enterprising and sincerity more than women.

Serbia

Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Men & Women*	Ubillos, S., Zubieta, E., Páez, D., Deschamps, J.-C., Ezeiza, A., & Vera, A. (2001).	Amor, cultura y sexo.	1667 psychology and education students (162 Argentina, 97 Angola, 105 Belgium, 240 Brazil, 112 Cape Verde, 133 Spain, 267 France, 101 Mozambique, 306 Portugal, 144 Switzerland)	Self-reported mate election priority criteria (18 attributes from Buss, 1990)
Men & Women*	Hatfield, E., & Sprecher, S. (1995).	Men's and women's preferences in marital partners in the United States, Russia, and Japan.	1524 university students (970 USA, 327 Russia, 227 Japan)	Traits desired in a Partner questionnaire
Men & Women*	Khallad, Y. (2005).	Mate selection in Jordan: Effects of sex, socio-economic status, and culture.	288 college students (121 men, 167 women)	Buss et al. (1990) list of 17 traits important to choose a mate. (chastity was removed)

Findings**Location**

Love and mutual attraction is the first and good health the second most valued criteria in mate selection. Love positively correlates with physical attractiveness. High social development negatively correlates with social status in mate selection criteria. Men preferred love and health and women social status as a mate criteria. Less developed societies preferred good health. Most developed countries have love as requirement and mate criteria and value less social status, chastity and good health

10 countries

Across cultures the most desirable traits were personality attributes, particularly those who contribute to a long-term maintenance of marriage (kind, understanding, expressive, open). Men rated physical attractiveness as more important than did women. Women preferred intelligence, ambition, potential for success, money, status and position, kindness and understanding.

USA,
Russia,
Japan

Men indicated greater preferences for attributes associated with reproductive capacity (youth and good looks) than women. Women put greater emphasis than men on qualities indicative of resources acquisition and commitment such as good financial prospects, favorable social status and dependable character. Mutual attraction was the most valued characteristic. Dependable character, pleasing disposition and good health were rated as highly valued attributes. The least important was similar political background.

Jordan

Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Men & Women*	Neto, F., Pinto, M. C., & Furnham, A. (2012).	Sex and culture similarities and differences in long-term partner preferences.	402 social sciences students (187 Brazilians: 92 women, 95 men; and 215 Portuguese: 121 women, 94 men).	Modified Furnham (2009) questionnaire with 14 mate traits. Plus additional items
Men & Women*	Li, N. P., Bailey, J. M., Kenrick, D. T., & Linsenmeier, J. A. W. (2002).	The necessities and luxuries of mate preferences: Testing the tradeoffs.	S1 71(37 women, 34 men), S2 178 psychology students (95 women, 83 men), S3 58 psychology undergraduates (32 women, 26 men)	Mate design page to design ideal marriage partner, with different “budget”. In S3 they added a cover up story
Heterosexual Men & Women	Buunk, B.P., Dijkstra, P., Fetchenhauer, D., & Kenrick, D.T. (2002).	Age and gender differences in mate selection criteria for various involvement levels.	137 (70 men & 67 women)	Questionnaire based on Kenrick, Gabrielidis, Keefe & Cornelius (1996)

Findings	Location
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The most desired traits were related to personality (conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, ambitiousness, and extraversion) and to abilities (emotional intelligence, cognitive ability). Women value more personality, abilities and resources than did men, men valued more physical attractiveness than women. in both countries. More sex than cultural differences emerged.	Brazil and Portugal.
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S1: Women and men differential preferences primarily stemmed from women’s emphasis on resources and men’s emphasis on physical attractiveness, especially when budgets were more constrained. S2: Women emphasized social level and kindness, while men physical attractiveness. S3 Women most often checked social level first, though kindness was a close second. Men most often checked physical attractiveness first.	USA
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Independent of age, women desired a mate with higher income and education than themselves. Men more than women preferred mates who were more physically attractive than themselves. Preference for physical attractiveness increased as relationship involvement become lower. Men and women preferred self-confident mates. Women, regardless of relationship level preferred men who are more intelligent, men preference for intelligence decreased as relationship involvement lowered. Women preferred a more dominant partner and with a higher social position than themselves.	USA, Netherlands
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Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Heterosexual & Gay Men	Gobrogge, K. L., Perkins, P. S., Baker, J. H., Balcer, K. D., Breedlove, S. M., & Klump, K. L. (2007)	Homosexual mating preferences from an Evolutionary Perspective: Sexual Selection Theory revisited.	804 (439 gay, 365 hetero)	Personal ad
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Bailey, J. M., Gaulin, S., Agyei, Y., & Gladue, B. A. (1994)	Effects of gender and sexual orientation on evolutionarily relevant aspects of human mating psychology.	283 (69 lesbians, 71 hetero women, 72 gay men, 71 hetero men)	Scale written by authors and Sociosexuality scale (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991)
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Bailey, J. M., Kim, P. Y., Hills, A., & Linsenmeier, J. A. (1997)	Butch, femme, or straight acting? Partner preferences of gay men and lesbians.	S1 2729 gay men, 782 lesbians. S2 2225 hetero men, 1434 hetero women. S3 144 gay men, 96 lesbians. S4 80 lesbians	Personal ad. Questionnaire about desirability of two hypothetical dating partner with a target photo and description

Findings	Location
Higher proportion of gay men placed ad for sexual encounter. Heterosexual men looking for sexual encounter were less selective in age preferences.	USA, Canada
Lesbian women were more interested in visual stimulation and less concerned about partner’s status. Gay men weight sexual jealousy less and put less emphasis on partner youth than hetero men. Gay man scored higher in sociosexuality. Lesbian and hetero women had similar scores in psychological and behavior subscale about uncommitted sex. Gay men were higher than hetero men in behavior uncommitted sex scale but identical in the psychological subscale.	USA
S1 Gay man self-descriptors and description of preferred partner were masculine and did not want feminine attributes. Lesbians prefer partner biased to feminine descriptions and do not want masculine attributes. Lesbians, more than gay men, describe themselves and prefer partners androgynously. S2 Compared to gay men, hetero men, were less likely to describe themselves as masculine or to request a masculine partner.	USA

Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Gonzales, M. H., & Meyers, S. A. (1993)	Your Mother Would Like Me: Selfpresentation in the personals ads of heterosexual and homosexual men and women	300 (75 gay men, 75 heterosexual men, 75 heterosexual women, 75 lesbian)	Personal ad
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Ha, T., van den Berg, J. E. M., Engels, R. C. M. E., & Lichtwarck-Aschoff, A. (2012)	Effects of attractiveness and status in dating desire in homosexual and heterosexual men and women.	1586 (840 gay men/lesbians, 746 heterosexuals)	Online questionnaire. 21 characteristics about social status and attractiveness (Buss, 1989, Buston & Emlen, 2003). Dating desire was measure with 10 photos of potential partners
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Kenrick, D T., Keefe, R. C., Bryan, A., Barr, A., & Brown, S. (1995).	Age preferences and mate choice among homosexuals and heterosexuals.	783 (486 heterosexual, 297 homosexual)	Personal ad

Findings**Location**

More gay man mentioned hair or eye color than the other 3 groups. Hetero women mention hair color more than lesbian and hetero men. More gay men mentioned high more than hetero man. Men specified weight more than women, and homosexual more than hetero men. Men indicated race more than women. In men, more heterosexual than homosexual offer financial security. Hetero women were more likely to express desire for a financially secure partner. More women than men seek expressive traits and sincere partners. Homosexual were more likely than hetero in mention sexual topics.

USA

Attractiveness and ambition were rated more important for older homosexual and heterosexual men and women. Gay men rated attractiveness like more important than lesbians but less important than hetero men. Hetero men rate attractiveness than more important than hetero women. Gay man and hetero women emphasize ambition more than hetero men and lesbians. For gay men and women education is more important than for hetero men. Gay men rate salary as more important than the other groups. Lesbians and gay men show less dating desire than hetero men. Lesbians and gay men show more date desire than hetero women.

Netherlands

Lesbian prefer younger partners as they age, hetero women remains constant in age acceptance. Both hetero and gay men prefer progressively younger partners as they age. For lesbian and hetero women older partner are acceptable at all age.

USA

Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Lawson, J. F., James, C., Jansson, A.-U. C., Koyama, N. F., & Hill, R. A. (2014).	A comparison of heterosexual and homosexual mating preferences in personal advertisements.	1733 total (649 gay men, 412 hetero men, 325 lesbians, 347 women hetero)	Personal ad
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Lippa, R. A. (2007).	The preferred traits of mates in a crossnational study of heterosexual and homosexual men and women: An examination of biological and cultural influences	185780 (102961 men, 91% hetero, 5 % gay men and 82819 women 90 hetero, 3% lesbian)	Internet survey. Reporting gender, sex orientation and preferred treats in relationship partner (23 traits including age)

Findings

Location

Ads written by men contain higher proportion of traits related to appearance than personality describing ideal partner, ads written by women display opposite condition. Lesbians advertise and seek resources more than the other groups.

UK

Nine traits were the same for all participants: intelligence, overall good looks, humor, honesty, face, attractiveness, kindness, values, communication skills and dependability. Sexual orientation differences in trait rankings are smaller than sex differences. Men ranked good looks and facial attractiveness to be more important than women did. Gay men, similar to hetero men, rank attractiveness relatively high. Lesbians, similar to hetero women, rank attractiveness relatively low. Hetero women and men rank religion, parenting ability and fondness for children more highly than gay men and lesbians. Gay men, more than hetero men, emphasize partners’ age and appearance as well as money, prosperity and honesty. Hetero men, more than gay men, value partners’ intelligence and domestic skills. Lesbians, more than hetero women, emphasize partners’ intelligence. Hetero women emphasize partner ambition, dependability, prosperity and money more than lesbians did. Sex differences in rankings of good looks were consistent across nations.

UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Western Europe, Latin America, New Zeland, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, India.

Sample type	Author	Title	Sample size	Method
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	Russock, H. I. (2011).	An evolutionary interpretation of the effect of gender and sexual orientation on human mate selection preferences, as indicated by an analysis of personal advertisements.	800 (200 men seeking women, 200 men seeking men, 200 women seeking men, 200 women seeking women)	Personal ads
Heterosexual Men & Women, Gay & Lesbian	VanderLaan, D. P., & Vasey, P. L. (2008).	Mate retention behavior of men and women in heterosexual and homosexual relationships.	355 individuals (83 hetero and 73 lesbian women; 120 hetero & 79 gay men)	Mate Retention Inventory Questionnaire

* sexual orientation not reported, it is implied to be heterosexual

Findings

Location

55-76% of the ads in each group include at least one term offering physical attractiveness, 31-37% seek attractiveness. 22,5- 33,5 % of the ads in each group contained at least one term offering resources, 5,5-27,5 seek resources. 56,5-62,5 % offered commitment and 59-64% seek commitment. Hetero women look for older partners and resources more than the other groups. Hetero men look for younger partners and offer resources more than other groups. Gay men looked for physical attractiveness more than the other groups Lesbian women offered attractiveness less than the other groups. Hetero men and lesbian women offered commitment more than the other groups.

USA

Heterosexual men and women differed significantly in six of the 19 mate retention tactics considered. Homosexual men behaved in a sex-typical manner for five of the tactics, whereas homosexual women behaved in a sex-atypical manner for all six tactics.

Canada

RESULTS

Mate preferences for the total sample were ordered based on the mean obtained for each attribute (Table 4). As shown, the overall ordering suggests that the most valued mate characteristic was mutual attraction-love. The following most valued preferences were related to personality characteristics, including having a dependable character and a pleasant disposition as well as being sociable. Interestingly, the additional item for this study, satisfying sexual relationship was highly valued by transgender people, who rated this characteristic in the second place of the ranking.

