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Exploring Stigmas and Emotions of Transgender People Using Rasa Theory and Rasaboxes in Drama Therapy

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Masters in Drama Therapy

Research Report

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my late grandmother, **Sophie Thiwe Tete** (1949-2013) as an update on the journey.

Kude kwalapha Makhulu.

(Grandmother, I've come this far.)

Acknowledgements

- To my **Heavenly Father** and my **Lord** and **Saviour**, **Jesus Christ,** for the strength and allowing me to be able to embark on this journey. *Nkosi, sewundivuyisile ekulileni kwam*.
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Exploring Stigmas and Emotions of Transgender People Using Rasa Theory and Rasaboxes in Drama Therapy

1. Background to the study

Due to the prevalence of discrimination and stigma throughout Africa, transgender individuals often face negative experiences in their daily lives. They are often harassed at work, in public places, and at home. Due to their non-conformity with gender norms, transgender individuals are prone to experiencing violence. Having a non-reflecting identity document makes them feel embarrassed and vulnerable, which can lead to humiliation and a threat of violence. This can effectively deny them their citizenship and legal rights. When transgender individuals are turned away from bank transactions and jobs due to their lack of government-issued identification, this issue highlights the problem. They are often subjected to humiliating and distressing treatment when they reveal their identity and personal details to others so they can access essential services (Southern African Litigation Centre, 2016). This violates basic human values such as Love, Peace, Truth, Non-Violence, and Right Action (Oji, 2020). According to Barker (2020), the term transgender refers to people whose behaviour, identity, and expression do not align with what they were assigned at birth. According to Judith Butler (2006), the body can't be considered a stable foundation when it comes to gender expression. My research aims to show the emotions that transgender individuals go through. According to the Embodied Emotions theory, which was presented by Glenberg et al (2013) and Nielsen (2017), the processing, understanding, and expression of emotions are related to individuals' physical arousal. There are various elements of cooperative associations between cognitive processes and physical actions that can be utilized effectively. In this study, I will explore the emotions of transgender individuals using the Rasa Theory. The progress in the study of emotions has been slower than expected. From a scientific viewpoint, it is not clear if there is a universal type of emotion or if there are specific kinds of emotions that people should be able to identify. On the other hand, from an indigenous perspective, it is not clear if there is a particular significance to how people comprehend and handle emotions. The integration of indigenous and scientific approaches has been

the least progress that has been made in the study of emotions. It has not established the role that Indigenous formulations play in managing one's emotional life (Heetas, n.d.). The Rasa Theory is rooted in Indian aesthetics and focuses on the aesthetic and emotional experiences that artists create through their performances (Das, 2017). According to Brene Brown (2021), an overwhelming feeling robs us of our ability to think, feel, and breathe. The goal of Rasa Theory is to enhance the performer's ability to embody the various emotional states of the rasa. This process can be done through the development of a deeper understanding of their own emotions. In addition to being able to physically embody these states, the performer also benefits from having a sense of integrity and authenticity. The ability to seamlessly integrate the body, emotions, and mind allows a performer to convey Rasa with a sense of resonance and depth. The practice of Rasa allows people to connect with various themes and emotions, as well as experience a collective aesthetic encounter. The concept of embodiment refers to the recognition of the body as a vital part of the study. It entails acknowledging that intellect and knowledge are not exclusively intellectual but are shaped by various bodily sensations and emotions (Lux et al., 2021).

The Rasaboxes by Schechner (2021) show that an internal emotional process may be externalized, which implies that genuine emotions are both psychological and physical experiences. In Drama Therapy, there are various aspects of identity, embodiment, and role-play. According to Silverstone (2018), in identity and role-play, participants can explore the effects of different factors on their self-concept by playing a role-play role. This can help them develop their identity as they go through various stages. The goal of this study is to explore the stigmas associated with transgender people. Prejudice and discrimination against such individuals have been known to have detrimental effects on their mental health. The Rasaboxes technique can be utilized in therapy to help individuals develop adaptive responses to unstable environments. This can be achieved by embodying the emotions found within the grid (Arie, 2023). The process of the Rasaboxes allows clients to identify their emotions by moving through boxes, which represent various types of emotions. This allows them to feel and experience these emotions more authentically. It also helps them develop emotional literacy. Providers of mental health services are referred to as "athletes of the heart." In a way that when they

help individuals develop their inner experience and become more present in moments of suffering. (Sajnani, 2023). I chose to use Rasaboxes because they are presented to sustain care in Drama Therapy. Through narratives from various training programs, I will be able to expand my own inner experience and develop a more contemplative perspective. In addition, the Rasaboxes can help me transition from my role as a researcher and a drama therapist in training to being able to support and understand transgender individuals in times of need. The use of Rasaboxes will enable space to include emotional labour, emotional intelligence, emotional aesthetics, and affective resonance in my performance (Sajnani, 2023). Rasaboxes are good tools for studying human expressions and emotions. They provide a comprehensive framework that lets me explore various emotional states, including complex feelings. I find the way they emphasize non-verbal cues particularly helpful. This allows me to study the way people express themselves. The ability to compare the emotional recognition and expressions of different cultural groups through Rasaboxes is very interesting to me. This allows me to study the link between cultural differences and emotional communication. The artistic and creative aspects of Rasaboxes also enrich my research. Through Rasaboxes, I can combine different disciplines such as psychology, aesthetics, communication, and performing arts to enhance my knowledge of emotions from different perspectives. Moreover, its innovative approach sparks my curiosity and opens a new avenue for emotional research.

I am interested in learning more about the stigmas surrounding transgender people. In this research, I will be studying various emotions using drama therapy techniques. I will then use the Rasa performance theory to embody the feelings of transgender individuals. This research's design method is performance as research, and it aims to explore the stigmas and emotions that transgender people go through. Through the practice of performance and theatre, I will be able to develop a method that will allow my readers and audience to understand the role that performance and theatre play in expressing emotions.

According to Schechner's (2001) study, the behaviour can vary depending on how the performance genre is used. The Rasa practice and theory provide practical and theoretical opportunities to explore emotions. The theory states that external experiences can be joined to internal emotions by expressing them. The research I am conducting explores the emotions that transgender individuals experience when they confront stigmas. To raise awareness about this issue, I intend to take the audience on a journey that will reveal suppressed emotions and explore the link between drama and therapy using the Rasaboxes. The journey will be explored through a drama therapy process. It explores the connection between the body and the mind. The body's basic needs are fulfilled by the brain, which is an organ that is responsible for carrying out all the body's actions. But it also has a need that is its own, and it requires that the environment be conducive to its functioning (Wolff, 1961).

The term transgender (Baker, 2020) refers to individuals who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. They may experience various behaviours and expressions that do not match their assigned sex. At any age, they may begin to become aware of their identity. Some people may experience a feeling of being out of place or a disconnect from their assigned sex at an early age. Others may have a specific desire to identify as a woman instead of a man. These individuals may face various human rights violations if their gender expression or identity is not accurately reflected in official documents (APA Editors, 2023). The lack of legal recognition of transgender individuals' gender identity can create a legal vacuum that allows discrimination and stigmatization to continue. Misperceptions about what constitutes a man or woman and their desire to punish those who break gender norms often lead to violent acts. These types of actions are typically carried out due to deep-rooted discrimination and stigma, as well as irrational anger. It further highlights the need for more social acceptance and legal protections for transgender individuals so that their fundamental human rights can be upheld and respected (OHCHR Editors, n.d.).

2. Aims and Objectives

The goal of this study is to explore the emotional experiences of people who identify as transgender. Through the Rasa Theory, which is my main research technique, I hope to explore how transgender individuals feel and how their experiences are influenced by the stigmas surrounding them. The objectives of my research are:

- To explore the emotions expressed by transgender individuals using the Rasa Theory.
- To examine the effects of discrimination and stigmas on the feelings of transgender individuals.
- To create empathy for transgender individuals. I will talk about their personal stories and narratives.
- To inform the public about the many challenges and feelings that transgender individuals experience due to discrimination and stigma.

3. Research Question

- In what ways can Rasa Theory help to explore and/ or portray the emotions that transgender people go through?

3.1. Sub-Question

- What are the emotions that transgender people go through when they experience stigmas?
- How can using the Rasaboxes help raise awareness about the emotions transgender people go through because of stigmas?

4. Rationale and Motivation

My focus was drawn to transgender people after a friend of mine stated that he did not like transgender people because they go against God's creation and claimed that God made a mistake when He created them. As someone that has friends that are

transgender, those words made me realize that my friends are going through a lot of challenges due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. That led to a deeper reflection about the situation of transgender people globally. These individuals around the world are subjected to a wide range of discrimination and violence due to the simple fact that they are transgender. This is an alarming violation of basic human values such as Love, Truth, Peace, Non-Violence, and Right Action (Oji, 2020). They are often victims of a vicious cycle of marginalization and social exclusion. They are often subjected to abuse and harassment at school, rejected by their families, and have limited job prospects. These experiences can result in severe psychological distress, which can worsen their mental and physical health (OHCHR, n.d.). Recognizing the contrast between their experiences and my own, I have found this new topic that is outside of myself to explore using Rasaboxes; which will allow me to access something that is quite away for me. I am an empathetic person, so I believe we must cultivate empathy and understanding. This can be done by actively listening to the lived experiences of transgender individuals.

As a cis-gendered individual, I acknowledge that I cannot authentically speak for transgender people. Instead, I intend to engage in a process of empathy and understanding regarding the struggles they face. Through the Rasaboxes method, I have embarked on a journey to access the complexity of emotions experienced by transgender individuals due to societal stigmas. It is not about performing their experiences or assuming the role of a spokesperson; rather, it is about bearing witness to their emotional journey. Rasa facilitates a personal connection with these experiences, enabling me to navigate through different emotional spaces and gain insight into the challenges they endure.

My role as a researcher is not to be a spokesperson, but rather an ally and advocate. By delving into these emotional spaces, I hope to deepen my understanding of the discrimination and violence they encounter. Through this process, I aim to foster empathy and compassion, both within myself and within society. It is about recognizing the humanity in everyone, regardless of their gender identity. My journey is one of growth and learning, as I strive to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all. By

sharing this experience and its insights, I aspire to inspire others to embark on their journey of empathy and understanding.

The goal of this study is to explore the lives of transgender people through drama therapy, which involves addressing the stigmas and promoting healthy living by utilizing various techniques, such as storytelling, performance, and role-playing. My performance ethnographic research aims to create a safe space where transgender individuals can talk about their identities, emotions, and experiences. Through this research, I will attempt to address the gap between the theoretical framework known as the Rasa theory and the performance ethnography of the emotions that transgender individuals go through because of stigmas and discrimination. In the performance ethnography of emotions, instead of considering emotions as mere deductive reasoning (Katz, 1999), one should consider them as corporeal and embodied (Denzin, 1984). This concept of carnal sociology aims to focus on the body, as Wacquant (2004) argues that individuals are suffering beings who participate in a social world that is connected to their hearts and body. According to Wacquant (2004), ethnographers should undergo a sensual and moral transformation to become more like their participants. If an individual's emotions manifest in their body, then this concept of carnal sociology is similar to the way that people experience and witness emotions. This does not require emotional intimacy with their participants. Although it is possible to study the embodied passions of people, this concept falls under the observation of emotions (Rosaldo, 1989). Although it has been used in Indian classical music and theatre, the application of this theory to transgender experiences is still unexplored. Using Rasaboxes, I aim to create a methodology that can represent transgender emotions. My research seeks to challenge present stereotypes, biases, and discrimination faced by transgender individuals. By utilizing theatrical portrayal, it aims to explore and foster empathy to promote social transformation and tolerance.

The term *"symbol"* has various meanings, ranging from simple to complex images and words (Lakhadive, 2019). The concept of Rasa *bhavas* (emotions) refers to the emotions expressed by performers through their movements, gestures, and expressions. They can

be regarded as representations of human feelings and, in a way, allow the audience to feel them. Using symbols, I have been able to create aesthetic experiences that are both powerful and relatable. In dramatherapy, the use of metaphor and symbols allows clients to connect with their surroundings (Mann, 1996). In my research through the context of symbols in drama therapy, I attempt to create non-verbal forms of communication for individuals to convey their feelings and thoughts. These symbols will help convey complicated experiences or emotions that may be difficult to express directly. Mann (1996) noted that individuals can embody various aspects of themselves using props, costumes, and symbols. Using symbols, people can develop their inner guidance and insight. They can also release their painful or intense emotions and find a safe and comforting space to talk about their feelings. By externalizing their emotions through actions or gestures, people can gain a deeper sense of perspective and distance. As a performer and researcher, I incorporate symbolism into my costume.

Performing rasas requires that artists enact *abhinaya* (leading an audience towards) of a particular feeling in accordance with the traditions of a certain style of performance. Although the feelings may be personal or intimate, the emotions must be managed objectively and consciously (Schechner, 2001). Through Rasaboxes, I will explore various emotions that are caused by the stigmas. The data collected during the interviews will help me develop scenarios that relate to certain feelings or stigmas. After each session, I will reflect on the process and journal my thoughts. Through Rasaboxes, I will be able to cultivate empathy by representing the different emotions that I may not have experienced. This will allow me to empathize with transgender individuals who face discrimination and stigma.

This study holds the potential to significantly enrich the body of knowledge within the field of Dramatherapy. By using verbatim methodology, drama therapy techniques, and Rasa theory in exploring emotions, it ventures into uncharted territory. To my knowledge, no previous research has traversed this unique path, making this study both innovative and pioneering. By taking this extra step, the aim is to make a substantial contribution within

therapeutic contexts. The aspiration is to be recognized among those who have made significant contributions to this evolving field of study.

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1. Richard Schechner

Richard Schechner is a professor of performance studies and theatre director. He is also the author of numerous books and articles. Through his work, Richard Schechner has been able to combine the theoretical analysis of performance with the practical applications of performance in various forms of media, including theatre, music, dance, and politics. He has also been able to understand the role of performance in the intellectual life of artists (New York University, n.d.).

Richard Schechner is a vital figure in the field of performance studies. His encounters with various Asian cultures, particularly those in China and India, have been instrumental in developing his major theoretical works. Through his various contributions to the field, including his mentorship and teaching, Schechner has helped artists and scholars explore the deeper connections between performance and various cultures. As the editor of the Drama Review, he has also helped disseminate new ideas in the discipline. The impact of Schechner continues to motivate scholars and practitioners all around the world. He is regarded as an indispensable figure in the field (Gillitt, 2013).

The Rasaboxes exercise was furthered by Richard Schechner (2021) to explore the nine emotional states that were theorized and described in the Natyashastra, a traditional Indian performance manual. The goal of the training is to help dancers and actors become more capable of expressing themselves in their emotions. It has been proven to be very effective in both professional and personal training (New York University, n.d.).

The concept of the Rasaboxes is to externalize the idea that real emotions do not have to be kept inside. They can be used by individuals and groups to explore their feelings.

This is done using the rasas, which can serve as a type of emotional baseline for a character (Minnick, 2001). The concept of Rasa refers to an emotional response that a performer creates in an audience (Das, 2017). The Rasa Theory is rooted in Indian aesthetics and focuses on the aesthetic and emotional experiences that artists create through their performances. The theatre provided the necessary space for the audience to experience what was happening, and the Rasa Theory also emphasized the importance of expression. According to Benamou (2010), the concept involves utilizing various body parts, facial expressions, and voice sounds to convey meaning and spark emotions. It transports the audience into the performer's world.

The work of Richard Schechner and the concept of the Rasaboxes offer valuable insights into the exploration of emotions and their expression. The Rasaboxes exercise, developed by Schechner, provides a structured framework for exploring the nine emotional states described in the Natyashastra. This training method aims to enhance performers' ability to authentically express emotions. By externalizing emotions through the Rasaboxes, individuals and groups can delve into their emotional landscapes, tapping into the rich reservoir of human feelings.

The concept of Rasaboxes brings forward the central idea that emotions need not be suppressed but can be harnessed and expressed to their fullest extent. This resonates with the goals of my research, which seek to understand and validate the emotional experiences of transgender individuals. By drawing parallels between the Rasaboxes' exploration of emotions and the lived experiences of transgender individuals, I can delve deeper into the complexities of emotions experienced by transgender individuals due to the stigmas they experience.

Furthermore, the concept of Rasa, rooted in Indian aesthetics and theatre, emphasizes the profound impact of artistic performances on audience emotions. By understanding how performers evoke emotional responses through their expressions, gestures, and vocalizations, I can gain insights into the ways in which emotions are conveyed and perceived.

5.2. Judith Butler

Judith Butler is an American academic who has written about the theory of sex and gender. Butler was born in 1956, in Cleveland, Ohio. Her theories have been influential in various fields, such as Francocentric philosophy and queer theory. One of the most influential texts on queer theory was Judith Butler's *"Gender Trouble"* (1990). Her performative theory on sex and gender has greatly contributed to the development of various gender studies and cultural theories during the twentieth and early 21st centuries (Britannica Editors, 2019).

Butler is a vital theoretical figure whose work is focused on gender studies, queerness, performativity, and the discourse about social constructs and identities. Her analysis helps us understand the various aspects of the research that it aims to accomplish. According to Meyerhoff (2015), the concept of gender performativity is a framework that Judith Butler developed to explore the intersection of anthropology and sociolinguistics. In her article, Meyerhoff talks about the various theorists who have contributed to the development of gender performativity. Some of these include Penelope Eckert (1942) and Kira Hall (1991).

The first approach to gender performativity is called the First wave. It involves analysing the correlations between various macro-social and language categories. For instance, according to Meyerhoff, men and women come from varying backgrounds (Meyerhoff, 2015). The second wave of gender performativity is focused on analysing the link between gender and language. It involves conducting research on women and girls who are part of the same social work setting as the older generation (Meyerhoff, 2015). According to Butler (1990), the concept of identity and gender performativity is crucial in addressing the various categories that people are labelled as. She argues that these labels should be understood as an emerging part of an individual's lived experiences and cultural norms (Meyerhoff, 2015).

In 1990, Judith Butler argued that the way people talk about one another is how gender identities are conceptualized and comprehended as normative. Although she does not talk about sex, Butler's discussion centres on the link between the quality of individuals' daily gender identities and their performance. This suggests that the concept of gender performativity can be used to address the various gender norms that are linked to sexuality (Butler, 1990).

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity serves as a foundational framework for examining the experiences of transgender individuals and elucidating the intricacies of their gender identities. Butler's conceptualization underscores the dynamic and socially constructed nature of gender, challenging essentialist viewpoints and emphasizing the performative aspects of identity formation. By adopting this theoretical lens, the study aims to analyse how transgender individuals navigate and negotiate their gender identities within diverse social contexts.

Moreover, Butler's emphasis on the intersectionality of gender with other facets of identity, such as sexuality and race, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay of factors shaping transgender experiences. Incorporating Butler's insights into the research contributes to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and furthers the discourse on gender studies and queer theory.

5.3. Liesl Theron

Liesl Theron is a South African activist for transgender people. She is the founder of Gender DynamiX, and an advocate for the freedom of expression of gender identity. The organization focuses on individuals who identify as transgender, non-binary, and transsexual. She is also active in South Africa's LGBT community. Her work revolves around the intersection of other bodies and gender (Gender Dynamix, 2007).

Gender DynamiX is a South African human rights organization dedicated to advocating for the transgender, transsexual, and gender non-conforming community. Initially focused

on creating a database for transgender individuals by transgender individuals, the organization quickly expanded its scope due to the overwhelming need for support beyond information dissemination. They began conducting workshops, seminars, and participating in activism within the larger LGBTI sector. Despite South Africa's progressive constitution, which includes protections for sexual orientation, the reality is marked by extreme violence against women, minorities, and LGBTI individuals. This violence often goes unreported due to fear of further victimization by law enforcement. Transgender individuals, in particular, face discrimination and violence, with many incidents going unreported. Hate crimes against transgender people, fuelled by gender non-conformity, underscore the need for advocacy and protection for all citizens, especially within the LGBTI community (Theron, 2008).

As part of her Honours thesis at Cape Town University, Liesl Theron studied the struggles and forms of identity of individuals who identify as transgender. She also investigated the support and resources that transgender people need. In 2007, she was selected to participate in a fellowship program that was held in Lagos, Nigeria. The fellowship provided her with the opportunity to develop her leadership skills and study the needs of the LGBT community. Her research topic was entitled *"Accessible Shelters for the LGT in Cape Town."* It was published by the Resource Centre.

In February 2010, a book about human sexuality in Africa was launched at an event held in Ethiopia. It was entitled *"Tapestry of Human Sexuality,"* which was an imprint of Fanele, a media company based in South Africa. The organization's first book was entitled *"Trans: South Africa's Transgender Life Stories."* Liesl was involved in the writing of the book's various chapters. One of these was entitled *"The SOFFA perspective"* (Gender Dynamix, 2007).

Liesl Theron's pioneering activism and advocacy for transgender rights, as demonstrated through her establishment of Gender DynamiX and her extensive involvement in South Africa's LGBT community, provide valuable insights and inspiration for my research on transgender individuals. Theron's commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive

environment for transgender, transsexual, and gender non-conforming individuals underscores the urgent need for advocacy and protection within the LGBTI community, particularly in the face of pervasive discrimination and violence.

Through her thesis and participation in fellowship programs focusing on the needs of the LGBT community, Theron has contributed to the understanding of transgender struggles, forms of identity, and the resources needed to support them. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of amplifying transgender voices and experiences, ultimately contributing to a broader understanding of gender diversity and the challenges faced by transgender individuals. Theron's work serves as a compelling example of the vital role activism and advocacy play in advancing transgender rights and promoting social justice within diverse communities.

5.4. Phil Jones

Phil Jones is the Professor of Children's Rights and Wellbeing at the UCL Institute of Education and the Director of Research at the University of Leeds' School of Education. He has received various awards, including a Fellowship from the RSA and a distinguished scholar award from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He has written about theatre as therapy, the arts, and children's rights, and he is the editor of the *"New Childhoods"* series of books by Bloomsbury. Other titles include *"Rethinking Children's Rights"* with Welch and Davis, and *"Education and Childhood"* with Rogers and Wyse. Articles about his research have been published in numerous journals, such as the European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling, the Journal of Drama Education, and the Psychotherapy Research Journal. He has also given numerous presentations at international conferences, including those in South Africa, Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, and Greece (Intellect Books, n.d.).

In one of the chapters in his book called Drama as Therapy (2007), he describes how dramatherapy works. He accomplishes this by identifying the various elements that work together to create therapeutic processes. These elements do not necessarily refer to

specific methods or techniques. This chapter focuses on the fundamental processes involved in dramatherapy. It then introduces clinical vignettes that draw on the experiences of drama therapists. These examples help develop the ideas of the core processes that were proposed in the first edition of this book. The main processes that play a role in drama therapy are drama-therapeutic empathy, drama-therapeutic distancing, drama projection, embodiment, life-drama connection, and transformation (Jones, 2007).

In dramatherapy, clients engage in dramatic projection, outwardly expressing and exploring their inner thoughts, emotions, and experiences through creative means like role-playing and storytelling. This process facilitates self-reflection and insight, allowing clients to externalize internal struggles and conflicts in a safe environment. Concurrently, the therapeutic performance process employs dramatic techniques to foster personal growth and change. Through structured performances and improvisation, clients explore their identities and relationships, enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation (Jones, 2011).

Dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing are pivotal, balancing emotional engagement and critical reflection. Empathy fosters deep emotional connection to dramatic material, while distancing encourages analytical exploration. These processes enable clients to engage with material at varying levels of intensity, fostering self-awareness and personal development. Dramatic representation through personification and impersonation allows clients to externalize aspects of themselves and others, promoting empathy and self-understanding. Finally, interactive audiences and witnessing dynamics provide clients with opportunities for reflection and support, enriching the therapeutic experience and facilitating personal growth (Jones, 2011).

Phil Jones's work on drama therapy provides valuable insight into the therapeutic processes utilized in addressing the emotional and psychological needs of individuals, including those within the transgender community. By examining the core processes outlined by Jones such as drama-therapeutic empathy, distancing, and projection, my

research can explore how these elements contribute to creating a safe and supportive environment for transgender individuals to express themselves and navigate their gender identity. By understanding the complexity interplay between embodiment (wherein individuals embody their experiences and emotions within the therapeutic space) and the life-drama connection (which entails linking personal narratives with dramatic expression) as a researcher, I can cultivate a deeper understanding of transgender individuals' experiences. This rounded understanding enables researchers to navigate the complexities of transgender experiences with sensitivity and insight, fostering a more meaningful engagement that acknowledges the multi-layered dimensions of gender experiences. In my research, I will incorporate the five fundamental processes outlined by Jones in dramatherapy. These processes offer valuable frameworks for exploring the emotional complexities and lived experiences of transgender individuals within the context of my study.

Furthermore, Jones's clinical vignettes offer real-life examples of how drama therapy is applied in practice, providing concrete illustrations of its effectiveness in addressing various issues related to identity, trauma, and self-expression. Overall, Jones's work serves as a valuable framework for understanding the therapeutic processes that reinforce drama therapy and their relevance to the experiences of transgender individuals in navigating societal stigmas.

5.5. Brene Brown

Brené Brown is a social work professor at the U.H. Houston and the holder of the Huffington Foundation endowed chair. She also serves as a visiting professor at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas. Over the course of her career, Brené has been studying the various aspects of empathy, courage, vulnerability, and shame. She has written six New York Times best-selling books and is the host of the award-winning podcasts, Dare to Lead and Unlocking Us. Her work has been published in more than 30 languages and includes titles such as Dare to Lead, Atlas of the Heart and Rising Strong. She also worked with Tarana Burke on an anthology entitled You Are

Your Best, which was released in 2015. Her TED Talk, which was about the importance of vulnerability, has been viewed over 60 million times.

In March 2022, she released a new show on HBO Max called Atlas of the Heart. The show focuses on her book. Most of Brené's time is spent working with organizations all around the world to develop more courageous leaders (Simon & Schuster Editors, 2023).

According to Brené, empathy is a skill that can be trained and practised. She encourages people to practice it often. It can help them feel accepted and heard, and it can help them develop their relationships with others. When we give others empathy, we allow them to feel like they are being fully heard and accepted. This is very beneficial for our relationships as it allows us to meet our loved ones who are going through a tough time. One of the characteristics of empathy is perspective-taking. This is when an individual is willing to let others see and feel what is happening around them through their eyes. This can be done by putting aside personal matters and just listening to what the other person is going through (Melli O' Brian Editors, 2023).

According to Brené, staying out of judgment is a way of protecting ourselves from the pain that another person is going through. It means being open to what the other person is going through and refraining from making them feel like they are being unfair or incorrect. This can be done by being more sensitive to what the other person is going through and not judging them if they are upset. Being able to recognize emotions involves looking into ourselves and remembering what it felt like to feel the other person's feelings. Being able to acknowledge the other person's emotions is a way of being able to identify what they are feeling. For instance, if you notice that they are feeling frustrated, you can ask them if they have identified what they are feeling correctly. Instead of saying, *"At least you,"* try to communicate that you understand the other person's situation and their experience. For instance, you can say something like, *"I'm so sorry that you're going through this,"* or *"It's so hard."* Brené suggests saying, *"It sounds like you're in a tough place right now."* (Melli O' Brian Editors, 2023).

Brené Brown's insights on empathy offer valuable guidance for fostering understanding and support within interpersonal relationships. Brown emphasizes empathy as a skill that can be cultivated through practice, highlighting its role in creating an environment of acceptance and validation for individuals experiencing challenges related to their gender identity.

The concept of perspective-taking, as elucidated by Brown, is particularly relevant to my research. By me stepping into the shoes of transgender individuals through Rasa and seeing the world through their eyes, perspective-taking fosters empathy and compassion. This willingness to set aside personal biases and truly listen to the experiences of transgender individuals is essential for building meaningful connections and offering genuine support.

Moreover, Brown underscores the importance of staying out of judgment when interacting with others, especially those facing adversity. In the context of transgender individuals, refraining from judgment allows for a more empathetic and supportive response to their experiences. Rather than invalidating their feelings or experiences, acknowledging and validating their emotions can help foster a sense of understanding and acceptance.

By integrating Brown's principles of empathy into my research, I aim to create a space where transgender individuals feel heard, accepted, and valued. Through empathetic listening and validation of their experiences, I strive to contribute to a more supportive and inclusive environment for individuals navigating the complexities of gender identity.

5.6. Sue Jennings

Sue Jennings emphasizes the importance of play from conception to promote healthy social and emotional growth. The work of Sue Jennings focuses on the utilization of theatre and drama techniques to promote well-being, healing, and personal growth. Her contributions have been notable, and she is an esteemed figure within the field of drama therapy. She also believes in playing for peace and enforcing a no-guns policy in the

playroom. She has made a significant contribution to the study of emotions within drama therapy.

Aesthetic empathy was conceptualized by her. It entails utilizing dramatic instances to foster emotional awareness with emotions through embodied and dramatic experiences. Sue Jennings is an anthropologist, a therapist, a performer, and a professor of play. She is currently visiting the University of Derby and is an Honorary Fellow of Roehampton. She has also been a pioneer of Play Therapy and Drama Therapy in the UK and has established training programs in Israel, Romania, Greece, and the Czech Republic.

The concept of the embodiment-projection-role is widely used in education and therapy. Professor Jennings has worked in various settings such as special education, psychiatry, and forensic settings. She has developed a framework for the development of empathy and attachment in children through neuro-dramatic-play (Neuro-dramatic-play Editors, n.d.). Sue Jennings said that drama and play can help people express their feelings and gain a better understanding of how they feel. She also explained how projection works by putting our thoughts and emotions into other people's hands (Jennings, 2021).