When analyzing the characteristics with the lowest ratings (from 17th to 19th in the ranking), chastity was the least valued mate preference, which is consistent with the importance given to satisfying sexual relationships. In addition, attributes such as sharing religious beliefs or political backgrounds, as well as having similar educational levels, which are features related to family of origin or cultural backgrounds, were of little relevance to select a partner.

To determine if there were gender differences in the most valued mate characteristics, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed using subject gender identity as a grouping variable and the 19 characteristics as dependent variables. Box's M statistic was 338.52, $F(190, 123631.64)$, $p < .001$, suggesting a violation of covariance matrix equivalence. Although we had unequal numbers of transgender men and women in our sample, suggesting a less robust test, it is possible that this statistic is an artefact of the many dependent variables involved in the analysis. The MANOVA showed a multivariate effect of gender (Wilks's Lambda = .036), $F(19, 208) = 6.08$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .36$, indicating that transgender men and women differed significantly in their mate preferences. It should be noted that the effect size was large, providing evidence of substantial gender differences.

As per Table 4, separate univariate analyses showed that 8 of the 19 characteristics studied reached conventional significance levels. Transgender men considered it more important than transgender women to have a partner with a dependable character, $F(226) = 4.87$, $p < .05$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .03$; transgender women valued more than transgender men satisfactory sexual relationships ($F(226) = 17.99$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .07$), good looks ($F(226) = 44.60$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .17$), and good health ($F(226) = 15.50$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .06$). Furthermore, transgender women placed more emphasis than transgender men on having a mate who exhibits refinement and neatness, $F(226) = 8.72$, $p < .05$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .04$. Finally, more than transgender men, transgender women valued mate characteristics related to socioeconomic status - such as being ambitious and industrious, $F(226) = 10.16$, $p < .05$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .04$; having a favorable social status, $F(226) = 29.51$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .12$; and having good financial prospects, $F(226) = 59.16$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .21$. The mate characteristics that showed the largest effect sizes were good financial prospects, good looks, and favorable social status.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for the Total Sample and by Gender Identity, and Ordering of Mate Preferences for the Total Sample

Ranked Value	Mate Characteristics	Complete Sample		Transgender men		Transgender women		F	partial η^2
		M	DE	M	DE	M	DE		
1	Mutual attraction – love	2.57	0.70	2.64	0.61	2.52	0.75	1.81	.01
2	Satisfying sexual relationships	2.57	0.66	2.35	0.73	2.72	0.57	17.99***	.07
3	Dependable character	2.54	0.67	2.66	0.50	2.46	0.76	4.87*	.02
4	Pleasant disposition	2.29	0.71	2.21	0.67	2.34	0.73	1.81	.01
5	Sociability	2.21	0.75	2.15	0.75	2.25	0.74	.30	.00
6	Education and intelligence	2.09	0.76	1.99	0.80	2.15	0.73	2.54	.01
7	Refinement and neatness	2.07	0.82	1.88	0.85	2.20	0.76	8.72**	.04
8	Ambition and industrious	2.07	0.80	1.86	0.82	2.20	0.75	10.16**	.04
9	Emotional stability and maturity	2.03	0.90	2.02	0.84	2.03	0.94	.01	.00
10	Good looks	1.97	0.93	1.52	0.90	2.28	0.81	44.60***	.17
11	Good financial prospect	1.96	0.98	1.43	0.99	2.33	0.79	59.16***	.21
12	Good health	1.92	0.97	1.63	0.97	2.13	0.92	15.50***	.06
13	Good cook and housekeeper	1.44	1.08	1.43	0.96	1.46	1.16	.05	.00
14	Favorable social status	1.43	1.06	1.00	0.89	1.73	1.07	29.51***	.12
15	Desire for home and children	1.42	1.05	1.40	1.06	1.43	1.05	.02	.00
16	Similar education	1.40	0.96	1.26	0.85	1.50	1.03	3.48	.02
17	Similar political background	0.79	1.03	0.79	0.99	0.78	1.06	.00	.00
18	Similar religious background	0.70	0.94	0.70	0.89	0.70	0.98	.00	.00
19	Chastity	0.32	0.76	0.29	0.65	0.35	0.83	.33	.00

Note: in bold are moderate to high effects (Cohen, 1988)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In addition, in order to examine the effects of hormone use on mate preferences, MANOVAs were performed, separately for transgender men and women, using subject hormone use as a grouping variable and the 19 mate characteristics as dependent variables. It should be noted that the high percentage of the sample that have received hormone treatments might lead to a less optimal statistical analysis; therefore, these MANOVAs were conducted only for exploratory reasons. Although a significant effect was not found for the subsample of transgender women – $F(19,111) = 1.09, p > .37$ –, a multivariate effect of hormone use was found among transgender men (Wilks's Lambda = .673), $F(19,69) = 1.76, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .33$, indicating that transgender men who had used hormone therapy differed significantly in their mate preferences from those who had not used hormones. Separate univariate analyses showed transgender men who had used hormones valued, more than those who had not used hormones, having satisfactory sexual relationships, $F(87) = 9.10, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .10$; and partners with good financial prospects, $F(87) = 6.88, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .07$; a favorable social status, $F(87) = 5.44, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .06$; and with similar political background, $F(87) = 6.22, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .07$.

DISCUSSION

In this study, mate preferences were examined in a sample of transgender people. Overall, transgender people valued as the most important attributes in a potential mate the same features as heterosexual and gay and lesbian people: mutual attraction-love, having a dependable character, having a pleasant disposition, and being sociable. Moreover, they also resembled heterosexual and gay and lesbian people in the least desirable attributes in a mate: chastity, sharing religious beliefs, or having a similar political background and educational level. In addition, it was found that transgender men, compared to transgender women, placed significantly more emphasis on having a partner with a dependable character, whereas transgender women, more than transgender men, valued having satisfactory sexual relationships, as well as attributes related to attractiveness (good looks, good health) and socioeconomic status (ambitious, industrious, favorable social status, financial prospects).

By exploring gender differences among transgender people, this study could provide initial evidence for the distinct influences of biological sex and gender identity on mate choices. Our result, that transgender men tended to emphasize personality over appearance in a potential mate whereas transgender women did the converse, parallels previous findings on sex differences in mate preferences in heterosexual (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Casullo, 2004; Chang et al., 2011; Ha et al., 2012; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Khallad, 2005; Neto et al., 2012; Shackelford et al., 2005; Souza et al., 2016; Todosijević et al., 2003; Ubillos et al., 2001) as well as gay and lesbian (Bailey et al., 1994; Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Lawson et al., 2014; Lippa, 2007; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008) people. To be more specific, transgender people displayed a number of sex-typical mate preferences: Female-born individuals preferred personality and character traits, whereas male-born individuals valued good looks and good health. Taken together, these results are similar to the findings of Buss et al. (1990) among heterosexuals, not only in the direction but also in the magnitude of the effect sizes, suggesting that the mate preferences of transgender people are in part influenced by their biological sex, providing support for the hypothesis of evolutionary psychologists that the mating strategies of

men and women have evolved in response to selective pressures and adaptive problems that lead people to seek for cues of parental investment and reproductive potential (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Shackelford et al., 2005).

The finding that transgender women, more than transgender men, place importance on having satisfying sexual relationships is in line with studies that demonstrated that male-born individuals are more concerned with sex in general (Bailey et al., 1994; Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008), also providing support for the evolved determinants of sex differences. However, it might also be expected that, due to the high rate of sex work, having satisfying sexual relationships in a caring environment may have become a very important aspect of a romantic relationship for transgender women.

The finding that transgender people preferred mutual attraction and love, as well as dependable, pleasant and sociable, personality traits in a potential mate replicated previous research among heterosexuals (Bailey et al., 1994; Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Casullo, 2004; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Khallad, 2005; Lippa, 2007; Shackelford et al., 2005; Todosijević et al., 2003; Ubillos et al., 2001). Regarding the least valued mate characteristics in transgender people, the results fit well with the idea that, although important in some cultures (e.g., Khallad, 2005), and more among heterosexual than among gay and lesbian people (Lippa, 2007), chastity and political and religious ideas are the least important features valued in a preferred mate (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Casullo, 2004; Ubillos et al. 2001). It would be interesting to see if this pattern persists among transgender communities from other cultures. The traits considered highly desirable and undesirable by transgender people resembled the choices of heterosexuals and gays and lesbians by prioritizing mate characteristics that serve as cues of interest or ability for long-term mating and establishing a committed relationship. That is, overall, the participants in the present study valued important features for interpersonal functioning, mate maintenance and retention.

Interestingly, the additional item satisfying sexual relationships seems to have a more important place in the ranking of mate preferences of transgender people (1st place) than in the ranking of heterosexual young adults (14th in Casullo, 2004). Unfortunately, this comparison could not be done with gay and lesbian people as this same item has not been included in studies in these latter populations. Nevertheless, studies have demonstrated that gay and lesbian people are overall more focused on sexuality and casual relationships than their heterosexual counterparts (Bailey et al., 1994; Bailey et al., 1997; Gombrogge et al., 2007). Thus, it seems important to see if there are similarities between gay and lesbian and transgender groups in the rating of this item. A possible explanation for the importance granted by transgender people to having satisfying sexual relationships is the relevance of sexuality in their lives considering that, in many cases, this population undergoes body modifications through hormone therapy and surgeries in order to adjust their physical appearance (particularly sexual features and genitalia) to their gender identity (APA, 2009; Fundacion Huesped, 2014). These characteristics are fundamental for a sexual relationship, not only to attract mates but also to experience satisfying sexual relationships.

It is noteworthy that transgender women also seemed to value some attributes in potential mates based on their feminine gender identity, showing that not only the biological sex is important in mate choice. That is, our data consistently showed that transgender women, more than transgender men, valued mate attributes related to socioeconomic status - such as being ambitious and industrious; having a favorable social status, and having good financial

prospects. This result is consistent with preferences of heterosexual women (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Khallad, 2005; Neto et al., 2012; Shackelford et al., 2005; Souza et al., 2016; Todosijević et al., 2003), and also with Lippa's (2007) findings among gay men, who value in their male mates the ability to obtain or provide resources. From an evolutionary point of view, one possible explanation for this strong gender identity difference in our sample could be the effect of the partners' sex (sex of the person being chosen) rather than the biological sex of the person choosing, as has been postulated in some studies with gay and lesbian samples. However, as that conclusion particularly derives from results on personal advertisements, where what people offer to attract to potential mates was analyzed (Bailey et al., 1994; Russock, 2011), and studies on mate retention strategies (VanderLaan and Vasey, 2008), and considering that, in our sample, partners' sex tends to affect only attributes related to socioeconomic status, another explanation such as the concept of domain specific or modularity of psychological processes (Kenrick et al., 1995) might better explain these results. It might be that although both are involved in reproduction, gender identity and mate preferences are independent modules, controlled by independent mechanisms.

Like some authors suggested (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Ha et al., 2012; Khallad, 2005; Lippa, 2007; Ubillos et al., 2001), cultural factors might have a relatively greater impact on people's ranking of certain, but not all traits. For example, in countries with a low economic development and in marginalized groups, as in the case of transgender people in Argentina, regardless of their biological sex, people tend to value partners' resources as a way to move economically upwards in the society. Perhaps, as Wood and Eagly (2002) proposed, the origins of sex differences in mate preferences are best understood from a biosocial perspective that gives priority to the interaction between the bodily specialization of each sex (evolution) and the attributes of societies' economy, social structure, and ecology (culture). In this line, and following Li et al.'s (2002) study on necessities and luxuries, it would be interesting to examine how these characteristics of mate preferences work in transgender people.

In line with some evolutionary theorists who emphasized the importance of sex hormones on mating motivations and behaviors (Gangestad & Grebe, 2017; Wood, Kressel, Joshi & Louise, 2014), the effect of hormone therapy on mate preferences was found but only for transgender men. Those who had used hormones placed relatively more value on attributes such as satisfying sexual relationships, good financial prospects, favorable social status and similar political background. It is worth noting that as the majority of the sample had used hormones, this analysis was only conducted for exploratory reasons. Still, the results highlight the need to properly analyze the moderating effect role of hormones on mate preferences of transgender people.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

As with any research, the current study suffered from a number of limitations that are worth noting. First, as participants were self-selected, this was not a probabilistic sample, and may be biased toward a group who have 'come out of the closet' and who may not be representative of the transgender community as a whole. Second, only transgender people who identified themselves as heterosexual were incorporated in the study, and the comparisons with heterosexual and with gay and lesbian people were drawn from comparison with results from previous studies. Future research would benefit by incorporating gay and lesbian transgender

participants based on their gender identity, as well as heterosexual and gay and lesbian non-transgender people in order to better distinguish the effect of biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation on mating preferences. Third, although widely used, the list of traits used to explore preferred characteristics in a potential mate has been questioned for consisting of a restricted set of items that has been mainly used with young college students (Schwarz & Hassebrauck, 2012). Subsequent studies should examine the generalizability of the data to a more general transgender population by using more naturalist designs, as some researchers have done with advertisements in gay and lesbian samples (Gobrogge et al., 2007; Gonzales & Mayer, 1993; Russock, 2011; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008), in which participants are not aware they are being studied and, thus, can consider the most salient characteristics for a real-life relationship with potential real consequences.

Contributions

A major strength of the present study is that it examined for the first time the mate preferences of transgender people in a large sample of both transgender men and women. Simultaneously, the study could test several evolutionary and sociocultural notions within a community that had not been previously examined. Overall, in terms of a trade-off between physical attractiveness and personality as preferred partner traits, transgender people of either biological sex are behaving in the same way as their heterosexual and gay and lesbian counterparts, indicating an overall trend toward biological sex-typical mate preferences in transgender people. Although biological sex differences as an evolved mechanism are present in both groups, providing some support to an evolutionary perspective, transgender women also seemed to value attributes in line with their gender identity, which could be better explained from a sociocultural perspective.

In addition, the results presented here offer new evidence for both powerful crosscultural consistencies and systematic cross-cultural variations in men's and women's mate preferences. Our findings add to the evidence that evolved dispositions contribute to men's tendency to assign more importance to physical attractiveness where women place more importance on personality traits. However, social structural forces seem to also influence the importance that men and women assign to other partner traits, suggesting that rather than choosing between evolutionary and social structural theories, researchers who study sex differences in mate preferences, and transgender people in particular, should instead systematically explore each theory's valid domains of application.

Chapter 5

Do Transgender People Respond According to their Biological Sex or Their Gender Identity when Confronted with Romantic Rivals?

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Abstract

This study examined the hypothesis that gender identity and biological sex represent independent modules and that transgender individuals respond to romantic rivals in line with their gender identity and not with their biological sex. Additionally, associations of jealousy with intrasexual competitiveness (ISC) and social comparison orientation (SCO) were explored. A total of 134 transgender women and 94 transgender men from Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, responded to a questionnaire. In line with the predictions, transgender men experienced more jealousy than transgender women in response to a physically dominant rival, whereas transgender women experienced more jealousy than transgender men in response to a physically attractive rival. Regardless of their gender identity, in both groups socialcommunal attributes were the most jealousy-evoking characteristic. Overall, the results indicate that transgender individuals mainly respond in line with their gender identity and not in line with their biological sex when facing romantic rivals. In addition, transgender individuals high in ISC experienced relatively more jealousy in response to all rival characteristics, whereas SCO was only among transgender women associated with jealousy.

Keywords: transgender, jealousy, rival characteristics, intrasexual competitiveness, social comparison, sex differences, Argentina

Transgender individuals are those whose gender identity – i.e., their sense of themselves as male or female – differs from their biological sex, regardless of the medical interventions the individual has undergone or may desire to do in the future (APA, 2009). There are still few psychological studies on this population, and particularly very little is known about topics such as their intimate relationships. Moreover, with some exceptions (e.g., Chivers & Bailey, 2000), transgender individuals have not been studied from an evolutionary psychological perspective, an approach increasingly used to explain sex differences in the mating arena.

There is considerable evidence that one's gender identity, i.e., one's sense of being a man or a woman, is an innate characteristic that is already experienced in early childhood, and is linked to brain structures developed when individuals are still in the womb (Swaab & Garcia-Falgueras, 2009). In line with the idea that reproduction is controlled by a series of independent mechanisms (Kenrick et al., 1995; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992), it seems that one's gender identity can be viewed as an evolutionarily developed module that is independent of one's biological sex. Whereas in the large majority of individuals both modules coincide, in transgender individuals this is not the case.

In the present research, we examined the hypothesis that it is one's gender identity, and not one's biological sex, which affects how individuals respond to the characteristics of a rival in a situation that might evoke jealousy. We also examined the extent to which the jealousy responses depend on individual differences, in particular social comparison orientation and intrasexual competitiveness.

Jealousy as an evolved mechanism

Jealousy is the response to a threat to, or the loss of, a valued relationship with another person, due to the actual or imagined presence of a rival vying for one's partner's attention (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2006). From the point of view of evolutionary psychology, jealousy has been defined as an adaptation that serves to assess the threats of rivals vying for the partner's attention to one's reproductive interests (Buss, 2000; Buunk, Massar, & Dijkstra, 2007). Jealousy functions as a retention strategy to ward off rivals, by alerting the individual to take action to prevent a mate from being unfaithful and from abandoning the relationship (e.g., Buunk & Dijkstra, 2006). When individuals perceive that their partners show signs of attraction to, or romantic interest in, a third person, they will in general consider that person as a rival, but the degree of jealousy will depend on the characteristics of the rival, in particular the rival characteristics that play a role in mate selection.

Rival characteristics that evoke jealousy

According to most evolutionary psychologists, there are sex-linked differences in mate selection strategies (Buss, 1989; Symons, 1979). Because in humans both sexes invest resources and parental care in their offspring, as a strategy to maximize their offspring's chances of survival, men and women differ in the characteristics they prefer in potential partners (Buss, 2005; Geary et al., 2004; Trivers, 1972). Many cross-cultural studies have found support for this assumption (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Shackelford et al., 2005; Ubillos et al., 2001). In general, these studies have shown that women, more than men, value social status and dominance in a mate, reflecting women's evolved preference for males

who are able to provide them and their offspring with sufficient resources and protection. Conversely, men, more than women, tend to value youth and physical attractiveness in a partner, reflecting men's tendency to select mates who show signs of fertility and reproductive potential. As people compare their own personal qualities with those of their rivals, they will feel particularly jealous when their rival surpasses them on characteristics of the rival that are believed to be important to the opposite sex (Buss, Shackelford, Choe, Buunk, & Dijkstra, 2000; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2005; Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998; 2001). Consequently, jealousy in males is, among others evoked more by the rival's physical dominance, whereas jealousy in females is evoked more by the rival's physical attractiveness (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002; Buunk et al., 2011). For instance, Dijkstra and Buunk (2001) found that individuals look at different body features and body builds to evaluate the potential threat imposed by a rival: women pay more attention to narrow waist – as a signal of body attractiveness - while men look at broad shoulders as a cue for physical dominance. There is evidence that such sex differences occur even in response to the subliminal presentation of such characteristics (Massar & Buunk, 2009).

Several studies have shown that not only physical dominance but also a rival's social dominance evokes more jealousy in men than in women (Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998; 2002). Men experience more distress than women when facing rivals' economic dominance, such as apparent from better financial and job prospects and rivals' higher status and prestige (e.g., Buss et al., 2000). The attitudes towards women's independence and dominance in society may also play a role in this domain. For example, Buunk et al. (2011) founded that Latin, but not Dutch women, feel more jealous than men when their rivals display attributes of power and dominance. Still, social communal attributes (e.g., better listener, more attentive, more self-confident) were the most jealousy-evoking characteristics for both sexes, followed by physical attractiveness in women, and by social power and dominance (e.g., higher education, more popular, more authority) in men. Quite consistent sex differences in the jealousy evoking features of rivals have been found in a variety of countries, including the United States, Netherlands and Korea (Buss et al., 2000; Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002) and Argentina and Spain (Buunk et al., 2011), although in Iraqi Kurdistan such sex differences were not observed (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2015).

Although there is considerable evidence for sex differences in the importance of specific rival characteristics, it is not clear whether these differences reflect primarily individuals' biological sex or their gender identity. Studying transgender people, who live as the gender opposite to their biological sex, and who are often attracted to people of their own biological sex, may shed light into this question. Indeed, most transgender individuals consider themselves heterosexual, based on their gender identity (Fundacion Huesped, 2014; Operario et al., 2008), preferring mates with the opposite gender identity, but the same biological sex, and thus, their rivals would usually be individuals with the same gender identity but with a different biological sex. According to this reasoning, a transgender woman who has a male partner would view women as rivals, and thus, may respond with more jealousy to a rival's physical attractiveness. Conversely, a transgender man individual who has a female partner would consider men as rivals, and therefore, may respond with more jealousy to a rival's physical dominance. In addition, while social communal characteristics will be the most jealousy evoking characteristics in both groups, this will be followed by physical attractiveness in transgender women, and by social power and dominance in transgender men.

Social comparison orientation and intrasexual competitiveness

There is evidence that the jealousy-evoking effect of rival characteristics depends on individual differences. Firstly, the degree of jealousy that an individual experiences, is in part determined by the outcomes of a process of social comparison (e.g., Broemer & Diehl, 2004; Dijkstra & Buunk, 2001). Social comparison orientation (SCO) has been defined as the extent to which individuals are interested in others' thoughts and behaviors in similar circumstances, tend to relate to themselves what happens to others and use social comparisons to evaluate their own characteristics (Buunk, Belmonte, Peiro, Zurriaga, & Gibbons, 2005; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; for a review, see Buunk & Gibbons, 2006). Heterosexual individuals high in SCO tend to respond with relatively more jealousy than individuals low in SCO. Particularly rivals' physical dominance (e.g., broader shoulder, more muscular) among males and rivals' physical attractiveness (e.g., better figure, more attractive face) among females are more prevalent among individuals with high levels of SCO. Interestingly, among lesbian women, but not among gay men, SCO tends to influence the response to rival characteristics that contribute to mate value (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002).

A second individual difference characteristic that may be related to experiences of jealousy is the degree of competitiveness with same-sex others (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2015; Buunk & Fisher, 2009). Intrasexual competition is an evolved adaptation that refers to the rivalry with same-sex others over access to mates (e.g., Darwin, 1871; Trivers, 1972). Not only men, but also women may be intrasexually quite competitive, using verbal and psychological aggression, and in extreme cases physical assaults, to compete within their sex (e.g., Campbell, 2002). The degree of such competition depends not only on situational factors such as a scarcity of mates (e.g. Arnocky, Ribout, Mirza, & Knack, 2014), but also on the dispositional tendency to engage in intra-sexual competition. Buunk and Fisher (2009) developed a scale to assess individual differences in intrasexual competitiveness (ISC), i.e., the degree in which one views the confrontation with same-sex individuals in competitive terms, especially in the context of mating. ISC encompasses, among others, the desire to view oneself as better than others, feelings of envy and frustration when others are more popular with the opposite sex, and a tendency to derogate and exclude potential rivals. There is evidence that the rival characteristics that elicit jealousy, except for physical dominance, are related to ISC in work settings (Buunk, Zurriaga, González, & Castro Solano, 2012) and that especially among those high in ISC, sex differences in the rival characteristics that elicit jealousy are observed (Buunk, van 't Goor & Castro Solano, 2010).