According to Jennings (2021), drama therapy can help people develop a deeper understanding of themselves. It can also help them connect with others and learn new ways of being themselves. In addition, it can improve people's self-esteem and confidence. Sue Jennings' ideas about embodiment and play can be expanded to include the experiences and feelings of other people. This allows participants to explore their own feelings and the behaviours and thoughts of others.

Sue Jennings delves into the concept of Drama Therapy as a form of healing rooted in the theatrical and ritualistic traditions, drawing inspiration from Antonin Artaud's theories on theatre. Artaud believed that theatre mirrored life, and vice versa, emphasizing the importance of metaphor and symbol in both realms. Jennings highlights Artaud's exploration of new language through sound and movement as a means of expression beyond traditional verbal communication. She proposes the idea of a *"theatre of healing,"*

which incorporates ritualistic elements and engages participants actively in the therapeutic process (Jennings, 1994).

Central to Jennings' approach is the notion of developing a new language of expression through bodily movement and vocalization. She advocates for the exploration of various movement systems, such as Balinese dance or Laban, to expand creative possibilities and foster improvisation. Jennings underscores the significance of ritual in the healing journey, cautioning against simplistic *"shamanic"* approaches and emphasizing the need for thoughtful planning and execution (Jennings, 1994).

Sue Jennings' emphasis on the role of play, theatre, and drama techniques in promoting well-being, healing, and personal growth is very relevant to my research. Jennings' work underscores the importance of utilizing creative and expressive modalities, such as drama therapy, to facilitate emotional awareness and understanding. By incorporating drama techniques into my process, I can provide participants with a safe and supportive environment to explore and express their emotions.

Furthermore, Jennings' concept of aesthetic empathy can inform my research by highlighting the transformative power of dramatic experiences in fostering emotional connections. Through embodied and dramatic encounters, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of their own feelings and those of others, ultimately promoting empathy and interpersonal connection (Jennings, 1994; Jennings, 2021).

Additionally, Jennings' exploration of embodiment-projection-role and the use of play and drama to enhance empathy and attachment in children offer valuable insights for my research. By incorporating role-play and perspective-taking exercises into the process, I can encourage participants to explore different viewpoints and experiences, thereby enhancing their emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills.

5.7. Paul Ekman

In his book, Paul Ekman writes about the various points that people can use facial expressions to identify and address their emotions. He states that various cultures have long recognized facial expressions as a way to recognize various emotions such as, but not limited to, anger, happiness, disgust, and sadness. He offers a standard method for analysing and interpreting these emotions.

Additionally, he offers exercises and guidelines to help individuals improve their ability to understand and use facial expressions to express their emotions. He also talked about how his research might be applied to cross-cultural communication. In conclusion, his work contributes to the understanding of how facial expressions can be used to understand how emotions are shown (Ekman & Friesen, 1984). Although Ekman's book does not directly relate to my research, it provides valuable insights into the study of emotions using facial expressions. This will help me in expressing the emotions that the transgender community feels due to discrimination and stigmas (Ekman & Friesen, 1984).

Ekman's methodology involves identifying specific facial action units (FAUs) associated with different emotions, allowing for a detailed analysis of subtle facial movements that may convey underlying emotional states. For example, the presence of raised eyebrows, wrinkled nose, and tight lips may indicate feelings of disgust, while a genuine smile involving the muscles around the eyes is associated with genuine happiness (Ekman & Friesen, 1984).

Paul Ekman's theories on facial expressions will be mostly useful in analysing the footage of the different stages of my performances to gain deeper insights into the emotions communicated through my body. Ekman's research emphasizes the universality of facial expressions as a means of conveying emotions, highlighting key expressions such as happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, and surprise (Ekman & Friesen, 1984). By employing Ekman's framework, I can systematically examine my facial expressions

throughout the performances, identifying and categorizing the specific emotions displayed.

Furthermore, Ekman's research emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting facial expressions, recognizing that cultural and situational factors may influence the expression and interpretation of emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1984). As such, in analysing my performances, it will be essential to consider the broader context in which the expressions occur, including the themes, narratives, and emotional content.

5.8. Sigmund Freud

Psychoanalysis's founder, Sigmund Freud, had a huge impact on sexology. His ideas about sexuality have been incorporated into our daily understandings of it. Freud also stated that sex is something that develops from birth, though he kept his belief that people can reach stable sexual preferences and choose between the *"same"* or *"opposite"* sex base (Barker & Scheele, 2020). Freud's *"Oedipus complex"* is one of the main ideas in his work, which explains how children develop their feelings toward their parents who are either same-sex or opposite-sex (Freud, 2018).

Sigmund Freud talks about the various aspects of sexuality in his book *"Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality"*, which also explores the significance of those aspects in our psychology. He claims that when you are a child, you have both innate sexual desires and instincts. In addition, he talks about the various phases of sexual development and how they can affect adult sexuality. He further explores society's role in repressions. He claims that such restrictions and norms can lead to the suppression of desires, which can be seen in socially acceptable activities (Freud, 2022).

In his book *"Three Contributions of the Theory of Sex "*, Ekman explores the link between sexuality and society. He claims that cultural taboos regulate and manifest our sexuality. He also explores the effects of unconscious desires, fantasies, and conflicts on the

development of a person's sexual identity. This suggests that we have no control over our sexuality (Freud, 2018).

Freud’s impact on sexology offers particular insights about my research. His notion of societal norms and restrictions influencing the repression of desires is highly relevant to my research. Transgender individuals often face societal pressures and norms that may contribute to the suppression or denial of their gender identity and expression. Understanding how these societal influences impact the emotional experiences and psychological well-being of transgender individuals can provide valuable insights into the challenges they face.

Finally, Freud's exploration of the unconscious mind and its role in shaping sexual identity and desires can shed light on the internal struggles and conflicts experienced by transgender individuals. The unconscious desires, fantasies, and conflicts discussed by Freud may intersect with the internalized stigma, shame, and dysphoria experienced by transgender individuals as they navigate their gender identity and expression.

5.9. Robert Landy

Robert Landy, Ph.D., is a licensed creative arts therapist, a drama therapist, and a certified trainer. He is a pioneer in the field of drama therapy, teaching, and training other practitioners around the world. Over the course of his 40-year career, he has helped individuals with various mental health and adjustment issues. He has been working in New York State prisons, where he developed programs that help rehabilitate the mentally ill inmates and the general population. Robert is the founding director of the Drama Therapy program at New York University. He is also a professor emeritus. He has written and produced numerous articles, plays, and books about the theatre, musical theatre, and drama therapy fields. He has also been featured in various media, including a documentary film entitled Standing Tall and a television series called Drama in Education.

In 2008, Robert published The Couch and the Stage: The Art and the Craft of Psychotherapy, which explored the link between therapeutic methods and theatre. In 2012, he collaborated with David Montgomery for Theatre for Change, which investigated the link between drama therapy and education. He has received various awards and honours, such as the Daniel Griffiths Award for Distinguished Research and the Gertrud Schattner Prize for his contributions to the field of drama therapy. He has also been interviewed and reviewed by a wide range of media outlets (Psychology Today, n.d.). In 1992, Landy wrote that in drama therapy, a role is often invoked to help a client explore their own personality and develop a deeper understanding of themselves. This method can help them focus on a single part of themselves. The invocation, which is like a poem's invocation, is a way of inspiration. The client seeks inspiration from a certain part of themselves, which can guide them toward finding solutions to their issues. The role's invocation is a calling into being of that specific part of themselves that will inspire a search for meaning. It can be initiated unconsciously, or it can be triggered by the client's creative process (Landy, 1992).'

The Drama Therapy Role Method, developed by Prof. Robert J. Landy, is a unique approach to psychotherapy that utilizes the dramatic medium of role-playing to facilitate self-discovery and healing. Unlike other forms of therapy, drama therapy proceeds through the enactment of roles, with both the client and therapist actively engaging in role-play to explore and address psychological issues. The method draws from various theoretical frameworks, including object relations, narrative therapy, and social anthropology, to guide the treatment process. Through a series of structured steps, clients are encouraged to invoke, name, and play out roles that represent different aspects of their personality, allowing them to explore alternative qualities and sub-roles, reflect on their role-play experiences, and integrate them into their everyday lives. Ultimately, the goal of drama therapy through the role method is to create a functional role system that promotes psychological well-being and social integration (Landy, 2011).

Firstly, my approach involves the exploration of roles as a means of understanding and addressing personal experiences and emotions which is closely related to the Drama

Therapy role method. In the Drama Therapy Role Method, clients and therapists take on and play out roles to help clients discover and recover functional role systems. Similarly, in my process, I will be inviting the audience to step into the Rasaboxes and explore the boxes, allowing them to embody different roles and emotions inspired by the interviews with transgender individuals.

The Drama Therapy Role Method involves integrating roles to create a functional role system, which aligns with my goal of experimenting with different elements such as sound, breath, body, and words to express and understand emotions and experiences. This process of integration allows for a deeper exploration and understanding of the self and one's relationships with others, which is a central aspect of both approaches.

5.10. Dr. Daniel Goleman

Internationally renowned psychologist Dr. Daniel Goleman is known for his lectures, which are often conducted at business and academic conferences. For many years, he was a science journalist for The New York Times. His 1995 book, Emotional Intelligence, was a bestseller and has been very successful. Goleman has written numerous books on various subjects, including emotional intelligence and creativity. He has also tackled topics such as transparency, eco-literacy, and self-deception. Goleman co-founded the CASEL organization, which aims to improve emotional intelligence in schools. Goleman is also the co-director of the Ei-consortium, a research organization that focuses on the importance of emotional intelligence in organizations. The group collaborates with practitioners and academic scholars to promote research that explores the link between emotional intelligence and excellence (Daniel Goleman Editors, 2021).

According to Dr. Goleman, an individual has an emotional intelligence, which is a skill that allows them to manage their feelings effectively (Cole, 2023). In his book, Goleman categorized emotional intelligence into five categories. One of these is emotional self-awareness, which is the ability to understand one's own weaknesses and strengths. An individual with this type of emotional intelligence tends to be more receptive to criticism than those with no emotional self-awareness. People with a high level of emotional

intelligence can control and restrain their emotions. They are resilient, self-motivated, and driven by their inner desires instead of external influences like money or prestige. An individual with empathy can relate to others on a personal level and respond to their concerns. Those who possess emotional intelligence can develop trust with others and quickly gain their respect (Goleman, 1995).

Dr. Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence aligns closely with my research on the emotional experiences of transgender individuals. Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence encompasses several key components that are highly relevant to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by transgender individuals in society.

Firstly, Goleman's emphasis on emotional self-awareness resonates with my exploration of how transgender individuals navigate their own emotions and identity in the face of societal stigmas and discrimination. The ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses is essential for individuals to navigate the complexities of their experiences as transgender individuals.

Furthermore, Goleman's concept of empathy is particularly relevant to my research, as it speaks to the importance of understanding and relating to the experiences of others. Empathy allows individuals to connect with and validate the experiences of transgender individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and support within communities. By promoting empathy, my research can contribute to creating more inclusive and affirming environments for transgender individuals, where their voices and experiences are respected and valued.

Overall, Dr. Daniel Goleman's insights into emotional intelligence provide a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the emotional experiences of transgender individuals. By incorporating Goleman's concepts into my research, I can deepen my understanding of the challenges faced by transgender individuals and contribute to creating more inclusive and supportive environments for them.

6. Literature Review

6.1. Transgenderism

The term transgender (Baker, 2020) refers to individuals who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. They may experience various behaviours and expressions that do not match their assigned sex. At any age, they may begin to become aware of their identity. Some people may experience a feeling of being out of place or experiencing a disconnect from their assigned sex at an early age. Others may have a specific desire to identify as a woman instead of a man. These individuals may face various human rights violations if their gender expression or identity is not accurately reflected in official documents (APA Editors, 2023).

6.2. The Stigmas

Transgender individuals navigate a complex landscape loaded with challenges and stigmas, both globally and within South Africa. Understanding the complex nature of these issues is crucial for developing effective strategies to address them.

Transgender individuals encounter significant barriers worldwide, including societal prejudice, legal discrimination, and limited access to healthcare (Theron, 2008). Liesl Theron (2008) highlights the pervasive lack of resources and support for transgender people in South Africa, mirroring challenges faced in many other regions. These challenges contribute to heightened vulnerability, increased rates of mental health issues, and reduced quality of life among transgender populations (Theron, 2008; Theron, 2009; Jobson, 2012).

Legal frameworks often fail to adequately protect transgender rights, leaving individuals vulnerable to discrimination and violence. In many countries, transgender individuals face challenges in obtaining legal recognition of their gender identity, leading to issues such as denial of access to essential services, harassment, and marginalization. These

systemic issues perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion, further aggravating the challenges faced by transgender communities globally (Theron, 2009).

In Africa, transgender individuals confront unique challenges shaped by cultural norms, historical legacies, and legal frameworks. While South Africa boasts progressive legislation, broader societal attitudes and entrenched norms continue to hinder transgender acceptance and inclusion (Theron, 2009). Although the Human Rights Act provides transgender individuals with the right to equality, they often encounter harassment and violence from both the private and public sectors. South Africa is known as a hotspot for hate crimes against those belonging to the LGBT community (Southern African Litigation Centre, 2016). As highlighted in Liesl Theron's paper (2008), misconceptions and lack of awareness contribute to stigma and silence surrounding transgender identities in South Africa and across the continent.

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa has had enduring effects on transgender communities, as discussed by Liesl Theron (Theron, 2009). While the 1980s saw a surge in gender affirmation surgeries, societal norms and government policies enforced conformity to binary gender roles, restraining transgender visibility and acceptance. Despite legal advancements post-apartheid, transgender individuals continue to deal with systemic barriers to healthcare, legal recognition, and social inclusion (Theron, 2009; Sherwood, 2021).

Despite progressive legislation such as the approval of the Rainbow Nation's constitution in 1996 and the subsequent amendments to Act 49 in 2003, transgender individuals in South Africa face formidable challenges in accessing healthcare, legal recognition, and social acceptance. Bureaucratic obstacles and delays hinder the legal gender recognition process, leaving many transgender individuals vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion (Theron, 2009; Sherwood et al, 2021).

For example, in the context of HIV/AIDS, transgender individuals face unique challenges that exacerbate their vulnerability to the virus. The paper *"Assessing inclusion of trans people in HIV national strategic plans: a review of 60 high HIV prevalence countries"*

(2021) highlights how stigma, discrimination, and marginalization contribute to limited access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care services for transgender populations across the continent. Moreover, the intersectionality of transgender identity with other marginalized identities, such as sex work and substance use, further compounds the risk of HIV transmission. Despite the disproportionate burden of HIV among transgender communities in Africa, existing HIV programs often fail to adequately address their specific needs. Therefore, addressing HIV/AIDS among transgender individuals requires targeted interventions that prioritize their rights, dignity, and access to comprehensive healthcare services (Sherwood et al, 2021).

Moreover, the broader LGBTI sector in South Africa often fails to adequately address the unique needs of transgender individuals. While organizations may claim inclusivity, the lack of transgender-specific programs and services perpetuates marginalization and erodes trust within transgender communities (Theron, 2008). This highlights the importance of intersectional approaches that centre transgender voices and experiences in advocacy efforts.

Despite these challenges, there are promising signs of progress and opportunities for change. Initiatives such as the *"Let us live in Peace"* campaign in Uganda and emerging support groups across Africa signal growing momentum for transgender rights. In South Africa, organizations like Gender DynamiX have played a pivotal role in pioneering transgender-specific advocacy and support services, offering hope for greater inclusion and acceptance (Gender Dynamix, 2007; Theron, 2008; Theron, 2009).

The situation of transgender individuals globally and within South Africa is marked by embedded stigmas, systemic challenges, and uneven progress. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts to dismantle barriers to healthcare, legal recognition, and social inclusion, while centring transgender voices and experiences in advocacy and policy making.

6.3. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a crucial concept in psychology and leadership, offering valuable insights into human behaviour and interpersonal relationships. Psychologists John Mayer and Peter Salovey coined the term emotional intelligence during the 1990s. It was popularized by Daniel Goleman. It refers to people's ability to understand and manage their own emotions. Goleman investigates the significance of Emotional Intelligence in various aspects of life, from personal well-being to professional success (Goleman, 2011).

At its core, emotional intelligence incorporates a set of skills that enable individuals to navigate the complexities of human emotions effectively. Goleman identifies five key components of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 2011).

Self-awareness, as emphasized in Daniel Goleman's in his book *"Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence,"* involves recognizing one's own emotions and their impact on thoughts and behaviour. It extends to understanding personal strengths, weaknesses, values, and aspirations. This self-awareness enhances individuals' ability to interpret experiences and interactions with clarity and empathy. By acknowledging their emotional states and biases, individuals navigate cognitive distortions and subjective interpretations, fostering more objective perspectives. Through introspection, individuals transcend biases, ensuring judgments and actions are inclusive. Cultivating self-awareness imbues leadership with authenticity and fosters equitable, inclusive environments. This awareness facilitates genuine connections and empathetic understanding, improving interpersonal relationships and organizational dynamics (Goleman, 2011).

Self-regulation is the capacity to manage and modulate one's emotions, impulses, and reactions across diverse contexts. It encompasses a set of strategies combining stress management, impulse control, and emotional resilience. This facet of emotional

intelligence serves as a cornerstone in determining individuals' responses to various challenges. Amidst societal prejudice, legal discrimination, and social exclusion, individuals often contend with potent emotional responses such as anger, frustration, or despair. Through self-regulation, an individual can adeptly navigate these stressors, maintaining balance and exercising sound judgment amidst adversity. Moreover, emotional resilience, a fundamental aspect of self-regulation, empowers individuals to rebound from setbacks and persist in the face of adversity. By cultivating self-regulation, individuals foster adaptability, fortitude, and a capacity for measured responses, essential attributes for effective leadership and navigating complex organizational dynamics (Goleman, 2011).

Motivation in the context of emotional intelligence refers to the drive to achieve goals, persist in the face of challenges, and maintain a positive view. It entails the establishment of attainable objectives, coupled with an intense commitment to their pursuit and a willingness to gather lessons from setbacks and failures. Motivation assumes a pivotal role in driving individuals towards comprehension, acceptance, and societal transformation, particularly for those confronting universal challenges such as discrimination, stigma, and social ostracization. These hurdles can undermine self-esteem and impede progress towards personal and communal growth. Motivation emerges as a powerful stimulus, stimulating individuals to persist despite adversity, striving towards positive outcomes. This drive may manifest as a resolute determination to articulate personal narratives and advocate for equitable treatment, despite the potential risks of backlash or further marginalization (Goleman, 2011).

Empathy, another important component of Emotional Intelligence as articulated by Daniel Goleman, is the ability to comprehend and resonate with others' emotions while demonstrating compassion and genuine concern for their welfare. It entails active engagement in listening, adopting alternate perspectives, and responding with sensitivity and understanding. Within broader societal contexts, empathy is very essential for fostering connectivity, understanding, and mutual support. In the realm of research, empathy empowers scholars to engage in attentive listening and perspective-taking,

facilitating a deep understanding of the multifaceted emotions and narratives of marginalized groups. Through empathetic inquiry, researchers create a safe, nonjudgmental space where participants can authentically express themselves, fostering trust and rapport. Furthermore, empathy propels researchers and advocates toward actionable measures aimed at cultivating inclusive and affirming environments conducive to the well-being and dignity of all individuals (Goleman, 2011).

Social skills, the final component of EI, involves effectively managing relationships, communicating clearly and persuasively, and resolving conflicts constructively. This component of Emotional Intelligence incorporates a range of skills including communication, teamwork, leadership, and networking. Social skills assume a pivotal role in navigating interpersonal dynamics, advocating for equitable treatment, and cultivating inclusive communities. Effective communication skills enable individuals to articulate their experiences and viewpoints effectively, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. Meanwhile, proficiency in teamwork and leadership facilitates the mobilization of collective efforts toward social progress and transformation. Networking skills are crucial for forging supportive relationships and accessing resources, enhancing individuals' capacity to navigate professional and social spheres. Through the cultivation of social skills, individuals foster resilience, collaboration, and social cohesion, vital components of effective leadership and societal advancement (Goleman, 2011).

The importance of emotional intelligence extends beyond individual well-being to organizational success. In the workplace, leaders with high levels of EI are better equipped to inspire and motivate their teams, foster a positive work environment, and build cohesive and productive teams. They are adept at managing conflict, providing constructive feedback, and adapting to change. Also, leaders with high EI are more likely to be perceived as authentic, trustworthy, and charismatic, earning the respect and loyalty of their employees (Goleman, 2011).

Furthermore, emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in decision-making, problem-solving, and innovation. Individuals with high EI are better able to regulate their emotions and think critically under pressure, leading to better decision-making outcomes. They are

also more creative and innovative, as they are open to new ideas, perspectives, and experiences. Moreover, employees with high EI are better equipped to manage stress, cope with setbacks, and bounce back from failure, enhancing their resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity (Goleman, 2011).

In conclusion, emotional intelligence is a vital skill set that underpins personal and professional success. By developing self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, individuals can enhance their relationships, make better decisions, and thrive in diverse environments. As Daniel Goleman argues in his book *"Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence",* emotional intelligence can matter more than IQ in determining one's success and happiness in life.

6.4. Rasa Theory

In his book *"Performance Theory",* Schechner explores the concept of rasa theory and how it can be used to understand and analyse the emotional impact of an event. He also emphasizes how important sensory experiences and bodily engagement are when it comes to eliciting emotions (Schechner, 2004).

In India, the emotional states that are commonly performed in the aesthetic performance system are not limited to one's own experience but are part of a wider community. They can be expressed in various ways and are not restricted to a specific type of behaviour (Schechner, 2001). The goal of Indian rasa is to provide literary criticism of the central idea of Indian aesthetics. Gupteshwar Prasad is a fundamental theorist who focuses on the early dominance of the literature of Sanskrit. He claims that the theory has dominated the field of criticism for over a hundred years (Prasad, 1994). The Theory of Rasa has been around for two thousand years. It is not a mere domain of literature or aesthetics but a major discipline of the whole being (Prasad, 1994).
One of the most common keywords used by Indian people to describe the fundamental aesthetic aspect of their culture is Rasa. V.K. Gokak claims that rasa is regarded as the most essential aspect of Indian culture (Prasad, 1994). The concept of rasa is focused on

the wholesome wording of philosophy and civilization in Sanskrit. It unifies the various parts of Indian poetics and provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of modern psychology. The affirmation of Indian rasa theory is the result of the literary influence that has made it a fundamental concept in the field of philosophy. According to Prasad (1994), the history of the theory has been full of controversies. The complexity of the critical theories that are presented in Sanskrit literature is a major factor that contributes to the development of the classical aspect of the literature.

The word rasa is composed of the letters Ra and Sa. The former is used to refer to giving, while the latter is associated with motion. When combined, these letters give various meanings, such as happiness, taste, and liquid. Most powerful and significant is the spiritual dimension of rasa in its internal and external manifestations and the experience of divine identity that becomes possible when these elements are harmoniously integrated (Schwartz, 2004). Schechner has witnessed the sensibility and the embodied reality of rasa and has formulated an intriguing analysis. To summarize very briefly, he is concerned primarily with bodily geography, that is, the location of the rasa experience in the body. Because of its very tangible essence as a digestive process, Schechner wants to emphasize its movement in the digestive tract, *"the belly",* as opposed to more western theatrical settings in the eyes and ears. *"What is outside is transformed into what is inside."* The experience is a blending of theatre, dance, music, food, and religious devotion, and characterizes festivals throughout South Asia. The rasic goal of Indian performance, he maintains, is the genesis of a third entity between the performer and the audience: the experience of the transcendent, archetypal emotion (Schwartz, 2004).

In an article published in 2019, Will Geraets explains the nine rasas. During ancient *Vedic* times, yogis developed a structure of five *koshas*, which are related to the body, mind, energy, and self. The third and fourth *koshas* are the intellect and the mind, respectively. The rasas are the human emotions that arise in these two. The emotions of humans can be affected by the outer *koshas*, but the self is never affected by them. The word rasa has various meanings, including feelings and mood. The nine basic rasas are joy, fear, anger, sadness, love, bravery, disgust, calmness, and astonishment. Every person experiences

these emotions. The rasas affect our mind and body chemistry. For instance, fear can trigger our body to respond with adrenaline. It can also change our facial expressions and body odour. The rasas are vital parts of life. Some individuals enjoy telling jokes all the time, while others feel sad and weak. On the other hand, some people are courageous and strong. Some people are satisfied with their lives, while others constantly complain (Hinduism Today, 2023).

6.5. Symbolism

The human mind operates symbolically, where certain aspects of our experiences trigger consciousness. Beliefs, emotions, and usages are considered as the *"Symbols,"* while the understanding or interpretation of these symbols constitutes their *"meaning."* This transition from symbol to meaning, termed as *"symbolic reference,"* is an active synthetic process influenced by the nature of the individual perceiving it. While there must be some common ground between the symbol and its meaning, this alone does not determine which is which, nor does it guarantee immunity from errors or misinterpretations. Perception, therefore, should be viewed as a fundamental step in the ongoing process of creating our reality and understanding our existence (Whitehead, 1927).

The concept of Rasa *bhavas* refers to the emotions expressed by performers through their movements, gestures, and expressions. They can be regarded as representations of human feelings and, in a way, allow the audience to feel them. Using symbols, I have been able to create aesthetic experiences that are both powerful and relatable.

Metaphor and symbol play integral roles in the healing process within Drama Therapy, drawing from rich historical and cultural foundations deeply intertwined with drama and ritual. While Drama Therapy may be a relatively modern discipline, its origins are rooted in traditions where the use of metaphor and symbol for healing has long been implicit. Both metaphor and symbol hold unique therapeutic power, yet they are intricately interconnected, forming the very fabric of Drama Therapy's structure and function (Mann, 1996).

The significance of metaphor and symbol within Drama Therapy cannot be overstated; they are indispensable to its essence. In essence, Drama Therapy hinges upon these elements, just as theatre relies on metaphor and ritual depends on symbol. Mann firmly believes that the therapeutic efficacy of Drama Therapy lies in its ability to operate through metaphoric and symbolic processes. These elements not only shape the therapeutic experience but are also shaped by the dramatic enactment itself (Mann, 1996).

In dramatherapy, the use of metaphor and symbols allows clients to connect with their surroundings (Mann, 1996). In my research through the context of symbols in drama therapy, I attempt to create non-verbal forms of communication for individuals to convey their feelings and thoughts. These symbols will help convey complicated experiences or emotions that may be difficult to express directly. Mann (1996) noted that individuals can embody various aspects of themselves using props, costumes, and symbols. Using symbols, people can develop their inner guidance and insight. They can also release their painful or intense emotions and find a safe and comforting space to talk about their feelings. By externalizing their emotions through actions or gestures, people can gain a deeper sense of perspective and distance.

6.6. Drama Therapy

Drama therapy is a dynamic and interdisciplinary approach to therapy that combines elements of educational drama, recreational drama, theatre arts, psychoanalysis, developmental psychology, and sociology. While it incorporates aims from various fields, drama therapy transcends the sum of its parts, offering a unique blend of learning, renewal, and recreation. Initially documented in the early 1980s in the anthology *"Drama in Therapy,"* the field has since evolved into a distinct profession with its own body of research, publications, academic training programs, and professional organizations (Landy, 1996).

Directly rooted in forms of psychotherapy that utilize dramatic techniques and processes, drama therapy finds its predecessors in approaches like Gestalt therapy, psychodrama,

and play therapy. These action-oriented therapies leverage role-playing and creative expression to facilitate client exploration and resolution of issues. While practitioners of these therapies may employ dramatic processes, they are not typically trained in the art form of drama or theatre. Instead, they utilize drama within the therapeutic context. Drama therapy builds upon this foundation, drawing inspiration and source material from these practices while incorporating specialized training in dramatic arts and therapeutic techniques (Landy, 1996).

Phil Jones believes that in defining the essence of dramatherapy, it is essential to resist the temptation to confine its therapeutic nature solely within the framework of psychotherapy. There is a notable trend, mirrored in other therapeutic disciplines like art therapy, towards emphasizing psychotherapeutic theories and language in framing and practicing dramatherapy. This convergence risks overshadowing the inherent theatrical and dramatic elements of dramatherapy, potentially reducing it to a form of 'theatre psychotherapy'. Robert Landy's approach, for instance, integrates concepts primarily derived from psychotherapy without adequately acknowledging the unique nuances of dramatherapy. To address this, a critical task lies in developing a distinct orientation towards dramatherapy processes and enhancing the prominence of dramatic aspects within its practice. Failure to do so risks divorcing drama therapy from its dual origins, with the dramatic parent only accessing its offspring, 'dramatherapy,' intermittently, Dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing, (Jones, 2011).

Additionally, he believes that in response to these challenges, efforts to define and articulate key Drama therapeutic processes become imperative. By isolating and highlighting specific processes unique to dramatherapy, it becomes possible to underscore its theatrical and dramatic nature while acknowledging its therapeutic underpinnings. Key areas of focus include the process of character embodiment, immersion in a theatrical or dramatic world, communication within this context, the interplay between the theatrical frame and real-life experiences, the performance process itself, and the role of the audience in witnessing dramatic enactments. These processes not only underscore the theatrical origins of dramatherapy but also illuminate its

distinctiveness within the broader landscape of therapeutic interventions. Through this nuanced understanding, dramatherapy can maintain its identity as a hybrid area of theory and practice, bridging the realms of drama, theatre, and therapy with clarity and purpose (Jones, 2011). The main processes that play a role in drama therapy are Dramatic projection, Therapeutic performance, Dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing, Dramatic representation through personification and impersonation, and Interactive audience and witnessing (Jones, 2011).