The present study

To summarize, we explored in a large sample of transgender men and women, sex differences in the threatening nature of rival characteristics. This particular population provides a unique opportunity to shed light on some of the processes that, according to an evolutionary perspective, underlie sex differences in mating contexts, in particular to what extent the differences in the rival characteristics that evoke jealousy depend on individuals' biological sex or on their gender identity. Additionally, this study also assessed whether individuals' tendencies to engage in ISC and SCO are related to the jealousy-evoking nature of rival characteristics among transgender individuals.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 228 transgender individuals from the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires City, 134 (58.8%) transgender women and 94 (41.2%) transgender men. On the basis of the Kinsey scale of sexual orientation (1953), and following the Chivers and Bailey (2000) procedure to categorize the continuum, this convenience sample only included individuals who considered themselves as heterosexual based on their gender identity. That is, we included only transgender women with male partners and transgender men individuals with female partners. From the original 264 participants who completed the survey, 17 cases of transgender women were excluded (of these, 9 reported a bisexual sexual orientation; three were in a homosexual relationship and one was born intersex), and 19 cases of transgender men were removed (of these, 10 reported a bisexual sexual orientation, 7 referred a homosexual sexual orientation and one was in a relationship with another transgender person). As inclusion criteria, all participants identified themselves as a transgender person, and were over 18 years old.

As shown in Table 5, the mean age was $M = 29.21$ ($SD = 7.99$, range 18-61 years). Participants reported being aware of having a gender identity different to one's biological sex at an early age and beginning their process of transformation to have an appearance congruent with their gender identity during adolescence. Most participants did some sort of body interventions to masculinize or feminize their appearance, the majority had accessed hormone replacement therapy or had self-administered hormones.

Regarding demographic information, the modal level of formal education was incomplete high school (40.4%, $n = 92$) and 20.6% ($n = 47$) of the sample had completed high school. The majority of the sample had a paid job at the moment of the study: 36.8% full-time ($n = 84$) and 30.7% part-time ($n = 70$). It should be mentioned that 88.8% of transgender women currently do or had done sex work ($n = 91$), while only 6.7% ($n = 6$) of transgender men had been involved in sex work. Almost half of the sample were in some sort of relationship when the study was conducted (47.9%, $n = 111$).

Table 5.
Age and Body Intervention Status by Gender Identity

	Transgender men <i>n</i> (%)	Transgender women <i>n</i> (%)
Age, mean (<i>SD</i>)	26.46 (6.51)	31.13 (8.38)
Age of awareness TG identity, mean (<i>SD</i>)	8.77 (5.16)	8.47 (3.87)
Age of transformation, mean (<i>SD</i>)	18.44 (4.26)	15.98 (3.15)
Body Interventions		
Hormone replacement therapy	72 (76.6)	111 (82.8)
Sex Reassignment Surgery	9 (9.8)	8 (6.3)
Industrial Silicone Injection	--	73 (56.2)
Top surgeries (mastectomy/breast implants)	34 (36.6)	72 (54.5)

Materials

Participants answered a questionnaire that asked about the rival characteristics that evoke jealousy, the tendency to compete with others of same gender and the disposition to compare with others. All instruments were in Spanish and had been previously validated. On the basis of twelve try-out interviews, and after consultation with transgender activists, the language of certain scales was slightly modified where necessary to make them appropriate and better comprehensible for transgender population.

Jealousy-evoking rival characteristics: Participants were given a questionnaire developed by Dijkstra and Buunk (2002), in which participants were asked to imagine a particular scenario. Transgender men were provided the following vignette:

You are at a party with your girlfriend and you are talking with some of your friends. You notice your girlfriend across the room talking to a man you do not know. You can see from his face that he is very interested in your girlfriend. He is listening closely to what she is saying and you notice that he casually touches her hand. You notice that he is flirting with her. After a minute, your girlfriend also begins to act flirtatiously. You can tell from the way she is looking at him that she likes him a great deal.

Transgender women received exactly the same scenario, except for the gender of their rival. Next, participants were asked: *When my partner and a different man would flirt with each other, I would feel particularly jealous when the other man...*, after which, they were presented with a list of 24 attributes that might describe their rival. Participants rated each of those rival attributes on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). Although the original scale comprised five dimensions, the Argentinean and Spanish adaptation (Buunk et al., 2011), revealed only four dimensions comprising the 24 rival characteristics: *physical attractiveness* (e.g., has a tighter waist, has more beautiful legs, has more beautiful hips, is more slender, has a better figure, is built lighter), *physical dominance* (e.g., has broader shoulders, is more muscular, is bigger, is built heavier, is taller, is physically stronger), *social power and dominance* (e.g., behaves more provocatively, has more authority, has had a higher education, is more popular, is smoother and more shrewd, is more of a troublemaker) and *social-communal attributes* (e.g., is a better listener, is more attentive, is more sensitive to my partner's needs, is sweeter, has a better sense of humor, is more self-confident). For this particular sample, high Cronbach's alpha coefficients were observed for the subscales: physical attractiveness (.91); physical dominance (.91); social power and dominance (.92); and social communal attributes (.91).

Intrasexual competitiveness (ISC) was assessed with a 12-statement scale (Buunk & Fisher, 2009) that measures the dispositional tendency to compete with same-sex others. This instrument has been previously used in Argentinean samples (Buunk et al., 2010; Buunk et al., 2011). Participants had to express how much some statements apply to them on a 7-interval scale (1 = *'not at all applicable'* to 7 = *'completely applicable'*). As it was not clear whether transgender individuals would experience competition primarily with other transgender persons or with a non-transgender person of the same gender, for this particular study, participants filled out the scales twice, considering two types of rivals, i.e., other transgender individuals with the same gender identity, or same-sex heterosexual individuals. Some item examples for MTF transgender respondents were: *"I tend to look for negative characteristics*

in attractive transgender women/ nontransgender women"; "When I go out, I can't stand it when men pay more attention to a same-gender transgender friend/ non-transgender of mine than to me". This resulted in two scales, i.e., ISC with same-gender transgender individuals and ISC with same-gender non-transgender individuals. However, a bivariate correlation between the two scales showed a significant positive and strong association ($r = .92$) and repeated measures t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between both scales, ($t(227) = -1.41, p = .160$). Additionally, the total jealousy-evoking rival characteristics scale showed the same correlation with ISC with same-gender transgender individuals ($r = .66$) as with ISC with same-gender non-transgender individuals ($r = .64$). Given that both instruments worked similarly, the scale that measures ISC with same-gender transgender individuals was used for future analyses because competition with others in the mating arena is potentially influenced by opportunity. This decision was consulted with transgender key informant who explained that, as transgender individuals belong to a hidden population, they usually move in quite close gathering venues and generally, their competition for mates willing to get involved with a transgender individual usually occurs within the same community. Cronbach alpha was .93 in this sample.

Social comparison orientation (SCO): The validated Spanish version of the SCO scale (Buunk et al., 2005) that measures the dispositional tendency to compare oneself with others was administered. The 11 items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), where higher scores represented higher levels of tendency to compare with others. In order to control for inconsistencies in expression, items 6 and 10 were reversed. Representative examples of items were "I always like to know what others in a similar situation would do", "I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life" and a reverse item "I am not the type of person who compares often with others". Cronbach alpha was .89 in this sample.

Additional *socio-demographic information* was also collected, including birth sex, gender identity, age, age of awareness of transgender identity, age of transition, level of education attained (ranged from 1 = incomplete elementary to 8 = graduate degree completed), work status (part-time/full-time/unemployed/never employed), life-time sex work (yes/no), relationship status (single/involved in a casual relationship/in a relationship not living together/cohabitating/married) and body interventions such as hormone replacement therapy whether prescribed or self-administered (yes/no), sexreassignment surgery (yes/no), industrial silicone injection (yes/no), top surgeries, that is mastectomy or breast implants (yes/no).

Procedure

Data collection was coordinated by two transgender interviewers that were hired in order to reach individuals who did not feel comfortable talking with non-transgender researchers. Participants were recruited by a snowball sampling technique, a highly used method to recruit "hard-to-reach" and vulnerable populations, such as transgender individuals (Magnani et al., 2005). Community-based organizations and specialized health care services were contacted in order to ask for referrals. Before participation, the objectives of the study were explained and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time with no explanation. Acceptance of participation was taken as an informed consent. An incentive of \$10 (American dollars) was given per participation. All data were analyzed with SPSS (version 21.0).

RESULTS

Between-gender differences

In order to examine gender differences, a MANOVA was performed using subject gender identity as a grouping variable and the four dimensions of rival characteristics as dependent variables. The Box's M was 28.77, $F(10, 180425.84)$, $p < .05$. This MANOVA showed a multivariate effect of gender (Wilks' Lambda = .550), $F(4,216) = 44.27$, $p < .001$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .45$, indicating that, overall, rivals evoked more jealousy among transgender women than among transgender men.

Separate univariate analyses showed that three scales reached conventional significance levels. As Table 6 shows, transgender women indicated more jealousy than transgender men in response to a rival who was physically more attractive and possessed more social power and dominance, whereas transgender men experienced more jealousy when their rival was more physically dominant. Transgender men and women did not differ in the extent to which the social communal attributes of their rival evoked feelings of jealousy.

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations of the Four Scales for Rival Characteristics, Intrasexual Competitiveness and Social Comparison Orientation for Complete Sample and by Gender Identity

Descriptive Statistics	Complete Sample		Transgender men		Transgender women		Univariate	
	<i>M</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2_{partial}
Rival Characteristics								
Social communal attributes	16.47	6.78	16.88	6.44	16.18	7.03	.57	.00
Social power and dominance	14.25	7.16	12.76	6.97	15.31	7.12	7.00**	.03
Physical attractiveness	13.81	7.18	10.76	6.33	15.98	6.98	32.40***	.13
Physical dominance	11.54	6.44	14.10	7.07	9.71	5.26	27.95***	.11
Intrasexual competitiveness	33.24	16.54	28.64	14.12	36.46	17.37	13.01***	.05
Social Comparison Orientation	30.93	9.47	30.80	9.21	31.02	9.69	.030	.00

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Within-gender differences

Separately for each gender a within-subjects ANOVA and subsequent t-tests were conducted to establish which rival characteristics evoked most jealousy. The results showed a highly significant within-subjects effect for transgender men. Given that Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated (Mauchly's $W = .82$, $\chi^2(5) = 17.951$, $p < .05$, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used, $F(2.68, 244.20) = 44.72$, $p < .001$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .329$. In transgender men, rival's social communal attributes evoked more jealousy than any of the other characteristics (t 's > 4.73 , $p < .001$), followed by rival's physical dominance that elicited more jealousy than physical attractiveness and social power and dominance (t 's > 2.15 , $p < .05$). Physical attractiveness was the rival characteristic that evoked the lowest intensity of jealousy among transgender men.

Among transgender women, also a significant within-subjects effect was found, given

that Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated (Mauchly's $W = .84$, $\chi^2(5) = 21.77$, $p < .001$), Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used, $F(2.75, 351.46) = 95.79$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .428$. The order from most to least jealousy-evoking rival characteristics was quite different than for transgender women: The most jealousy evoking dimension was social-communal attributes, followed by physical attractiveness, next social power and dominance, and physical dominance as the least jealousy evoking rival characteristic. While rival's physical attractiveness aroused similar intensities of jealousy as social communal attributes and social power and dominance (t 's < 1.67 , *ns*), it evoked more feelings of jealousy than physical dominance ($t = 13.30$, $p < .001$). Among this group, physical dominance evoked less jealousy than social power and dominance ($t = 12.06$, $p < .001$).

Relation with intrasexual competitiveness (ISC)

For exploratory purposes, a univariate ANOVA was run in order to examine if there were gender differences in the levels of ISC. Results showed that overall, male-to-female individuals experience significantly higher levels of intrasexual competitiveness than female-to-male individuals, $F(226) = 13.01$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .05$. Separately for each gender, correlations between the four dimensions of rival characteristics and ISC were calculated. As shown in Table 7, quite substantial correlations were found between ISC in relation to other transgender individuals of the same gender and the four rival characteristics among transgender women as well as transgender men. As transgender individuals were higher in ISC, they responded with more jealousy to all four rival characteristics, i.e., when the rival showed more social-communal attributes, was physically more attractive, was physically more dominant, and exhibited more social power and dominance. No significant differences were found for those correlations between transgender men and women.