Dramatic projection in drama therapy involves clients projecting aspects of themselves or their experiences into theatrical or dramatic materials, externalizing inner conflicts. This process establishes a relationship between the client's inner state and external dramatic forms, allowing for exploration and insight through the enactment of projected material. Through dramatic expression, clients create new representations of their material, engaging in a dialogue between their internal situations and external expressions. This dynamic process facilitates the exploration and reintegration of client material, leading to changed awareness and a new relationship with their experiences (Jones, 2011).

The therapeutic performance process in dramatherapy comprehends the stages of idea forming, rehearsal, showing, and disengagement, providing a framework for clients to express and explore their material. This process allows clients to find expression for their needs while engaging in therapeutic work through physicalising and representation. Therapeutic performance may involve dramatic expression of client material or focus on the therapeutic effects of the performance process itself, influencing the client's relationship to the material represented. Clients may hold various roles within the performance process, each offering therapeutic potential by allowing access to creativity or facilitating changes in perspective. Disengagement marks the transition out of direct involvement with the dramatic material, completing the therapeutic cycle (Jones, 2011).

Dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing play essential roles in the effectiveness of dramatic portrayal and emotional engagement within dramatherapy. Empathy fosters emotional resonance and high involvement, allowing clients to warm up to the material

and engage deeply with their own experiences. On the other hand, distancing encourages a perspective oriented towards thought, reflection, and critical engagement, facilitating the development of insight and perspective on personal issues. Both processes are present whether clients are actively engaged with the material or serving as witnesses, and they often coexist within a client's reaction or engagement, fuelling dynamic changes essential to therapeutic development. The interplay between empathy and distancing can be leveraged to assess a client's relationship with the material and guide therapeutic progress within the dramatherapy session (Jones, 2011).

Dramatic representation through personification and impersonation is a central aspect of dramatherapy, allowing clients to express and explore their inner experiences within a dramatic framework. Personification involves representing objects or personal qualities using dramatic means, while impersonation entails embodying imaginary characters or individuals from the client's life. This process involves the client's emotional need for representation, imaginative engagement with the object of representation, creation of the personification or impersonation, development within a contextual framework, exploration of meaning, and eventual disengagement. Both personification and impersonation facilitate active participation in the material being explored, enabling clients to manifest and engage with their inner struggles or experiences. Through these processes, clients can gain insight into their emotional relationship with the represented subject and potentially shift their perceptions or responses (Jones, 2011).

In dramatherapy, witnessing serves as a crucial aspect of the therapeutic process, allowing participants to act as both audience members and performers within the group dynamic. Unlike traditional theatre, where the audience is typically passive, dramatherapy encourages interactive engagement, blurring the lines between observer and participant. Participants may take turns witnessing each other's work, providing support, confrontation, guidance, or projection as needed. This interactive audience dynamic can facilitate therapeutic exploration and insight, as participants shift between roles and engage with each other's enactments. Additionally, witnessing oneself through role reversal or object representation can deepen self-awareness and perspective. The fluidity

of roles within the dramatherapy session creates a rich environment for exploration and growth, with the audience's presence serving as a catalyst for change and understanding (Jones, 2011).

6.7. Verbatim

Verbatim performance, as a form of arts-based research, offers a unique methodological tool for exploring and presenting data derived from interviews and media artifacts (Salvatore, 2023). It engages audiences in critical reflection while fostering empathy among both ethno-actors and viewers. This paper situates verbatim performance within the broader context of performance studies, highlighting its distinctiveness from verbatim theatre. Drawing on insights from scholars like Salvatore and Denzin, as well as practitioners in the field.

Verbatim performance involves presenting data from interviews and media artifacts through a presentational acting style, often involving the portrayal of multiple identities by ethno-actors. This approach allows for empathic connections between performers and the real people they portray, achieved through close analysis and replication of speech and gestural patterns. Ethno-drama, as advocated by Denzin, emphasizes the importance of making performance texts accessible and performable for interpreters beyond the realm of fieldwork, thus bridging the gap between academic research and broader audiences (Denzin, 2003).

While verbatim performance shares similarities with verbatim theatre in its reliance on the spoken words of 'ordinary' people, it distinguishes itself by its focus on critical engagement and empathy-building rather than purely on documentary representation (Paget, 1987). Verbatim theatre often represents the voices of marginalized groups through literal verbatim presentations of oral histories, sometimes leading to tensions over methodological puritanism. However, the process of theatricalizing these interviews allows for creative interpretation and improvisation, adding layers of complexity to the performance.

Theatre has a long tradition of motivating radical social action, as seen in the works of Brecht, Boal, Churchill, and Fo. While verbatim theatre may not explicitly claim to drive social change, it has the capacity to challenge attitudes and foster understanding among individuals. By bringing community stories to the stage, verbatim performance serves as a powerful tool for amplifying voices and addressing social issues. Its resurgence in popularity may stem from a desire to return to the basics of storytelling and community engagement in an increasingly complex world (Denzine, 2003).

In conclusion, verbatim performance offers a dynamic approach to exploring and presenting research data, engaging audiences in critical reflection and empathy-building. By combining elements of theatre and ethnography, verbatim performance bridges the gap between academic research and public engagement, contributing to broader conversations about social change and community empowerment. As scholars and practitioners continue to explore the possibilities of verbatim performance, its impact on both research and society is likely to grow.

6.8. Silencing

Silence, often regarded as an absence of speech, holds multifaceted meanings and implications across various contexts. While traditional psychoanalytic perspectives have interpreted silence as pathology or resistance, recent research has shed light on its nuanced role as a linguistic device in managing sequential environments, especially in spiritually oriented-humanistic psychotherapy sessions (Berger, 2023). Beyond the therapeutic setting, silence permeates societal structures and interactions, serving as both a coping mechanism and a tool for social control.

In psychotherapy, silence has long been viewed through a clinical lens, often interpreted as resistance or pathology (Dimitrijević & Buchholz, 2021). However, recent studies have highlighted its role as a preference for gaps and pauses, particularly in spiritually oriented-humanistic psychotherapy sessions (Berger, 2023). Unlike everyday conversation, where

immediate responses are preferred, these therapeutic interactions prioritize reflective pauses, fostering deeper introspection and engagement.

Beyond psychotherapy, silence manifests as a coping mechanism and a form of resistance, particularly among trauma survivors (Miranda, 2020). In the aftermath of atrocities, individuals may silence themselves to protect their families and avoid passing down traumatic memories to future generations (Ndlovu, 2019). This form of self-quieting serves as a method of survival, agency, and sacrifice, highlighting the resilience of communities and survivors amidst adversity.

Silencing extends beyond individual experiences to societal dynamics, where it functions as a tool of social control and oppression (Miranda, 2020). In legal settings, silencing occurs when victims are denied the opportunity to speak or when their testimonies are undervalued and undermined (Tuerkheimer, 2017; Miranda, 2020). Additionally, silencing is perpetuated through victim-blaming and the disavowal of colonial and structural oppression, forming part of broader social defence systems (Brown, 2001).
The concept of the social unconscious sheds light on the collective forces that shape individual and group behaviour (Foulkes, 1948; Hopper & Weinberg, 2011). Silencing can be understood as a manifestation of social defence mechanisms rooted in the unconscious dynamics of societal structures and power dynamics (Brown, 2001).

Silence, once viewed as a mere absence of speech, emerges as a complex phenomenon with diverse implications in psychotherapy and societal dynamics. From its role in therapeutic reflection to its function as a coping mechanism and tool of social control, silence unveils layers of meaning and significance. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of silencing, we can better understand its impacts and work towards fostering spaces of dialogue, empowerment, and justice in both individual and collective contexts.

7. Timeline and Action Plan

I will be interacting with transgender individuals and myself as part of my study. I will be conducting qualitative interviews with them. Instead of selecting from a list of suggested answers, participants will offer their own responses during qualitative interviews. These will allow for more detailed and unique stories to be told. In addition, they will enable me to ask questions that arise during the conversation (Finesurrey, 2019). According to Griffiths et al. (2017) and Blackstone (2012), qualitative interviews are not only about statistics. Instead, they seek narratives, which include details such as how the interviewee felt, or what happened after the conversation. Through open-ended responses, interviewers can gain a deeper understanding of the interviewee's perspective.

For this project, I will be working with Ashvir Hiralall who will assist me in understanding Rasa in the body. Ashvir is a student at the University of the Witwatersrand, pursuing his master's degree in applied drama and theatre. He is exploring the topic of "Deconstructing Gender Performativity: An exploration of Masculinity, Femininity, and Gendered roles in the South African Indian dance community through Kathak Storytelling." He believes that the Rasa technique, derived from ancient Sanskrit texts, captures the essence of taste, a feeling that cannot be described but can be vividly portrayed. Ashvir has a profound affinity for Rasa, grounded in practical experiences. He underwent a course at WSOA taught by Isana Ibrahim. The course was in cinematography, one of the concepts explored in the Rasa techniques. As an applied drama and theatre practitioner, Ashvir is a passionate physical storyteller activist. His extensive experience with Rasa involves embodying diverse characters on stage using this technique. As a Kathak dancer, Ashvir's deep understanding of the body and Rasa makes him a compelling choice for my research.

- **Step one:** In the first week, I will contact Ashvir and get in touch with the participants.
- **Step two:** In the second week, I will conduct interviews over a period of three weeks, because my interviews will depend on the availability of my participants.
- **Step three:** In the fifth week, I will put together the script.

- **Step four:** In the sixth week I will start working on the performance for 2 weeks (rehearsals).
- **Step five:** In the ninth week, I will work with my supervisor, Leila, to explore the Rasaboxes further.
- **Step five:** In the tenth week, I will showcase the work to Dr. Bhebhe and my supervisor, Leila Henriques.
- **Step six:** After receiving feedback, I will work on polishing my performance for two weeks.

My study plan involves working on various aspects of self-regulation. These include qualitative interviews, reading more deeply into existing papers, journaling, developing a theatrical piece, and gathering and analysing data.

8. Research Methods

My research will be using both Performance as Research (PaR) and Performance ethnography. Performance as Research will be my research design and it is a type of research that focuses on the main inquiry, which is the practice. It involves presenting the findings through a set of performances. In addition to these, it also includes a written result and an archival outcome, which can be used to capture the critical reflection that occurs during the process (HKAPA Editors, n.d.). Performance ethnography is under Performance as Research, and it will be my data collection method. Performance ethnography is a type of research that explores the collected data through in-depth interviews and observation field notes. It creates a collaborative work of art that is also accessible to non-academy audiences (UNCW Editors, 2017).

My research design method is Performance as Research, which is a qualitative method that involves the study of the body in relation to time, place, history, and the subject matter. The performance paradigm aims to provide a more direct experience of the body through facework. Performance as Research is often associated with various critical and cultural contexts. It breaks away from the traditional methods of conducting research and focuses

on the multiple aspects of the process. The concept of performance as research emphasizes the importance of collecting data related to the researcher's overall perspective on the project (Lenox, 2017). Performance as Research is a methodology utilized by Mark Fleishman (2012) to analyse Indian dance. Through a combination of discussions and evaluation, he aims to deconstruct the dance. According to Fleishman (2012), the concept of the connection between various worlds is expressed in the multiple embodied repetitions that are part of the performance. These events are referred to as micro, and they trigger an escalation towards projects, installations, and productions. Performance as Research is a method utilized to analyse performance. It involves utilizing validated methodologies that are specific to the characteristics of practitioners. It aims to generate an outcome that is closer to the actual performance (Fleishman, 2012). Performance as Research is conceptualized as a method that addresses the epistemological issues that are related to performance. This is done through the validity of the performance itself, as well as through the distribution of research (Fleishman, 2012). The concept of Performance as Research indicates that there is no connection between the written word and the research apparatus. Following the methodology's gesture, interest in the research became more prevalent. It is a performance that is different from other genres of research. It aims to explore the essence of embodiment, movement, and its interactional and affective aspects (Fleishman, 2012). In addition, Performance as Research necessitates extensive journaling to capture the thoughts and feelings of the researcher. After a researcher has acquired the necessary field notes, they start the writing process. This step involves making written drafts of their work. Although the final output of a performance research project is usually physical, the writing process is very important (Lenox, 2017). Using words can prevent me from properly showing the "WHY" of my research. It's easy to miss the emotional details when they're explained in words, but they make more sense when they are acted out. The goal of the performance is to connect the researcher, the audience, and the performative-I. According to Conquergood (2013), performance research is committed to developing and maintaining a dialogue that is open-ended and resists conclusions.

Performance ethnography is a qualitative data collection method that explores the various facets of performance. It involves bringing together multiple ethnographic techniques and theoretical frameworks from performance studies. As a field of investigation, performance studies are focused on the study of performance in all aspects of theatre, communication, and drama. The ethnographic techniques I will be using are qualitative interviews and field notes. A qualitative interview is typically conducted in a semi-structured manner. It involves asking open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of a person's experiences and traditions. Although the interviewer usually starts with a set of questions, they may deviate from the agenda. This type of interview is beneficial for many reasons, such as it allows for follow-up inquiries and the *"why"* and *"how"* of a participant's experience (Finesurrey, 2019). Field notes are written by an observer while interacting with people during a certain type of ethnography or fieldwork. They are usually written in an unobtrusive manner (Delamont, 2019). Performance refers to various cultural activities that are deemed to be performed or self-consciously created (Given, 2008), these include theatre, dance, music, drama, and video. Studies on performance provide valuable social relations insights by examining how these activities are perceived in real life. Through performance ethnography, researchers can investigate social dramas and dramatic moments in daily life, such as conflicts and inquiries into daily interactions. They can also investigate the cultural conditioning of certain social roles, such as the performance of fathers, employees, and daughters. Performance ethnography has been regarded as a collection of qualitative methods that can be utilized in different stages of a research project (Given, 2008). These include generating research materials, presenting research, and interpreting or analysing information. The process of performance ethnography can be used to generate research materials by collecting participant’s responses. It can be done in various forms, such as interviews, field notes, and observation. In addition, it can also incorporate ethnographic methods into the study of performance. Through performance ethnography, researchers can explore the various aspects of performance in a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. They can also investigate the cultural significance of performances in everyday life (Given, 2008).

The goal is to immerse the audience in a meta-narrative that will allow them to apply the lessons learned to their own lives (Denzin, 2019). The concept of embodiment explores the link between our energy and our physical selves. The concept of embodiment involves the interactions between our thoughts, actions, and bodies (Madeson, 2023). Through my work, I hope to raise awareness about the stigmas faced by transgender individuals. I believe that using words alone will prevent me from properly explaining my research. It can be hard to differentiate between feelings and emotions, and it is easy to miss them when spoken, but they become more apparent when acted out. Stigmas can negatively affect the mental health of transgender individuals. As my collaborators, I will be joined by two groups: one is just me, and another are transgender individuals. I will be interviewing them to create a process of exploration, *The Contemporary Dance of Voice and Silence.* I will also be collecting data from the participants. Through my various research tools, such as audio recording, journal writing, and observation, I will be able to collect data about the individuals who are participating in my project. An audio recording process involves taking sound information and storing it on various types of media. The audio can then be utilized to reproduce its original form by connecting it to a speaker system or a playback machine (Jump, 2023). The practice of journaling involves regularly recording one's thoughts, feelings, observations, and ideas in a semi-private or personal manner (Wright, 2023). I will then use the collected data to create a backdrop sound for my verbatim performance using Rasaboxes. Through the verbatim performance, there will be an ethical witnessing. An ethical witnessing event occurs when the spectator experiences a performance that encourages them to develop multifarious and fluid meanings. This can promote awareness of the social implications of these meanings (Phelan, 1999 and 2004). “The performance encourages the spectator to take ethical responsibility for the (represented) other, rather than simply viewing the performance as a reflection or exploration of personal subjectivity” (Duggan, 2013). As an actress, I will be using Rasaboxes to move from one emotion to another. During the interviews, I will be able to identify the hidden emotions that transgender individuals do not usually express. As an embodied actress, I will be able to perform these actions in front of the audience. The data will be created by Rasa in real time, and the audience will be able to hear and

inspect it as it is presented. After the performance is over, everyone will be allowed to see the collected emotions.

9. Ethical Considerations

In conducting ethical research studies, it is important that the identities of participants are protected. This ensures that they can participate in the study and maintain their rights as subjects. As a researcher, I take ethical responsibility seriously and will do everything in my power to follow these principles. I commit to ensuring the anonymity of all participants by refusing to disclose their personal information, such as their names, addresses, or other distinguishing characteristics, to protect their privacy. In certain cases, when recording material is used for research, additional precautions will be taken to ensure that the participants' identities are not compromised. This ensures that the voices of the individuals are not identified by their distinctive vocalizations or speech patterns. This ensures that the data handling process is conducted in a secure manner and that the confidentiality of the participants is protected.

When presenting the results of the study or disseminating the information, I will do everything in my power to ensure that the anonymity of the individuals is protected. All the identifying data will be redacted, and pseudonyms will be used. Doing so makes it impossible for anyone to be recognized or singled out. I will do everything in my power to ensure that the integrity of the study and the rights of the participants are protected. This is done through adherence to the strictest ethical standards set by the relevant institutions.

I also understand that the failure to protect the confidentiality of the study's participants can have detrimental effects on their participation in future studies. By prioritizing this issue, I aim to create an environment of respect and trust for all involved parties. Upholding the ethical standards of research is a vital part of ensuring that the study is credible and trustworthy. As a responsible researcher, I believe that it is important that the identities of the study's participants are protected. Doing so allows me to maintain the

integrity of the study and ensure that the individuals are contributing to the advancement of scientific knowledge.

10. Analysis and Discussion of the interviews

10.1. Selected Lines for the performance

Disclaimer: The following transcripts have been transcribed to the best of my ability. Some parts of the recording contain language that may be considered offensive. All names used are pseudonyms, and no real names were utilized to protect the identity of the participants.

I sent an e-mail to the dean's office so that I could get permission to send e-mails to students. After receiving the dean's permission, the participants were sourced on a voluntary basis. My participants are students from the University of Witwatersrand. My participants' group are transgender individuals. Age range of 20–35-year-old males and females. My participants were answering 18 semi-structured qualitative interview questions. These were the interviews I conducted.

The following lines, extracted from semi-structured interviews conducted with participants spanning the age range of 20 to 35 at the University of Witwatersrand, were chosen for their profound resonance and divergence from conventional norms. These selections transcend the ordinary and illustrate the nuanced experiences of transgender individuals, shedding light on aspects often overlooked or underappreciated. Through these narratives, I was stimulated to reevaluate societal assumptions and gain insight into the difficulties of the lives of transgender people.

1. How do I know I am trans? I feel like Trans kids will always have a similar kind of upbringing way from early ages in exhibiting the wrong behaviour you know like… I had short hair as a kid and I only ever wear boy's clothes so luckily my parents didn't try and dress me any way, they were just like… whatever do your thing and you know

I was playing with action figures and cars instead of barbies I was kicked out of ladies bathrooms because everyone thought I was boy I used to tell people I'm a boy and then I wasn't. I would ask my parents why I don't have a dick, like a pre-teen… just being like as a kid being like… something's missing. I remember trying to pee standing up and being so crushed when it didn't work. You know, one of those, kind of when you look back at it, it makes so much sense but at the time it's… I don't know, you are just confused.

2. There are a lot of occasions where, I don't feel comfortable going to a particular space or talking to people or presenting… you know where it's like authentic because I know that… Either people are going to read me as a man; which is not going to be comfortable… Or they're going to read me as Trans, and they're not going to be very supportive of that… So yeah, it's like… there's always a sort of… before going into any social situation or doing any social situations there is like a constant calculation of asking about am I safe to seem like myself or if I'm already… if I am already presenting more feminine am I still safe? Do I have to get out of here? Then in a way… something that has been quite scary a couple of times is like… I've been driving and let's say I just come from a date or just come from seeing my friends, but I am dressed quite femininely, I have makeup. My Driver's license shows a picture of me looking masculine, it has… it has the word male on it. And I'm always worried if I get pulled over and the cops wants to check my license when they see that on their perspective there is a disjuncture you know… like you don't know what's going to happen then. There is quite a common worried when I'm on the road.
3. If you are away with a bunch of strangers like at an event in a crowd in the mall everyone kind of has the sense of belonging in like a social group like you know humans are social pack animals and everyone kind of knows where they fit, knows the roles they're supposed to perform, you know kind of… it's a great source of comfort as people to have that. If you're trans you are excluded from that, and it's really destabilizing and you kind of live on the fringes of society. If you pass it's okay but if anybody knows you are trans, you get this back. It's the first thing they see about you. You know, I'll never just be Thomas that dude. For a large amount of my life, I will be Thomas that trans guy and I fucking hate that. I don't like being trans, I would never

no one wants to be trans, I'm not proud of it, I don't like, it it's embarrassing. Nobody needs to know anything about my gender possibly it's like broadcasting what your genitals are. What I mean it's like I'm a dude, but I have a vagina everyone, that is humiliating; and everyone is uncomfortable around that, and you know before I knew what trans was, I wasn't comfortable.

4. On a more day-to-day basis, pretty much all spaces, both educational and business-related have gendered bathrooms and sometimes other gendered spaces, and it can be quite difficult to tell where I'm supposed to go. If I am dressed masculinely or if I haven't changed then okay cool, I go the man's room… it's fine, I don't enjoy it, but I am used to it. But If I'm dressed very femininely, I think I'm looking very feminine, I will sometimes go to the women's room. Often, I'll just go to the men's room because I'd rather be read as a woman in the men's bathroom, and if something happens, I can just be like, "Oh, sorry, I was in the wrong place." than being read as a man in the women's bathroom because then I will be read as predatory which feels so much worse. And that's a horrible decision to have to make every day. Yeah.
5. Yes, a little bit. Not directly… but like for example like filling in a form… there's most of the time… about 98% of the time… There's never a… There's either male or female and sometimes I want to answer none; but that option is not there, it's a binary thing it seems. I'm just not there. There's also… So, I think also like if… I have fear sometimes that if I eventually do want to go through a lot of the process of making it a legal thing that my identity is… Of my identity, I'm just not going to be accepted because of however… for whatever the case may be but like my presentation or whatever.
6. It's been very different… in parts… At the start of it all, it was a repeat of adjustments where people had to wear my… where I needed to really lay it to my friends that listen… my body has changed… so we can't do or I can't do these very physical things. So, you can't send me there in the middle of the night because I'm at elevated risk.

10.2. Analysis

The journey of self-discovery and acceptance is often complex and deeply personal, particularly for transgender individuals who are navigating societal expectations and

norms. Through a series of insightful interviews with transgender individuals, I have gained valuable insights into the multi-layered experiences, challenges, and emotions that shape their identities. These narratives provide a view into the nuanced realities of being a transgender individual, highlighting the importance of representation, support, and societal acceptance in fostering a more inclusive world.

From the interviews conducted, it is evident that each transgender individual exhibits a unique set of experiences, challenges, and identities. While they collectively share the commonality of being transgender individuals, their individual journeys, perspectives, and needs diverge significantly. Despite constituting a diverse and vibrant community, transgender individuals frequently encounter marginalization due to their comparatively small population within the broader societal context. Through conducting and embodying the interviews, I understood the depth of emotion, feeling and discomfort that many of the interviewees displayed.

Additionally, participants recount a variety of experiences in coming to terms with their transgender identities, ranging from early hints of discomfort with traditional gender norms to moments of profound recognition and validation through online communities and personal introspection. One participant recalls their initial confusion and lack of vocabulary to articulate their feelings until stumbling upon a YouTube video discussing transgender experiences, which served as a revelation and validation of their own struggles. Another participant reflects on their childhood, marked by behaviours and preferences that deviated from societal expectations of their assigned gender, such as preferring boys' clothes and toys instead of barbies, leading to a sense of confusion and longing for a different bodily experience.

The interviews underscore the profound impact of representation and visibility on shaping individual understandings of gender identity and fostering a sense of belonging within the community. However, many transgender individuals struggle to find acceptance and belonging due to stigmas and discrimination. As one participant lamented, navigating public spaces can be burdened with discomfort, whether being read as a man or as

transgender, with neither option feeling authentically supportive. Another participant expressed the deep sense of exclusion and destabilization experienced by transgender individuals, who often feel relegated to the fringes of society. Even when passing as their true gender, the spectre of being labelled as transgender looms large, overshadowing their individuality and humanity.

Moreover, Transgender individuals navigate a confused landscape of emotions daily, struggling with frustration, anxiety, and moments of joy and affirmation amidst the weight of societal expectations and discrimination. One participant vividly articulates the constant fear of being defined solely by their transgender identity, highlighting the inevitability of being perceived as "that trans guy" rather than simply "Bob." The internalized shame and embarrassment associated with being transgender are profound, reflecting broader societal stigmatization and misconceptions. Moreover, participants bravely disclose their struggles with depression, anxiety, and body dysphoria, shedding light on the urgent need for greater awareness and support for transgender individuals' mental health needs. One participant underscores the harmful impact of misinformation and stereotypes, debunking myths about de-transitioning and challenging pervasive misconceptions about transgender individuals as child-abusing drag queens or mentally ill teenagers. The internal conflict and self-doubt experienced by many transgender individuals are emotionally expressed, as they struggle with the relentless attacks of transphobic narratives both externally and internally. The pervasive nature of internalized transphobia is acknowledged, stemming from societal discomfort and judgment, which even those within the transgender community may perpetuate.

Supportive relationships serve as a cornerstone in the journeys of transgender individuals, offering them validation, acceptance, and a much-needed sense of belonging. As one participant recounts their experience of meeting other transgender individuals for the first time, they express a profound sense of relief and comfort in realizing that their identity is not as isolating or extreme as they once believed. Witnessing fellow trans people living authentically encourages them to embrace their own journey of transition with newfound courage. Similarly, another participant reflects on the initial adjustments

their friends had to make upon their transition, emphasizing the importance of clear communication and understanding in maintaining supportive relationships. Despite these challenges, the participant expresses gratitude for the unwavering support of their family throughout their transition process.

Transgender individuals encounter practical difficulties when accessing essential services and navigating legal processes, particularly in changing their name and gender markers on official documents. These bureaucratic challenges highlight the pressing need for streamlined legal procedures and institutional support to facilitate gender-affirming transitions. Participants express frustration at the lack of inclusive options on forms, where only binary gender choices are provided, leaving them feeling unseen and invalidated. Moreover, concerns about safety arise when discrepancies between their appearance and official documents, such as driver's licenses, could lead to potential discrimination or misunderstanding, especially during encounters with law enforcement.

In conclusion, the narratives gathered from interviews with transgender individuals offer profound insights into the complex and multifaceted journey of self-discovery, acceptance, and resilience in the face of stigmas and discrimination. These accounts underscore the diverse experiences, challenges, and emotions inherent in navigating gender identity, from moments of profound validation to struggles with internalized shame and stigmas. Despite the marginalization and obstacles they face, transgender individuals find relief and strength in supportive relationships, such as family and friendships, and communities, highlighting the transformative power of acceptance and understanding. However, systemic barriers, such as bureaucratic hurdles and legal challenges, continue to impede their ability to live authentically and access essential services. Therefore, there is an urgent need for greater awareness, empathy, and systemic change to create a more inclusive and affirming society where transgender individuals are recognized, respected, and supported in their journey towards authenticity and societal acceptance.

10.3. Discussion

The literature and the findings of interviews both shed light on the complex and multifaceted experiences of transgender individuals, offering valuable insights into the challenges transgender individuals face and the strategies they employ to navigate societal norms and discrimination. While the literature provides a comprehensive overview of the broader issues confronting transgender communities globally and within South Africa, the interviews revealed a more intimate exploration of individual narratives, emotions, and resilience.

At the core of both the literature and the interviews lies a profound acknowledgment of the deeply intimate and often challenging journey of self-discovery and acceptance that transgender individuals undertake. Theron's papers illuminate the systemic obstacles and societal prejudices that create barriers to healthcare, legal acknowledgment, and social integration for transgender communities, issues that are deeply rooted in the legacy of apartheid. This historical context is illustrated in the interviews, where some transgender individuals express reluctance to engage with bureaucratic processes due to their complexity and fear of encountering ignorance or hostility. For instance, one participant expressed exhaustion at the mere thought of explaining their transgender identity to officials at Home Affairs, anticipating a lack of understanding and empathy.

Additionally, one key theme that emerges from both the literature and the interviews is the importance of representation and visibility in shaping individual understandings of gender identity and fostering a sense of belonging within the transgender community, although Theron emphasizes the lack of resources and support for transgender individuals in South Africa and across the continent (Theron, 2008; Theron, 2009).

Furthermore, both the literature and the analysis underscore the intersectional complexity of transgender identity, emphasizing how various factors such as race, class, and geographical location intersect with gender identity to shape individual experiences and access to resources. Theron's work delves into the intricate interplay of cultural norms,

historical legacies, and legal frameworks in Africa, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by transgender individuals in the continent. These challenges manifest in the interviews through emotional accounts of familial rejection, leading some individuals to detransition in order to regain acceptance. The narratives also reveal the pervasive impact of misconceptions and misinformation, with one participant lamenting the prevalence of false beliefs surrounding de-transitioning within online discourse. This participant highlights the importance of accurate information in fighting harmful stereotypes and misconceptions, underscoring the urgent need for equality and factual education (Theron, 2008; Theron, 2009).