Table 7

Correlations between ISC and SCO and the Four Scales for Rival Characteristics for transgender men and women

Rival characteristics	Intrasexual Competitiveness		Social Comparison Orientation	
	Transgender men	Transgender women	Transgender men	Transgender women
Physical attractiveness	.68***	.65***	-.01	.24**
Physical dominance	.64***	.54***	.08	.14
Social power and dominance	.70***	.64***	.10	.26**
Social communal attributes	.54***	.45***	.04	.26**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Relation with social comparison orientation (SCO)

For exploratory purposes, a univariate ANOVA was run in order to examine if there were gender differences in the levels of SCO. Results showed no significant differences between transgender men and women, $F(226) = .03$, *ns*. Separately for each gender, correlations

were computed between SCO and the jealousy-evoking effect for the four clusters of rival characteristics. Transgender men's scores on SCO were not related to the intensity to which they rated rival characteristics as jealousy evoking (all $ps > .05$, *ns*). However, among transgender women, SCO was related to the impact of most rival characteristics. As transgender women were higher in SCO, they responded with more jealousy when the rival showed more social-communal attributes, was physically more attractive, and had more social power and dominance. Only jealousy evoked by a more physically dominant rival did not correlate with SCO.

DISCUSSION

This study examined gender differences in the jealousy-evoking nature of rival characteristics and whether intrasexual competitiveness (ISC) and social comparison orientation (SCO) were related to that experience of jealousy in a sample of 228 Argentinean transgender individuals. The main finding was that jealousy in transgender men was, more than in transgender women, evoked by the rival's physical dominance, whereas jealousy in transgender women was, more than in transgender men, evoked more by the rival's physical attractiveness and social power and dominance. These sex differences are in line with those found among heterosexuals (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2001), and support the hypothesis that transgender individuals will respond according to their gender identity rather than according to their biological sex when confronted with romantic rivals.

The finding that transgender women experienced more distress than transgender men when a rival possessed characteristics related to social power and dominance may seem unexpected as these attributes are typically associated with male competition and mate value. However, this finding is in line with Buunk et al.'s (2011) findings that in Latin countries women tend to experience more distress than men when confronted with a rival who shows clues of social power and dominance. Therefore, results from the present study provide additional evidence to the finding that transgender individuals in a specific culture respond based on their gender identity when facing romantic rivals. As Symons (1979) suggested, humans use different strategies according to the environmental conditions in which they are immersed.

Despite these sex differences, it must be noted that, regardless of their gender identity, in both groups social-communal attributes were the most jealousy-evoking characteristic, followed by physical attractiveness in male-to-female and by physical dominance in transgender men. As has been shown in many studies on mate preferences for long-term relationships, individuals value in a potential mate those characteristics that contribute to the development and maintenance of a committed relationship (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Shackelford et al., 2005; Ubillos et al., 2001) and thus, rivals who possess that features tend to evoke high levels of jealousy.

In addition, transgender men and women high in ISC experienced relatively more jealousy in response to all rival characteristics. These results are similar to those of Buunk et al. (2010) in work settings. Remarkably, overall, transgender women reported higher levels of ISC than transgender men. Considering that intrasexual competition is usually related to male-male competition, one might conclude that this result is associated with transgender individuals' biological sex, rather than their gender identity. However, there may also be other explanations. In particular, as some authors have found (Arnocky et al., 2014), situational factors such as the scarcity of mates might have a substantial impact on the tendency to compete with same-gender

others. In Argentina, most transgender women are sex workers (Fundacion Huesped, 2014), and thus, competition among same-gender others is quite fierce and a necessary and adaptive mechanism to attract clients. Gender differences also emerged in the effects of SCO. Only male-to-female individuals with a strong orientation to compare themselves with others felt particularly threatened when confronted by rivals high in social-communal attributes, physical attractiveness, and social power and dominance. Comparing the present results with those from previous studies (Buunk et al., 2011; Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002) it seems that individuals high in SCO with a feminine gender identity, whether heterosexual, lesbian or transgender, tend to feel particularly threatened by same-gender rivals with more social-communal attributes, more physically attractive features, and more social power and dominance. Thus, the present study adds support for the notion that jealousy in individuals with a female gender identity, stems more from the comparison of their own qualities with those of their rivals than jealousy in male individuals, particularly those important for mate value.

The present findings are consistent with the hypothesis of modularity and the notion that human mating psychology consists of domain-specific rather than domain-general processes, that is, that different evolutionarily developed independent mechanisms are involved in the process of reproduction (e.g. Kenrick et al., 1995; Bailey et al., 1994; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). As Swaab and Garcia-Falgueras (2009) suggested, gender identity is a cerebral programming that shapes human behavior from early age. Therefore, these domain-specific processes may be traced back to differences in the development of brain structures. The present study suggests that the characteristics that most transgender individuals try to attain when feminizing or masculinizing their bodies to match their gender identity (Fundacion Huesped, 2014; WPATH, 2011) are precisely those that, if present in a real or imaginary person vying for one's partner, make individuals more jealous. Thus, one may think that gender-affirmative interventions, besides having a strong impact on transgender people sense of well-being (White Hughto & Reisner, 2016), are key elements in incrementing mate value and consequently, the opportunity for attracting and acquiring mates.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The current research has a number of limitations. Firstly, as this was not a probabilistic sample, results may represent a unique sub-population of transgender individuals who are 'out' about their transgender identity and utilize special health care facilities or those who are in contact with community-based organizations. Secondly, the sample only consisted of transgender individuals who identified themselves as heterosexual and thus, it was not possible to distinguish the effect of biological sex, gender identity and sexual orientation on the jealousy-evoking characteristics of the rival. Future research would benefit by incorporating not only a sample of homosexual transgender people but also a control group of non-transgender heterosexual and homosexual individuals in order to better understand specific characteristics of this population, as Chivers and Bailey (2000) have previously revealed.

Thirdly, considering that most transgender women in the sample of this study engage in sex work, and this might have enhanced their intrasexual competitiveness, in order to better explore the role of jealousy and rivalry in this population, future studies should aim at comparing transgender women sex workers with a sample of nontransgender women who are also sex workers. Fourthly, as the great majority of the sample has taken hormones, the role of hormones

on jealousy among transgender individuals could not be explored. Considering that cross-sex hormone therapy is a frequent practice to suppress endogen hormones and therefore, secondary sex features, and that previous studies have shown that jealousy is influenced by estradiol levels (e.g., Cobey, Pollet, Roberts & Buunk, 2011) and the disposition to engage in intrasexual competition is affected by testosterone levels (Hahn, Fisher, Cobey, DeBruine & Jones, 2016), future studies should focus on transgender individuals without any genderaffirming intervention, in particular hormone therapies. Individuals who have underwent some sort of hormonal treatment may have their gender identity more aligned with their sex, particular hormonal sex, thus, future studies would benefit from testing hormonal levels as well.

Finally, although the scales used demonstrated a relatively high internal consistency and high face validity, as Buunk and Dijkstra (2015) posit, the use of scenarios may overrule some features that elicit jealousy in real life or may not capture specific features that are important for the transgender community. Therefore, it would be interesting if future studies can replicate or expand these findings by also applying a more naturalistic design.

Contributions

The main strength of the current study is that it adds to a long tradition on research examining individuals' jealousy responses when confronted with romantic rivals conducted with heterosexual and homosexual males and females in different cultures. Using a large sample of transgender people, it is the first study to demonstrate that the rival characteristics that evoke jealousy in transgender individuals may be similar to those that evoke jealousy in intimate relationships of non-transgender people, and that, remarkably, this occurs based on their gender identity, providing additional support to the hypothesis of modularity. As stated by evolutionary psychologists, genderdifferences in the features that elicit jealousy are tightly related to components of mate value or desirability, and this mechanism is rival-oriented. Given the rarity of the target population, this is a quite valuable work that provides a unique glimpse into romantic relationships among transgender people.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

In the present dissertation, I explored the perceived effects of the legal recognition of the transgender identity in Argentina and the resources that people use to cope with experiences of stigma and discrimination among transgender women. In addition, I explored the characteristics that transgender individuals value in a potential partner, and the characteristics of a rival that evoke jealousy when transgender individuals are confronted with a romantic rival.

Summary of Main Findings

Perceived Impact of the Gender Identity Law in Transgender People's Lives

The Argentinean Gender Identity Law, enacted in May 2012, has been considered as a step-forward for transgender people's civil rights and as a potential manner to counteract the pervasive effect of social stigma (Winter et al., 2016). In Chapter 2, I explored perceptions of the impact of the implementation of the Argentinean Gender Identity Law on the living conditions and the experiences of stigma and discrimination of transgender women.

In this qualitative study, conducted with transgender community leaders from different regions of the country, I found that there was an optimistic view regarding the current and future impact of the Gender Identity Law on their quality of lives. The main perceived consequence of the legal recognition of transgender identities was a meaningful empowering effect on the community. Transgender women understood the law as the acceptance of their existence, and thus, at an individual and subjective level, this empowerment brought identity pride and visibility which may help to reduce internalized stigma. At social and institutional levels, the law acted as a tool to explicitly limit experiences of stigma and discrimination in different settings, particularly in facilitating access to healthcare, educational services and work, as well as improvements in their civil and political rights. Broadly, the law brought a general sense of having a better quality of life among the community, but additionally, it facilitated the social visibility of transgender individuals and their stigma-related daily difficulties, which in turn, helped to initiate a process of cultural change. Despite the positive overall perception, transgender women also perceived some internal and external barriers to the full implementation of the law. On the one hand, older individuals or those with a long history of social rejection were more reluctant to change their identity card or to exert their rights, probably due to their high levels of internalized stigma. On the other hand, there were regional disparities, with distant provinces or conservative governments having none or few professionals trained, and being more hesitant to support the changes promoted by the law, possibly due to the persisting levels of transphobia in their communities. Therefore, despite the optimism following the enactment of the law, the remaining long way ahead to achieve its full implementation was highlighted.

Resources to Cope with Stigma and Discrimination

In line with positive approaches in psychology (Antonovsky, 1988; Castro Solano, 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmyhalyi, 2000) and the importance of identifying individual and collective factors that people use to overcome difficulties in life, in chapter 3, I explored the resources that people belonging to stigmatized groups – in particular transgender women – identified as means for coping resiliently with situations of stigma and discrimination and for maintaining a general sense of psychological wellbeing.

I found that, regardless of the associated stigma –HIV, gay man, or transgender

woman— individuals identified similar resources to resiliently cope with stigma in their daily lives. These protective factors operated at different levels and were consistent with Ryff's model of psychological well-being. At the personal level, self-acceptance was the first step and the main resource to cope with internalized stigma and to develop a sense of control over their lives. At the interpersonal level, social bonds such as acceptance by significant others (e.g., family and friends) and social support networks (e.g., peer groups) were core resources. Social relationships were a mean to cope with internal and external stigma as they help to develop self-confidence and a sense of belonging. Particularly for transgender women, activism provided visibility, a purpose in life, and an opportunity for personal growth. At the institutional level, socio-political changes were identified as pivotal factors to reduce situations of stigma and discrimination and to create a sense of control over their lives. Legislations such as same-sex marriage and recognition of transgender identities not only recognized transgender women as citizens and expanded their civil rights but also limited institutional discrimination. Moreover, the social debate generated around those laws contributed greatly to dismantling social prejudices.

Mate Preferences among Transgender People

Given the importance of social bonds for individuals' psychological wellbeing, in the second part of this dissertation, I focused on intimate relationships in transgender people. Given the many studies that show on sex differences in the mating arena, particularly from an evolutionary psychology approach (e.g., Buss et al., 1990; Lippa, 2007), and considering the unique characteristics of this population, I decided to use an evolutionary approach to explore intimate relationships. In Chapter 4, I studied mate preferences for a long-term relationship among transgender people and I also explored to what extent it is the biological sex or the gender identity of transgender individuals that determines these preferences in potential partners.

I found that transgender individuals displayed some sex-typical mate preferences regarding the importance placed to attraction and personality traits in a potential mate. Transgender women, as their male-birth counterparts, valued having satisfactory sexual relationships and attributes related to attractiveness (e.g., good looks, good health) more than transgender men, whereas transgender men, as their female-birth counterparts, valued a partner with a dependable character more than transgender women. Interestingly, transgender women, more than transgender men emphasized the attributes related to socioeconomic status (ambitious, industrious, favorable social status, financial prospects) when evaluating potential partners. Overall, transgender people resembled heterosexual and gay and lesbian people in the most and least valued attributes in a potential partner. While the most preferred characteristics were mutual attraction-love, a dependable character, a pleasant disposition and being sociable, the least important characteristics were chastity, sharing religious beliefs, or having a similar political background and educational level. However, the most salient preference for transgender individuals was having satisfying sexual relationships, a feature likely associated with the body uneasiness that many transgender individuals experience. Regarding hormone therapy, its effect on mate preferences was only found for transgender men. Individuals who had used hormones placed relatively more importance on features such as satisfying sexual relationships, good financial prospects, favorable social status and similar political background.

Jealousy-evoking Rival Characteristics

Building on the previous study, and considering that most transgender individuals try to acquire sex-typical characteristic congruent with their gender identity (Sevelius, 2013; Coleman et al., 2012) and that jealousy is evoked by the rival characteristics that are believed to increment mate value (e.g., Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002; Buunk et al., 2011), the research described in Chapter 5 hypothesized that gender identity and biological sex represent independent modules and that transgender individuals will respond to romantic rivals in line with their gender identity rather than with their biological sex.

I found that largely, when transgender individuals face romantic rivals, they responded based on their gender identity. Transgender men, more than transgender women, experienced higher levels of jealousy when facing a physically dominant rival, whereas transgender women, more than transgender men, experienced higher levels of jealousy when confronted with physically attractive and social powered and dominant romantic rivals. Like non-transgender individuals, no matter their gender identity, transgender people felt more distress when confronted with rivals that possessed socialcommunal attributes (e.g., good listener and sense of humor), followed by physical dominance in transgender men and physical attractiveness in transgender women. Additionally, in chapter 5, I also described to what extent jealousy responses depended on individual differences. I found that transgender men and women with a strong tendency to compete with same-gender others (i.e., those high in intrasexual competitiveness), experienced more jealousy in response to all the rival characteristics. Interestingly, transgender women presented in general higher levels of intrasexual competitiveness than transgender men. Additionally, only for transgender women, there was a strong association of social comparison orientation with all the rival characteristics that evoked jealousy, except for physical dominance.

Theoretical Implications

From a resilience-based approach, the first part of this dissertation – chapter 2 and 3 – showed that transgender people, as most individuals do, tend to display a variety of protective strategies to successfully deal with the adversity of life (Bariola et al., 2015; Bockting et al., 2013; Bonanno, 2004; Johns et al., 2018; Riggle et al., 2011). As found worldwide (Bariola et al., 2015; Bockting et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2011; Lombardi et al., 2002; Poteat et al., 2013; Reisner et al., 2016), this work depicted how Argentinean transgender individuals usually experience stigma and discrimination attached to their gender nonconformity –such as family rejection, early drop-off from school, unstable housing and survival sex work- that lead this population to precarious living conditions and poor physical and mental health outcomes. However, in line with previous studies (Bockting et al., 2013; Lo & Horton, 2016), the present research illustrated how legal recognition of civil rights for minority groups - or even the social debate around it - acts itself as a protective factor for the communities. The Argentinean gender identity law not only was deemed as an institutional resource to cope with stigmatization, but most importantly, this legal recognition fueled additional resources to deal with situations of stigma and discrimination at the individual and interpersonal levels.

The social and legal recognition of transgender identities, by empowering the community, promoted a sense of self-acceptance that, as has been highlighted, allows individuals to deal with the initial inner sense of not belonging, to boost their feelings self-confidence and to recapture a sense of control over their lives (Bariola et al., 2015; Johns et al., 2018; Riggle

et al., 2011). Additionally, the law generated greater visibility of the transgender community, that as has been shown with other stigmatized groups, helps to dismantle social prejudices and initiate a process of higher acceptance and social change (Johns et al., 2018; Weisz et al., 2015). Being visible, being out, also enhanced the conformation of social networks and the development of identity pride. As Weisz et al. (2015) posited, the identification with a group of peers, facilitates a sense of belonging and the construction of one's social identity. Particularly for transgender individuals involved in activism, working with and for others helped them to collectively find response to situations of discrimination (Schmitt et al., 2003) while providing them with personal goals and meaning in life (Baiocco et al., 2014; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007). Therefore, as previously stated by theorist and professional organizations, legal recognition of transgender identities is needed if societies are willing to facilitate not only people's endorsement of civil rights and but also to promote social inclusion (Knudson et al, 2018; Winter et al., 2016; WPATH, 2018). Moreover, as most of the protective factors mentioned in this dissertation were aligned with Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model of psychological well-being, if societies endorse these types of laws, they will be also promoting a better quality of life for the transgender community.

The importance of social bonds for transgender individuals, particularly of intimate relationships (Feeney & Thrush, 2010; Meier et al., 2013), was also highlighted in the second part of this dissertation. Chapter 4 and 5 showed that transgender people, as non-transgender people do, largely value features that are cues of the ability for commitment and maintenance of long term relationships, both as preferred attributes in a potential mate (cf. Buss et al., 1990; Casullo, 2004; Ubillos et al., 2001), and as the most jealousy-evoking characteristics when confronted with romantic rivals (cf. Buunk, et al., 2011; Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002;). This emphasis placed on love and socio-communal attributes such as trustworthiness and sense of humor are in line with previous studies that show that healthy relationships - understanding them as satisfying and caring exchanges in a context of relative stability - are essential for human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007). For transgender individuals, in particular, intimate relationships are pivotal for feeling accepted and resiliently accompany their process of identity formation (Feeney & Thrush, 2010; Meier et al., 2013).

However, studies presented in Chapter 4 and 5 also showed that transgender men and women differ in some mate preferences and jealousy-evoking rival characteristics. Regarding mate choice, the fact that transgender men tended to prefer personality and character traits over attractiveness, while transgender women tended to prefer good looks and good health over personality in a potential mate, resemble previous findings with non-transgender men and women whether heterosexual (Buss, 1989; Chang et al., 2011; Ha et al., 2012; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Khallad, 2005; Neto et al., 2012; Shackelford et al., 2005; Souza et al., 2016; Todosijević et al., 2003) or gay and lesbian people (Bailey et al., 1994; Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Lawson et al., 2014; Lippa, 2007; VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008). This finding that transgender individuals display sextypical mate preferences not only provide evidence for the well-documented gender differences in human mating strategies but also provide support for the hypothesis of evolutionary psychologists that these strategies are independent mechanism that have served to resolve adaptive problems, and thus, individuals look for cues of parental investment and reproductive potential in their partners (Buss et al., 1990; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Shackelford et al., 2005; Symons, 1979; Trivers, 1972).

In a similar manner, the results that transgender women, like non-transgender women,

felt more distressed when a real or imaginary rival possessed characteristics of physical attractiveness while transgender men, like non-transgender men, felt more distressed when the rival possessed characteristics associated to physical dominance are aligned with previous results (Buunk et al., 2011; Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002). These findings suggest that, when confronted with a person vying for their partner's attention, transgender individuals respond based on their gender identity, rather than their biological sex. This is not a surprising outcome considering that jealousy is driven by the features that increment individuals' mate value and the opportunity to attract mates, which in the case of transgender individuals, are the characteristics that they try to attain when feminizing or masculinizing their bodies through medical gender-affirming procedures such as cross-sex hormone therapy and surgeries (Coleman et al., 2012; Fundacion Huesped, 2014; Sevelius, 2013; WPATH, 2011). Moreover, the role of hormones in mate choice was incipiently explored in chapter 4 and the finding that transgender men who has used testosterone displayed more male-typical preferences than those who has not are consistent with evolutionary theorist that highlight the importance of sex-hormones on mating motivations and behaviors (Cobey et al., 2011; Gangestad & Grebe, 2017; Hahn et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2014). As this effect was only found for transgender men, and considering that most individuals of the sample have been using hormones and in several cases this was under self-prescribed circumstances, these results, although not conclusive, open a very interesting line of research.

Largely, the studies in Chapter 4 and 5 provide initial evidence for the distinct influences of biological sex and gender identity on some aspects of mating. While transgender individuals display sex-typical mate preferences - based on their biological sex - they tend to respond to romantic rivals based on their gender identity, offering support for the hypothesis of modularity and the idea that human mating, as many other evolved processes, consist of domain-specific rather than domain-general mechanism (Kenrick et al., 1995; Bailey et al., 1994; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). That is, mating, as a pivotal aspect of male and female reproduction, is not controlled by a solo mechanism but rather by a number of cognitive and behavioral mechanisms designed to performed different functions and linked to particular brain structures. In this line, from recent neurological studies, it has been proposed that gender identity is a cerebral program, developed independently from other cerebral programs - e.g., sexual orientation- that shapes human behavior from very early age (Savic et al., 2010; Swaab & Garcia-Falgueras, 2009). Therefore, a change in one of these biological mechanisms would not be accompanied by changes in all related mechanisms. Overall, this dissertation provides initial evidence for the hypothesis that, as transgender individuals present an incongruence between their gender identity and their biological sex, they seem to respond in some mating domains based on their biological sex and in others based on their gender identity.

Finally, the finding that transgender women consistently presented a tendency to focus on attributes related to socio-economic status and social power and dominance, both in their potential partners and in their romantic rivals, might be explained by contextual factors, as proposed by some socio structural theorists (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Ha et al., 2012; Khallad, 2005; Ubillos et al., 2001). Transgender women, as a marginalized group with low socio-economic status, might privilege in a partner traits that are cues of resources and social power either as a necessity to survive (Li, et al., 2002) or as an opportunity to move upward in the society (Ubillos et al., 2001). The role of contextual constraints in shaping mating strategies was also shown by some findings related to jealousy and intrasexual competitiveness. Although transgender men and women high in intrasexual competitiveness experienced relatively more

jealousy in response to all rival characteristics as non-transgender people do (Buunk et al., 2010), transgender women were significantly more competitive than transgender men, a result that is worth noting given that intrasexual competitiveness is frequently associated to male-male competition. However, considering that most transgender women are sex workers in Argentina and consequently competition among same-gender is part of their daily lives (Aristegui & Vazquez, 2013; Fundacion Huesped, 2014), and taking into account that very few non-transgender heterosexual individuals consider transgender persons as potential partners (Blair & Hoskin, 2018), the perceived scarcity of mates might increment the tendency to compete with same-gender others (Arnocky et al., 2014). Overall, this dissertation highlights the importance of integrating a more positive approach when studying transgender people and of considering valid domains of application of different theories to uncover the particularities of this population.

Practical Implications

The results of this dissertation have a number of clinical and political implications. As transgender people are gaining visibility in society and due to the de-pathologization and legal recognition advance, it is expected that not only this population, but also their families and friends, employers, schools, and government agencies will increasingly turn to psychologists for help in addressing some of the issues affecting this group. Therefore, for practitioners, this work highlights the importance of working from an identity-recognition and strength-based approach and informs the development of tailored resilience-building and mental health interventions and programs. This work provides practitioners with knowledge to develop greater cultural competencies to work with transgender individuals and to understand that, besides the usual problems that a person brings to individual or couples therapy, transgender people face the unique issue of determining how to live their gender non-congruency while addressing a complex environment characterized by social stigmatization.