Despite the challenges outlined in both the literature and the insights gathered from the interviews, there are also encouraging indications of progress and opportunities for positive change. In her paper, Theron references initiatives such as the “Let us live in Peace” campaign in Uganda and the commendable efforts of organizations like Gender DynamiX in South Africa, which are at the forefront of pioneering transgender-specific advocacy and support services (Theron, 2008; Theron, 2009). Similarly, the interviews illuminate the transformative influence of supportive relationships and communities in nurturing acceptance and understanding for transgender individuals. For instance, one participant shared their experience of familial support, noting that while their parents initially struggled, they ultimately embraced and accepted their identity, reflecting a heartening evolution in attitudes. Another participant recounted the profound impact of connecting with older transgender individuals in Johannesburg, describing how the experience of being in the presence of fellow trans people provided a sense of reassurance and belonging. Witnessing others living authentically empowered them to embark on their own journey of transition with newfound confidence and courage. These narratives underscore the vital role of supportive networks and communal acceptance in fostering resilience and empowerment within transgender communities, offering hope amidst the broader landscape of challenges and discrimination.

However, both the literature and the analysis underscore the urgent need for greater awareness, empathy, and systemic change to create a more inclusive and affirming

society where transgender individuals are recognized, respected, and supported in their journey towards authenticity and societal acceptance.

In conclusion, a striking parallel emerges between the insights gathered from the literature and the firsthand accounts shared in the interviews, underscoring the convergence of experiences and challenges faced by transgender individuals. Both sources illuminate the pervasive societal stigmas, systemic barriers, and intersecting factors that shape the lives of transgender people worldwide (Theron, 2008; Theron, 2009). From the rooted discrimination and legal hurdles highlighted in the literature to the poignant narratives of struggle, resilience, and acceptance confirmed in the interviews, there is a profound resonance in the depiction of transgender experiences. Moreover, amidst the adversity depicted in both sources, there are also shared glimpses of hope and progress, evidenced by initiatives and support networks backing transgender rights and empowerment. This alignment underscores the significance of understanding and addressing the complex realities of transgender individuals from multiple perspectives, whether scholarly or personal, in advancing inclusive policies and fostering societal acceptance. Ultimately, the convergence between literature and interviews serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of amplifying transgender voices and advocating for meaningful change to create a world where all individuals, regardless of gender identity, can live authentically and with dignity.

11. Process in Drama Therapy

11.1. Define process in Drama Therapy

As Sennett (1977) says, *"When people invest feeling in their roles, they acquire something of the power of an actor."*

Phil Jones defines the *"therapeutic performance process"* as how performance unfolds within the context of dramatherapy. While its duration and intensity may vary, a fundamental procedure underlies performance in dramatherapy. Therapeutic

performance entails the stages of idea generation, rehearsal, presentation, and subsequent disengagement. Although alike to theatrical performance in definition, its implications and outcomes differ significantly within the therapeutic realm (Jones, 1991).

11.2. Quickfire (Introduction to PaR)

In the initial stages of my research, I had to introduce it, and I did that through performance. In the performance I was highlighting the stigmas and stereotypes that transgender individuals are facing. My performance began with singing a song saying *"Ndizelwe Mna"* translated *"I am Born."* This was followed by me giving birth to two different shoes. The shoes are a heel and a safety boot. Giving birth to the different shoes was the beginning of my research journey, as I intended to "*Explore the Stigmas and Emotions of Transgender People using Rasa Theory and Rasaboxes in Drama Therapy."* In my performance, I used crates to represent Rasaboxes. Also, as a performer and researcher, I incorporated symbolism in my costume. I wore an Indian dress which represented the Rasa Theory and the female gender, and men's trousers to represent the male gender, and make-up had a subtle resemblance to that of a male and female. I did this to show the audience how identity and sexuality can confuse one's life, also, the conflict inside a transgender individual who is battling with knowing if they are male or female.

After giving birth to the shoes, I then moved to the crates. When I played around with the crates, I voiced out the stigmas and stereotypes that society projects on transgender people. The crates represented the Rasaboxes. Every time I touched them, I showed a different emotion. I then moved to a court scene where a lawyer who is advocating for transgender people is given a stand. She mentions the incident that happened when society was projecting the stigmas and stereotypes, and that is when I, as a researcher, was introducing my framing document.

After this embodied performance, I did not really sit with anything on my body, but I battled with emotions and the mind. I could feel the rage, despair and sadness that comes with being called names and being sidelined from society. The emotions that I felt boiling inside

me led me to wondering, how much more to transgender individuals. With all of that I then thought maybe the reason I did not sit with anything on my body was because I anticipated picking up the crates. I thought about the emotion I was going to represent next, and I think that hindered me from allowing the process to lead me.

11.3. Embodiment in Research

In my pursuit of exploring the emotions that transgender people go through, I embarked on a journey to explore the connection between the body and the mind through performance. Embodied cognition has been used as a tool for making performance-oriented works. Throughout the journey, I have explored the use of hybrid elements in performance, such as text, sound, and gesture. I have developed a method that involves re-creating material through a continuous process of composition. Through this process, I have been able to gain a deeper understanding of the body's mysterious processes, such as recall and selection. It also led me to explore the nature of the thought and brain when it comes to creating performance materials (Reeve, 2013). The venue changed; I was now in the amphitheatre. For this performance I did not have the crates. I used the backdrop curtain to pass the nine emotions that are found in the Rasaboxes. I entered the stage with the song *"Ndizelwe Mna"* which translates to *"I am born."* On centre stage there was a chair. I sang the song while I was approaching the chair. I then stood behind the chair while singing, moved in front of the chair to sit on it, and gave birth to the different shoes. After that, a sound of some of the interviews I had with my participants played. When the sound started, I stood up and explored emotions based on what was being said in the recording. As I moved through the space embodying the emotions, at some point I had to take off the dress and it got stuck on my neck. I then played around with that, as it represented the internal conflict transgender people go through. I then wore the shoes and at the end, I stood on top of the chair and faced the audience. The performance emphasised the connection between the mind and body, and I struggled with my body during the performance. The mind guided me to the participants' experiences, but my body could not bring them to the surface. The body's message to me was that there is a

lack of awareness regarding the body. This prevented me from fully expressing and embodying the emotions that I felt during the performance.

Even though my research questions were not fully answered at this point, I found some things I was looking for. Through the interviews, I was able to find out that there are various emotional struggles that transgender individuals go through, and that being transgender does not automatically make one transgender person the same as the next transgender individual. Through this performance, I realised that there were many conflicts and confusions that transgender individuals go through, and it has helped me to understand how they are feeling. During my performance, I had a lot of conflicting feelings about whether I should wear the dress or not. There were moments when I felt suffocated by the garment, and I could not get it over my head. This represented the emotional struggles that were conveyed by the audio recordings from the interviews with transgender individuals. The sound that I used to mask the voices of transgender individuals and help me with the fluidity of the performance was incredibly sensitive and revelatory. Because that sound came with one emotion, it hindered my performance as the Rasa has varying emotions. The hindrance forced other emotions from the recording to be masked. This represented how transgender individuals' voices tend to be silenced involuntarily. Instead of drawing the Rasaboxes, I internalized the emotions. This resulted in me feeling exhausted and emotional. That informed me that transgender individuals go through heavy emotions, and they mostly internalize them, and in doing so, they end up drained and overwhelmed.

11.4. Embodied Performance

Rasa as a way of describing the design and goals of performance is an essential part of the vocabulary of performance in most contexts (Schwarts, 2004).

At the beginning of my journey, I began with a costume. I had one heel on one foot and a safety boot on the other. On my face, I had one side with a moustache and the other with lipstick, without a moustache. I wore a woman's dress and a man's trousers. I then began

my exploration to realize that it is much more. It is a more complicated and complex nuanced thing than just a costume or appearance. So, I explored the external thing. But what the Rasa has enabled me to do is to profoundly explore the internal emotions and complexities of just one statement and hidden feelings. I worked with Ashvril as I explored Rasa. At first, I explored with just my body. I attempted to address the dominance of sound in guiding the emotional process within the performance by introducing additional sounds in the recording. This attempt only exacerbated the issue. Despite efforts to diversify the sounds, emotions continued to be primarily led by the distinct sound cues. The process felt generic. It felt like I was just being surface. This persistence underscores the complex interplay between sound and emotional engagement in performance, highlighting the need for further exploration and innovative approaches. It was only when I began working with breath, sound, and words that I experienced the real Rasa, because my way into this was through words. When I really began working deeply, that is when Rasa came alive. I did the process through the development of a deeper understanding of my own emotions. In addition to being able to physically embody these emotions, I also benefited from having a sense of integrity and authenticity. The ability to seamlessly integrate my body, emotions, and mind allowed me to convey Rasa with a sense of resonance and depth. This part of the process brought the authentic feel of emotions because I was in the moment and the experiential process was raw. Being witnessed brought feelings of intimidation and a moment of silencing took place because being witnessed is against Rasa. The very essence of my research came up for me in that moment of being witnessed because what I was dealing with are suppressed emotions and I am trying to give voice to those emotions. And the silencing that happened was speaking directly to that. It became difficult for me to show my vulnerability. I became scared because I was being witnessed. That led me to being nervous and that resulted in me rushing through the process. I chose the parts of the interview that I used because those are experiences we take for granted, but they have a deeper resonance that I was able to access through Rasa.

11.5. The Contemporary Dance of Voice and Silence

"The fear comes when I have to go out at night to the shops or garage."

DISGUST	**COURAGE**	**JOY**
WONDER	**PEACE**	**FEAR**
SADNESS	**LOVE**	**ANGER**

In my last process I decided to go back to costume because I noticed symbolism plays a huge role in my journey. As I previously said, my costume was to show the audience how identity and sexuality can cause confusion in one's life, also, the conflict inside a transgender individual who is battling with not knowing if they are male or female. The process of personal transformation exploration and self-expression is what inspired the look.

Beginning with the process I invited the audience to close their eyes, then I played some of the recordings from the interviews. I played the recordings once, and then I read the transcript of the recordings. The aim of doing this was to highlight the element of verbatim in this process. This is the link between the participants' voices and mine, leading to the Rasa process. After reading the transcript of the recordings I invited the audience to open their eyes. I then invited them to do a breathing exercise with me. After that I invited the audience to step into the Rasaboxes and to explore the boxes, then write down the words

that come to mind. I then took the papers and asked them to be seated. I again invited them to a breathing exercise. I then stepped into the Rasaboxes with the sound of the song "*Ndizelwe Mna."* After that sound, I went through the boxes experimenting with breath and body. After going through the boxes with the sound, breath, and body, I experimented with words. I chose the words *'The fear comes when I have to go out at night to the shops or garage."* When I was done experimenting with words, I went to the middle of the boxes and said, *"There by the Grace of God go I."* This means I cannot understand someone else. It means, by grace we are all just floating. We are only here because of some divine grace. We cannot judge anyone by anything.

At times we tend to focus on the process but fail to pay attention to the subtle things that unintentionally become part of that process. And them becoming part of the process contributes tremendously. I have tattoos on my shoulders. On the left shoulder is the sun, and on the right shoulder is the moon. I did not pay attention to them when I was putting my costume on but during my process they showed. Them showing played a huge role because they spoke back to my costume. The contrast between the two represented the emotional conflict that transgender individuals go through. Stepping into the boxes I sang the song because I was aware of my nervousness, and I was trying to quieten the voice that was in my head. As I went through the boxes singing the song, I changed the tune to match each emotion. Doing that helped me a lot into digging deep inside me, and really understanding how I was genuinely feeling. Singing the song pushed me to show the rawness of the emotions I was feeling. I was also challenged to be vulnerable and transparent. The song helped me to show the different representations of what I was dealing with on the inside. As I was singing and going through the Rasaboxes, the song became a vessel and gave me other offers as I continued with the process.

Speaking back to breath, I struggled to push myself because I was self-critical. The moment I was not speaking, and it was quiet in the room, I got to be aware that I am being witnessed. I battled with my mind and that caused me to not allow my body to fully experiment with breath. When I was in the Rasa of Fear, I did not allow myself to go there because I was too conscious of what would break if I sat with it for some time. I anticipated

what might happen, and immediately I got an overwhelming feeling, then I thought it best to move to the next Rasa.

The Saree cloth has an original texture of satin and a slippery finish but when I was exploring the Rasaboxes, my body and the texture communicated differently with each box. Also, the way I treated it was different in each box. There was a time when I was taking the cloth. To me the intention was to fix it, but it looked like I was strangling myself because the sadness was in my throat. When I stepped in the Rasa of Anger, the cloth fell apart. To me that represented chaos. Anger is not beautiful. Anger is messy and nothing can be fixed with anger. That showed when I was trying to fix the cloth, but my hands wanted to point and confront instead of fixing. I became a man and a woman with the cloth. The way I fiddled with the cloth when I was in fear and the way I took care of it when I was in love showed the adaptation of the Rasa and the results of emotions.

The shift of my legs when I was stepping in played a huge role in being aware of each box. Sometimes the heel is the one that stepped in first in the box, and other times the safety boot is the one that went in first. When it was the male part that was leading, I noticed that the transition was smoother, but when it was the female part, then transition was more heightened. This made me look at males and females in general. I believe that males tend to be calmer than females when they are going through certain emotions. This could also represent the balance that transgender individuals try to find in their lives. They are constantly in a position to try and understand their sexuality and identity while navigating their gender. At some point, my legs were shaking because of the pressure from the different levels of the shoes and from the discomfort of constantly trying to make sure the other side keeps up with the other.

12. Conclusion

Performance as Research is a unique and innovative method for conducting studies. My research explores the emotions that transgender individuals go through because they are often stigmatized and discriminated against due to their gender identity. Through a combination of in-depth interviews and a drama therapy process, I aim to change how people view and understand transgenderism. Through this research, I hope to develop empathy and expose the lived experiences of individuals who identify as transgender. The research methodology involves listening to and engaging in intimate conversations with individuals who have been marginalized. The conversations that I have conducted have provided me with valuable insights into the complicated and multifaceted experiences of people who identify as transgender. They have also highlighted the various forms of stigma and discrimination that this community encounters. Through performances, I hope to connect with my audience and elicit a deeper understanding of the complex and nuanced experiences of people who identify as transgender.

The process in drama therapy using Rasaboxes, as explored through the lens of transgender experiences, reveals the intricate interplay between identity, emotions, and embodiment. Through various stages of exploration, from embodying stereotypes to delving into the nuances of emotions, the journey unveils the complexity and resilience of transgender individuals. Symbolism, embodiment, and the use of Rasa theory provide profound insights into the internal struggles and external pressures faced by transgender individuals. Despite challenges such as societal stigmas and internal conflicts, the process also highlights moments of empowerment, authenticity, and connection. Overall, the journey underscores the transformative potential of drama therapy in fostering understanding, empathy, and acceptance within transgender communities and society at large.