Moreover, considering that conforming and maintaining romantic relationships may be challenging for transgender people, this thesis also provides practitioners with greater understanding and capability for addressing issues related to intimacy and a first glimpse on how transgender individuals respond in the market of mating. This dissertation highlights the importance of medical gender-affirming intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, as a manner to develop clients' feelings of congruency and sense of psychological well-being. However, considering the importance placed on sexuality by this population and the fact that the sexual characteristics that transgender people tend to attain through these interventions are tightly related to components of mate value or desirability, gender affirming interventions may increase their possibility to develop a satisfying sexual life, their own appraisal as potential mates and thus, their confidence when it comes to intimate relationships. In this line, this thesis not only provides practitioners with knowledge to work accompanying clients through the process of transitioning, managing anxieties and expectations, but also informs policy makers of the importance of including gender affirmation in their public health programs to improve mental health outcomes and well-being of transgender people (Bouman et al., 2016; Witcomb et al., 2018) and to avoid risky behaviors such as silicone injections or street hormone use (Sevelius, 2013).

For policy makers, as the Argentinean Gender Identity Law has inspired activists internationally and has been set as benchmark of best practice law -because it stands on the self-determination model of gender identity and includes the right of transgender people to

access gender-affirming healthcare (Winter et al., 2016; WPATH, 2018)- the results presented in this dissertation can be used when discussing the implementation of similar laws in other countries. Although the Argentinean approach may not in all respects be appropriate or feasible in other countries or cultures, these studies provide transgender people's perceptions of the gains and potential shortcomings in the law implementation and therefore, can serve as a checklist against which to compare when evaluating different approaches to gender legal recognition.

Main Strengths of this Dissertation

A major strength of the present dissertation is that it adds to the current literature on adult transgender population, and that it expands some lines of research from a positive and resource-based approach as well as from an evolutionary perspective.

The study described in chapter 2 is the first to explore transgender women's perceptions of the impact of the novel Argentinean Gender Identity Law and to provide insight on the advances and barriers encounter on its implementation. The research described in chapter 3 explored resources to cope with stigma among transgender women, and linked these resources to a well-established model of wellbeing, a topic that has received little attention in previous research. The studies described in chapter 4 and 5 provide a significant contribution to the study of intimacy with a large sample of transgender individuals, a very important issue of adults' lives, that has hardly been explored before in this population. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, these findings point to a unique opportunity to examine the relative importance of gender identity and biological sex on the processes related to mating. Most importantly, these studies build upon a long tradition on research examining sex differences with heterosexual and gay and lesbian individuals in different cultures and adds to the existing evidence for both powerful cross-cultural consistencies and some cross-cultural variations.

An additional positive feature of the present thesis is that all studies were conducted in Argentina and included a large sample of transgender men and women, expanding research in this population to a country outside Europe and the USA, which may add to a better understanding of this unique population, and may generate new hypotheses for future research.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

Despite the positive features, the present research also had a series of limitations that are worth noting. In the first section of this dissertation, the qualitative nature of the studies presented in chapter 2 and 3 did not allow generalizing the results to other contexts or samples. Moreover, as participants were activist of the transgender community, their perceptions might not necessarily represent individuals who have not fully achieved self-acceptance or visibility of their identities. Therefore, future studies assessing stigma-coping resources would benefit from incorporating a more diverse sample of individuals. Furthermore, it will be interesting to study these resources in a quantitative and longitudinal manner in order to understand the role of resilient factors, such as self-acceptance and legal recognition of transgender identity, at different stages of the lifespan as well as their long-lasting effects on wellbeing. Finally, as the present studies were conducted in a country that has been passing progressive laws in terms of human rights, some of the resources mentioned to cope with stigma may operate in a different manner in societies with more restrictive laws or conservative cultures, therefore, future studies

will benefit from conducting cross-cultural comparisons.

In a similar manner, the quantitative studies on intimate relationships introduced in chapter 4 and 5 also suffered from some sampling and methodology issues. First, as the sample was self-selected this may not be representative of the transgender community as a whole and present a bias toward a subgroup of individuals who are “out” about their transgender identity and are in contact with gender-affirming health-care facilities or community-based organizations. Second, as only participants who identified themselves as heterosexual were included, it was not possible to explore the interaction between sex, gender, and sexual orientation in mating preferences and jealousy-evoking rival characteristics. Thus, in terms of better understanding the specific characteristics of this population and their intimate relationships, and to further contribute to theorizing in on sex differences on human mating, future studies should incorporate samples of transgender individuals with different sexual orientations as well as nontransgender heterosexual and gay and lesbian samples in the same studies in order to make adequate comparisons among these groups. Third, as the great majority of the sample has underwent some sort of hormonal treatment and in many cases without medical supervision, it was not possible to adequately explore the role of sex hormones on their mating behavior. As individuals who have used cross-sex hormones may have their gender identity more aligned with their biological sex, it is highly desirable to conduct research among transgender individuals with different status in terms of hormone replacement therapy and to objectively measure hormonal levels in order to explore the modulating effect of hormones in the role of biological sex and gender identity on the mating mechanisms of transgender individuals. Finally, the use of selfreported measures, although widely expended and with demonstrated validity internal consistency, implies a restricted number of items and hypothetical scenarios that might not capture real-life interactions or specific characteristics important for the transgender population. Future studies should explore the generalizability of the data presented in this dissertation to a more general sample of transgender individuals using naturalist methodologies designs, in which participants are not aware they are being studied and, thus, can assess potential partners’ or rival’s characteristics with their potential real-life consequences.

Conclusion

In sum, this dissertation provides insight into the experience of transgender individuals in Argentina. Particularly, in the first section of this dissertation, two qualitative studies provide evidence of how programs and policies that recognize transgender identities counteract the pervasive effect of transphobia on this population and help to improve their living conditions. It describes transgender women’s general positive perception of impact of the Gender Identity Law and an optimistic view regarding future outcomes. This section illustrates advances in areas such as health, education and work, and remaining challenges for the law full implementation. Most importantly, these studies reveal a major empowering effect for the transgender community of this type of legal frameworks, and describe individual (e.g., identity pride), social (e.g., activism), and institutional (e.g., sociopolitical changes) resources that may help to cope with situations of stigma and discrimination. These protective factors may in turn improve psychological well-being of transgender individuals by emphasizing the importance of self-acceptance; the ability to have control over situations; the quality of psychosocial bonds; and the importance of having projects in life.

The second part of this dissertation, by focusing on the intimate relationships of transgender individuals, provides a unique opportunity to explore sex differences that have observed in heterosexual and gay and lesbian non-transgender populations across different cultures. Using a large sample of transgender individuals, this is the first research to demonstrate that transgender people resembled non-transgender people of either sexual orientation in the most valued attributes (e.g., mutual attraction-love, being sociable) and the least important characteristics (e.g., chastity, sharing religious beliefs) in a potential partner as well as in the attributes that evoke jealousy when facing a romantic rival (e.g., socio-communal characteristics). However, a particularly remarkable finding is that transgender individuals present a general trend towards biological sex-typical mate preferences but a tendency to respond to romantic rivals based on their gender identity, shedding light on the role of biological sex and gender identity and providing evidence for the notion of modularity of human mating strategies. Although the present thesis offers support for the existence of evolved mechanisms that influence human mating behavior, it also opens questions regarding the role of contextual forces with respect to these mechanisms.

In sum, this dissertation depicts the changing public and private experience of transgender people, the resources that transgender individuals apply to develop resilient lives, despite the adversity of stigma, and a valuable glimpse into their romantic relationships, an important component of well-being.

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Summary in Dutch

SUMMARY IN DUTCH - SAMENVATTING

Het aantal transgenders dat zich openlijk als zodanig bekend wil maken, is de laatste jaren toegenomen. ‘Transgender’ is een overkoepelende term voor mensen die zich niet vereenzelvigen met de genderidentiteit en/of -expressie van de geslachtsgroep waarbij ze bij de geboorte zijn ingedeeld. De term omvat een diversiteit aan groepen en genderidentiteiten, waaronder transseksuelen, travestieten, transgender vrouwen, transgender mannen en mensen van wie de genderidentiteit en -expressie niet binnen het binaire man/vrouw-indelingssysteem past. Veel transgenders hebben niet alleen het gevoel er niet bij te horen, maar hebben ook te maken met sociale stigmatisering in verband met hun gender-non-conformiteit, wat een nadelige invloed heeft op leefomstandigheden en de lichamelijke en geestelijke gezondheid.

Wat betreft deze minderheidsgroep is heel weinig bekend over onderwerpen met betrekking tot positief psychosociaal functioneren. In het eerste deel van dit proefschrift worden daarom twee kwalitatieve studies gepresenteerd: één die de waargenomen effecten van de wettelijke erkenning van de transgender identiteit in Argentinië heeft onderzocht, en één die in een steekproef van homoseksuele mannen en transgender vrouwen heeft onderzocht welke hulpmiddelen mensen gebruiken om zich te weren tegen stigmatisering en discriminatie.

Aangezien transgenders steeds zichtbaarder worden in de samenleving, is het belangrijk meer inzicht te verkrijgen in intieme relaties binnen deze groep. Het tweede deel van dit proefschrift gaat daarom in op twee kwantitatieve studies waarin relatieproblemen in een grote steekproef van deze unieke bevolkingsgroep zijn onderzocht vanuit het perspectief van de evolutionaire psychologie.

Hoofdstuk 2: Waargenomen impact van de Wet inzake genderidentiteit op het leven van transgenders

In mei 2012 werd in Argentinië, na gezamenlijke inspanningen, de Wet inzake de genderidentiteit aangenomen. Dit was een zeer progressieve, op mensenrechtenprincipes gebaseerde, wet omdat zij de eerste ter wereld was die iemands genderidentiteit erkende zonder daar voorwaarden aan te stellen. Deze wet werd beschouwd als een stap vooruit voor de burgerrechten van transgenders en als mogelijk tegengif tegen het ingrijpende effect van sociale stigmatisering. Er is echter weinig studie gedaan naar de impact van deze wet (positieve effecten als wel obstakels voor de uitvoering) op de transgender gemeenschap. In hoofdstuk 2 heb ik onderzocht hoe er werd aangekeken tegen de impact van de uitvoering van de Argentijnse Wet inzake genderidentiteit op de leefomstandigheden en de stigmatisering en discriminatie van transgender vrouwen. In deze kwalitatieve studie is gebruikgemaakt van twee focusgroepen met twintig transgender vrouwen uit verschillende delen van het land die leiders van een gemeenschap waren.

Er bleek een optimistisch beeld te bestaan van de impact, nu en in de toekomst, van de Wet inzake genderidentiteit op hun kwaliteit van leven. Het belangrijkste ervaren effect van de wettelijke erkenning van transgender identiteiten was dat transgender vrouwen zich als mens geaccepteerd voelden; op een individueel en subjectief niveau zorgde deze empowerment dus voor een gevoel van trots op de eigen identiteit en voor zichtbaarheid, wat verinnerlijkte stigmatisering kan helpen verminderen. Op een maatschappelijk en institutioneel niveau fungeerde de wet als een instrument voor het nadrukkelijk beperken van stigmatisering en discriminatie in verschillende situaties, met name door het vergemakkelijken van toegang tot de gezondheidszorg, onderwijs

en werk, en door het verbeteren van hun burger- en politieke rechten. Al met al bracht de wet bij mensen binnen de gemeenschap niet alleen een algemeen gevoel teweeg dat hun kwaliteit van leven was verbeterd, maar bevorderde zij ook de maatschappelijke zichtbaarheid van transgenders en de problemen die zij dagelijks ondervonden als gevolg van stigmatisering, wat vervolgens een cultureel veranderingsproces op gang bracht. Ondanks de algemene positieve ervaring liepen transgender vrouwen ook tegen een aantal innerlijke en externe obstakels aan voor een volledige uitvoering van de wet. Ouderen en mensen met een lange geschiedenis van sociale afwijzing hadden meer moeite met het aanpassen van hun identiteitskaart of het uitoefenen van hun rechten, waarschijnlijk in verband met een sterk verinnerlijkte stigmatisering. Daarnaast leidden in verschillende regio's conservatieve overheden geen of weinig professionals op en was er minder bereidheid om de door de wet voorgestelde veranderingen te steunen, wellicht door de hardnekkige transfobie in hun gemeenschappen. Ondanks het optimisme naar aanleiding van de uitvaardiging van deze wet, gaf deze studie dus ook duidelijk aan dat er voor een volledige uitvoering van de wet nog een lange weg te gaan was.

Hoofdstuk 3: Hulpmiddelen om zich te weren tegen stigmatisering en discriminatie

Stigmatisering op grond van een hiv-status, genderidentiteit en seksuele oriëntatie heeft een nadelige invloed op de kwaliteit van leven. In lijn met de benadering van de positieve psychologie en het belang van het benoemen van individuele en collectieve factoren waarvan mensen gebruikmaken om moeilijkheden in het leven te overwinnen, heb ik, zoals besproken in hoofdstuk 3, onderzocht welke factoren mensen die tot gestigmatiseerde groepen behoren – met name transgender vrouwen – zagen als een manier om zich te weren tegen stigmatisering en discriminatie en om een algemeen gevoel van psychologisch welzijn te behouden. In deze kwalitatieve studie is gebruikgemaakt van vier focusgroepen met achttien homoseksuele mannen en zeventien transgender vrouwen, die op basis van de hiv-status werden onderverdeeld.

Het bleek dat mensen, ongeacht het stigma waarmee ze te maken hadden – hiv, homoseksuele man of transgender vrouw – vergelijkbare middelen aanwezen om zich in hun dagelijkse leven te weren tegen stigmatisering. Op een persoonlijk niveau was zelfacceptatie de eerste stap en het belangrijkste factoren om met verinnerlijkte stigmatisering om te gaan en een gevoel van controle over het eigen leven te ontwikkelen. Op een interpersoonlijk niveau waren sociale relaties, bijvoorbeeld acceptatie door belangrijke naasten (zoals familie en vrienden) en sociale netwerken (zoals groepen van gelijken), de belangrijkste hulpmiddelen. Sociale relaties boden een manier om met innerlijke en externe stigmatisering om te gaan, omdat ze bijdroegen aan de ontwikkeling van zelfvertrouwen en het gevoel ergens bij te horen. Met name bij transgender vrouwen zorgde activisme voor zichtbaarheid, een doel in het leven en een mogelijkheid tot persoonlijke groei. Op een institutioneel niveau werden sociaalpolitieke veranderingen genoemd als cruciale factoren voor het terugdringen van stigmatisering en discriminatie en het teweegbrengen van een gevoel van controle over het eigen leven. Wetgeving, zoals kunnen trouwen met een persoon van hetzelfde geslacht en erkenning van transgender identiteiten, zorgde niet alleen voor erkenning van transgender vrouwen als burgers en uitbreiding van hun burgerrechten, maar verminderde ook de institutionele discriminatie. Het maatschappelijk debat rondom deze wetten droeg bovendien enorm bij aan het ontmantelen van maatschappelijke vooroordelen.

Hoofdstuk 4: Partnerkeuze bij transgenders

Gelet op het belang van intieme relaties voor het psychologisch welzijn van mensen, is het tweede deel van dit proefschrift gericht op intieme relaties bij transgenders. In hoofdstuk 4 heb ik onderzoek gedaan naar de manier waarop transgenders een partner voor een langdurige relatie kiezen, en naar de mate waarin de biologische sekse of de genderidentiteit van transgenders bepalend is voor deze voorkeuren wat betreft mogelijke partners. Er is gebruik gemaakt van een gelegenheidssteekproef van 134 transgender vrouwen en 94 transgender mannen uit Argentinië die zichzelf beschouwden als heteroseksueel. De deelnemers beoordeelden de Buss-lijst met achttien eigenschappen van partners.

Transgenders gaven blijk van een aantal seksegebonden partnervoorkeuren wat betreft het belang dat werd gehecht aan aantrekkelijkheid en persoonlijkheidskenmerken van een potentiële partner. Net als hun als man geboren tegenhangers, hechtten transgender vrouwen, in vergelijking met transgender mannen meer waarde aan het hebben van bevredigende seksuele relaties en kenmerken die betrekking hebben op aantrekkelijkheid (bijvoorbeeld een goed uiterlijk, een goede gezondheid), terwijl transgender mannen, net als hun als vrouw geboren tegenhangers, in vergelijking met transgender vrouwen meer waarde hechtten aan een partner met een aanhankelijk karakter. Wat opviel was dat transgender vrouwen, meer dan transgender mannen, potentiële partners met name op kenmerken met betrekking tot de sociaaleconomische status (ambitieuw, hardwerkend, een goede sociale status, financiële vooruitzichten) beoordeelden. Al met al waren de voorkeuren van transgenders vergelijkbaar met die van heteroseksuele, homoseksuele en lesbische mensen wat betreft kenmerken die het meest en minst in een mogelijke partner werden gewaardeerd. De eigenschappen die het meest werden gewaardeerd, waren wederzijdse aantrekking en liefde, een aanhankelijk en vriendelijk karakter en sociaal zijn, en de minst belangrijke eigenschappen waren kuisheid, gedeelde religieuze opvattingen, of een vergelijkbare politieke achtergrond en opleidingsniveau. De meest in het oog springende voorkeur voor transgenders was echter het hebben van bevredigende seksuele relaties, wat waarschijnlijk samenhangt met het lichamelijke ongemak dat veel transgenders ervaren. Hormoontherapie voor transgender mannen was van invloed op de partnerkeuze. Individuen die hormonen hadden gebruikt, hechtten relatief meer belang aan kenmerken als bevredigende seksuele relaties, goede financiële vooruitzichten, een goede sociale status en eenzelfde politieke achtergrond.

Hoofdstuk 5: Jaloezie-opwekkende eigenschappen van rivalen

Voortbordurend op de voorgaande studie en gelet op het feit dat de meeste transgenders seksegebonden eigenschappen proberen aan te leren die passen bij hun genderidentiteit en dat jaloezie wordt opgewekt door de eigenschappen van de rivaal waarvan wordt aangenomen dat die de waarde van de partner verhogen, werd voor het in hoofdstuk 5 beschreven onderzoek aangenomen dat genderidentiteit en biologische sekse los van elkaar staan en dat transgenders in lijn met hun genderidentiteit zullen reageren op romantische rivalen. De steekproef bestond uit 228 heteroseksuele transgenders die een vragenlijst invulden waarin werd gevraagd naar de eigenschappen van rivalen die jaloezie opwekten, de neiging om de competitie aan te gaan met andere personen van dezelfde sekse, en de neiging om zichzelf met anderen te vergelijken.

Transgenders bleken over het algemeen afhankelijk van hun genderidentiteit op relationele concurrenten te reageren. Transgender mannen voelden zich, in vergelijking met transgender vrouwen, jaloers(er) ten overstaan van een fysiek dominante rivaal, terwijl transgender

vrouwen zich, in vergelijking met transgender mannen, jaloers voelden ten overstaan van fysiek aantrekkelijke, dominante romantische rivalen met een goede sociale positie. Net als niet-transgenders voelden transgenders zich, ongeacht hun genderidentiteit, meer gespannen ten overstaan van rivalen die beschikten over sociale kenmerken (bijv. goed kunnen luisteren en gevoel voor humor), gevolgd door fysieke dominantie bij transgender mannen en fysieke aantrekkelijkheid bij transgender vrouwen. Ook bleek dat transgender mannen en vrouwen die een sterke neiging hadden om met anderen van dezelfde sekse te concurreren (dat wil zeggen mensen met een sterke intraseksuele competitiviteit), meer jaloezie voelden ten aanzien van alle eigenschappen van de rivaal. Interessant genoeg bleken transgender vrouwen over het algemeen een sterkere intraseksuele competitiviteit te hebben dan transgender mannen. Alleen bij transgender vrouwen was sprake van een sterke samenhang tussen de neiging tot sociale vergelijking en alle eigenschappen van de concurrent die jaloezie opwekten, behalve wat betreft fysieke dominantie.

Conclusies

Met betrekking tot weerbaarheid toonde het eerste deel van dit proefschrift aan dat transgenders, zoals de meeste mensen, geneigd zijn verschillende beschermingsstrategieën aan de dag te leggen om tegenslagen in het leven te boven te komen. De Argentijnse Wet inzake genderidentiteit werd niet alleen beschouwd als een institutioneel instrument om met stigmatisering om te gaan, maar was ook een aanjager voor aanvullende manieren om met stigmatisering en discriminatie om te gaan op een persoonlijk, maatschappelijk en institutioneel niveau. Wettelijke erkenning van transgender identiteiten is uiteraard noodzakelijk als samenlevingen niet alleen de bekrachtiging van burgerrechten, maar ook sociale inclusie en een betere kwaliteit van leven voor de transgender gemeenschap willen bevorderen.

In het tweede deel van dit proefschrift lag de nadruk op het belang van intieme relaties voor transgenders en werd aangetoond dat transgenders, net als niettransgenders, veel waarde hechten aan kenmerken die blijk geven van het vermogen zich te binden en bevredigende langdurige relaties te onderhouden. Er zijn echter wel genderverschillen aangetroffen: transgenders geven weliswaar blijk van partnervoorkeuren op basis van hun biologische sekse, maar de wijze waarop ze reageren op romantische rivalen, is afhankelijk van hun genderidentiteit. Deze bevindingen bieden niet alleen bewijs voor de goed gedocumenteerde genderverschillen bij de partnerkeuze van mensen en de aanname van evolutionair psychologen dat deze strategieën geëvolueerde mechanismen zijn, maar ook voor het idee van modulariteit en het idee dat de partnerkeuze, net als veel andere geëvolueerde processen, uit domeinspecifieke in plaats van domein-algemene mechanismen bestaan. Het belang dat transgender vrouwen hechten aan kenmerken die te maken hebben met sociaaleconomische status en sociale macht en dominantie wees op de rol van omgevingsfactoren bij de totstandkoming van bepaalde partnerkeuze-strategieën. Dit proefschrift benadrukt ten slotte ook het belang van medisch genderbevestigend ingrijpen, zoals hormoontherapie en chirurgisch ingrijpen, als een manier om bij patiënten het gevoel van harmonie en psychologisch welzijn te ontwikkelen, maar ook als essentiële aspecten van de waarde of begeerlijkheid van een partner.

Dit proefschrift beschrijft, samengevat, de veranderende wijze waarop transgenders in het publieke en private domein worden ervaren, de manieren waarop transgenders een weerbaar leven proberen te leiden ondanks de tegenwerking van stigmatisering, en een intrigerend beeld van hun liefdesrelaties, hetgeen een belangrijk aspect is van ons welzijn.

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About the author

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ines Aristegui was born in Argentina in 1976. She has a Bachelor in Psychology (Honours) from the Australia Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia (2006) and completed her studies as a clinical psychologist at the Universidad de Palermo, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Mrs Aristegui has provided individual and group counseling for sexual diversity populations and people living with HIV. Since 2007 she also has been working at Fundacion Huesped, an Argentine non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on researching and developing practical solutions to guarantee access to health, particularly HIV/AIDS, other transmissible diseases and sexual and reproductive health. At this NGO, she coordinates the social research unit in the Direction of Clinical Research. Particularly, she leads a multidisciplinary transgender research team that conducts qualitative and quantitative studies, participates in clinical trials and implements projects in public hospitals and community based-organizations, all targeting transgender population. Mrs Aristegui has been involved in national and multicenter international studies on the following topics: impact of the Gender Identity Law in Argentina; HIV-related stigma and discrimination among vulnerable populations; influence of hormone therapy on mental health of transgender people; and psychological, social and structural factors related to testing, adherence and engagement on the HIV care continuum.