In addition to unveiling the complexities of transgender experiences, the process in drama therapy also sheds light on broader societal dynamics and challenges. Through the exploration of stereotypes, emotions, and embodiment, the performance underscores the

pervasive impact of societal stigmas and expectations on transgender individuals' lives. By embodying these struggles and confronting them head-on, the process offers a powerful critique of the marginalization and discrimination faced by transgender communities. Through this heightened awareness and empathy, the process in drama therapy not only facilitates personal growth and healing but also contributes to larger conversations about social justice and inclusion.

In conclusion, the integration of Rasa theory and Rasaboxes in the exploration of transgender experiences deepens our understanding of the emotional landscape within the community. By delving into the nuances of emotions and their embodiment, the process illuminates the internal conflicts and external pressures faced by transgender individuals in navigating their identities. The symbolic use of costume, sound, and movement enhances the visceral impact of the performance, inviting audiences to engage with the rawness and authenticity of transgender experiences. Ultimately, the process in drama therapy serves as a platform for empowerment and advocacy, amplifying transgender voices and fostering solidarity within the community. Through shared experiences and mutual understanding, it paves the way for greater acceptance, respect, and affirmation of transgender identities in society.

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Appendix A (Pictures)

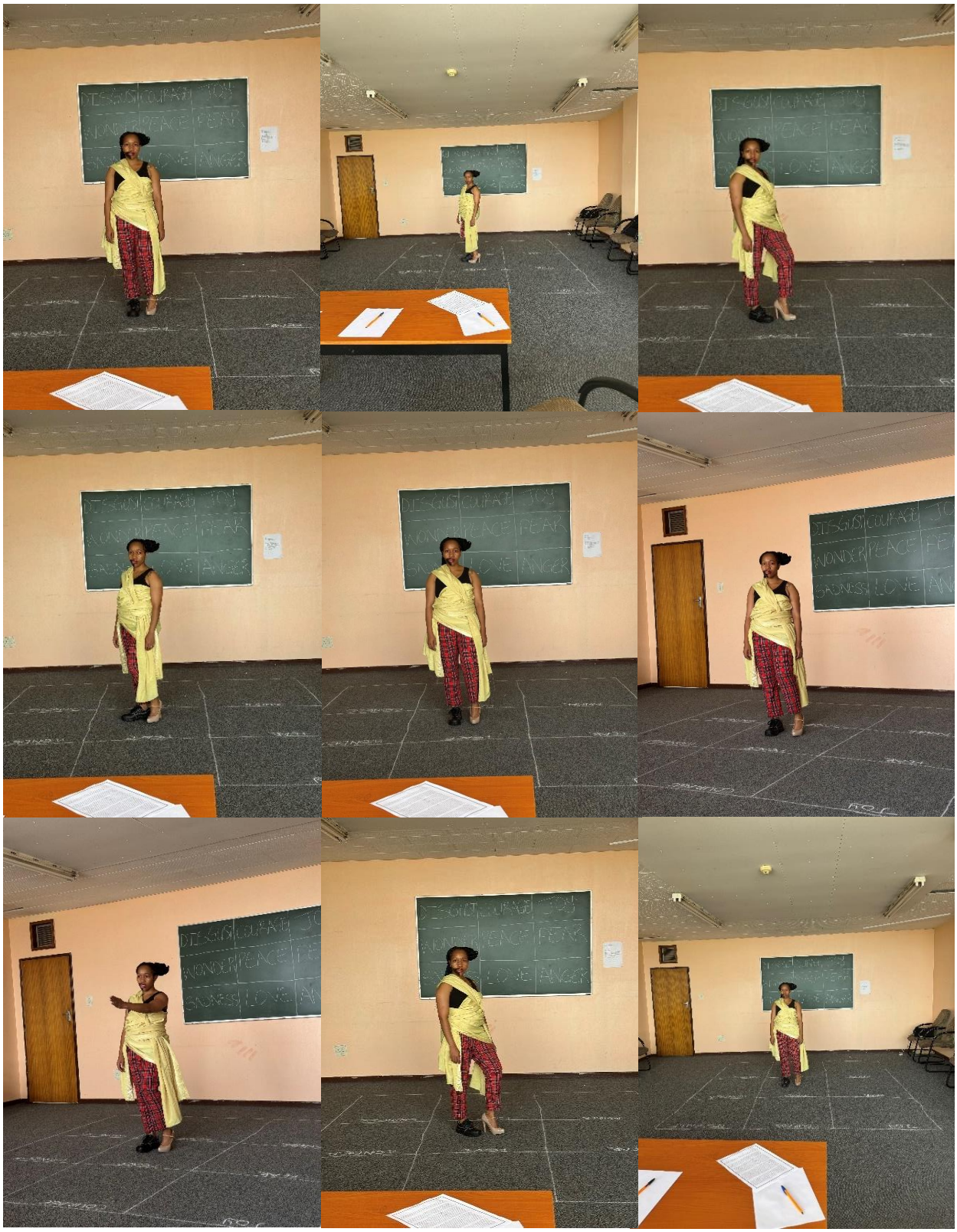


Photos by: Mandisi Sindo (Dr. Disi)



Photo by: Nday Kimemwenze

Siphokuhle Keseni **1108896** **1 July 2024**



Photos by: Nday Kimemwenze

Appendix B (Transcript of Recordings)

Disclaimer: The following transcripts have been transcribed to the best of my ability. Some parts of the recording contain language that may be considered offensive. All names used are pseudonyms, and no real names were utilized to protect the identity of the participants.

Participant #1

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender for you?

Participant #1: Okay cool, so being trans for me… I think it means, I guess experiencing gender in a way, but it doesn't align with sort of I guess, the social expectations of the sex I was assigned at birth.

Siphokuhle: How did you know you are transgender?

Participant #1: So, for me, it wasn't one of those things where I guess I knew from an early age or something like that… I guess, I guess because maybe it wasn't something that appeared to be… I guess it was because of like, I guess the representations of trans people in media. I didn't really associate with anything that I saw, so I didn't, even though I guess a lot of my experience around sort of like my gender presentation, from an early age where would probably like be consistent with like a lot of other people's trans experiences. I think, I only really realised after once I was like sort of at university and then once I think like trans people became more invisible online and I started seeing like maybe a broader sort of spectrum of like identities I guess or sort of like presentations that I sort of identified with then. Especially when this may sound like kind of a strange thing to say, but YouTube was a big thing for me, especially seeing other people who were for example disabled like seeing people who were in a wheelchair and trans. That was a big thing for me because I saw someone that was like, oh wow, that's like that's just like me and I sort of like I could identify with, and I thought that I guess that's when I knew was when I Sort of like saw content online that I identified with it. It helped me explain to me the feelings that I've been feeling for a long time.

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #1: I think well, I think like trans people are you know, people too. So, I think we should have equal rights. I think also quality means like I guess more than just you know rights on paper. I guess it also means societal, sort of acceptance of moving about in the world becomes easier. So I think in that way it's important I think also yeah it just makes moving around the world easier and it makes especially, a lot safer for people so yeah I think it's really important just because you know trans people of people and everyone should have equal life rights.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis as a transgender individual?

Participant #1: I think I think I go through I should say that my experience is sort of I don't know maybe a bit weird in that I do not I'm pretty sort of preclusive I guess. I don't leave the house much, and I think that like sort of like affects sort of like I guess my perception as well because like I'm not I guess perceived as much and this is like sort of like online. I think emotionally, at the stage that I'm now I think I think it's more like when I leave the house that like I feel frustrated sometimes because I'm not out to everyone that I should be out with and I feel sort of frustrated with myself sometimes. I also feel I guess it increases my anxiety a lot sometimes just because I am sort of trying to figure out what people think sort of how people perceive me and then I'm yet trying to navigate that can be difficult. So, I think just like increases my anxiety and stuff, but I think also some like sort of positive things like I think sort of having I guess community and yes sort of like a sense of belonging in that way but sort of I guess like-minded people.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #1: Okay cool, yeah, so I think it's like inherently sort of like already I kind of like yeah, it's like an inherent sort of strange experience I guess because like you get to be experienced from like multiple perspectives. People perceive you in a lot of different ways I guess that you wouldn't normally, yeah I guess it's like a kind of like I guess a unique experience that not I guess like a lot of people sort of go through. I think I've had like a lot of sort of like funny interactions, I guess with like sort of like health care providers and things of that nature. I think like for example, I had like a Doctor's appointment recently where like, and this was like completely unrelated to gender

things, I think the doctor just didn't have to handle this. After I left you know like basically after saying goodbye. He looks me up and down and he's like, have any surgeries planned? So yeah it's just um yeah lots of like I guess strange experiences.

Siphokuhle: How do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #1: I like they/them, but she/her is fine as well. yeah and yeah I identify as sort of non-binary but also transfeminine and trans-female, all of those don't feel wrong they just feel weird if that makes sense.

Siphokuhle: What challenges do you face in your daily life that may be specific to your transgender identity?

Participant #1: I think having to, having to still sort of, having to juggle like a lot of names and identities and stuff. I think sort of like having to think like okay well this person knows me as this thing, and this person knows me as another thing. Having to sort of also like, sort of walking into a room, especially as someone who as of legally changed their name. Or sort of decided on the name change amends or changed my gender mark on my ID. It becomes sort of like I guess a difficult, becomes difficult, it becomes difficult to navigate certain situations just because you're like, oh gosh, how is this person perceiving me… like I'm going to hand this person some paperwork, and then they've perceived me one way and now they're going to read the paperwork and then it's going to say, oh it's gonna say, like you know, like wrong I guess gender… or my sex assigned at birth, because it got my ID on and then like gosh how to navigate that. I think also it makes, it makes things like submitting like exhibiting paperwork, applying for academic things more difficult because I have to sort of navigate or guidance to your latest stuff. If I like have a phone call with my supervisor, oh gosh, is this the day I come out to my supervisor, this would be the day. Then end of the call it's like bye-bye. Then I'm like damn I didn't do it. So I guess, just having to juggle a whole bunch of different things.

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others would make your daily life easier?

Participant #1: I think sort of like on a society level I think if, if people in fact maybe there wasn't like as much of a like as much of sort of an association. I know it because this is like a society-level thing, but like if there wasn't as big of an association between my names and genders, that make things like helpful, because like I mean to me it's like I'm not kind with my name except in that I really don't, I don't like the sort of

the social connotations of the name. So, I think that would be helpful but I think also I think if people… So, I, it's a difficult question because like I'm the one hand I think sometimes to myself. oh like if people knew more about trans people maybe things would be easier but then also I think that well maybe if people knew about trans people then things would be more difficult because example in America where there's like a lot more sort of I guess like trans people in the news and stuff like that, so it's necessarily like a good thing. So, I guess I guess just having more understanding that there's trans people around and sort of like and especially like for me is like someone who's disabled I guess like this will bury like a lot for other people especially because I come in like a very privileged position. Like I'm not like subjects of violence and stuff but at the same time, I got like a lot of my doctor's appointments and stuff, so like doctors or like just bad, and always have to think like should I tell them shouldn't I tell them I don't know and then I guess that would be like how old is this what's sort of divide yeah and so if I didn't have I didn't have yeah if we didn't have those sort of expectations I think that would be very helpful and also just like small things like sort of like any of these are kind of boring but sort of like forms sort of like having you know accommodation and yeah I guess that's sort of like the standard things like sort of restrooms and also yeah I guess just like I guess just if societies stopped associating various body types of genders as much by another that's something that would take like years or decades.

Siphokuhle: How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #1: I think to the people I've come out to… I think people have mostly been accepting. I think my childhood best friend sort of took it demeaningly well but then I wouldn't say he ghosted me but I'm definitely he doesn't interact with me as much as he used to, but like my friends from university and stuff like yet one was really accepting and really helpful. I think it's sort of, some doctors sort of react strangely, I think some people some people like from university for example take it well but then basically like a few months later you've realised like they ignored or forgotten everything you told them and essentially act like nothing has happened. Which I think in some ways at least for me can be sort of like I guess more complicated than an outbreak rejection just because I can't, it's difficult to tell what people think I guess if people are trying you know sort of like oh I don't like you because of this thing it's much easier to, I guess if people are sort of like just I don't know like seemingly forgetting what

you told them and just be like referring to you by old pronouns and old names etc. that could become a difficult situation. With my family, I think my mom is really accepting, which is helpful, but I'm not out to anyone else in my family which makes it difficult because then she has to use different pronouns for me, based on sort of who she speaking to.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive and accepting of transgender people?

Participant #1: I think for me, I think people, I think it's like sort of treating, I guess it's just treating trans people like humans you know, in terms of like not really being weird about it. I know that's a hard thing to do, but people are weird about it. And so like apart from, I guess I could easily say like to not to stop being a bigger turtle or stop feeling this way about people. I know that would be sort of pretty great but it's maybe more difficult in practice. I think we're lucky South Africa, has like I guess, like indigo framework protecting trans people in some ways but at the same time on like a social level and like I don't want to speak for sort of people who have experienced violence and things like that but like I know that I'm going to sort of I guess at a social level things are sort of don't pretty reflect like the legal you know like legal rights that people have, because so I'm not going to sort of say how like how you would to breach that gap. But I think definitely, oh there's one thing sorry this is such a specific thing, but I think for me if I had had trans-inclusive education in life orientation I think like I would have realized things a lot sooner and would have understood myself a lot better. Just like not like over the top, like it like sort of like make it the focus of life orientation but like just like for example like trans-inclusive education on like things like puberty and hormones… and things like that when sort of talking about sort of puberty and life orientation and stuff like that, I think that would be really helpful. I think also sort of not stigmatizing gender variance. I guess like just in general even if it's people doing it so for example, like school uniforms and sort of like the way the people like all black hair and dress codes and stuff like that.

Siphokuhle: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity (jobs, insurance, reporting a crime)?

Participant #1: I don't think so just because I'm kind of a shut-in, I don't leave the house that much. I guess it's because I'm studying and I'm not out to my supervisor yet. I don't really know if that would affect anything, I'm hoping I wouldn't, but yeah, I guess like it hasn't really affected me too much. The only way that is affected me I guess in some ways,

in some ways I guess just making sort of like on like a medical like, medical sort of perspective I guess sort of some yes some doctors can just be sort of really weird about it and it can sort of maybe change the way they you would sort of access health care and stuff.

Siphokuhle: Are there any particular moments or incidents in your life that stand out as positive or negative experiences related to your gender identity?

Participant #1: Yes, I think… I can think of a lot of moments. I think having a space online for me, especially sort of when I'm playing video games with friends and people sort of just like you know it's like the first place that I agree with people sort of referred to me using I guess like names and pronouns that like I was comfortable with. It was like in a video game space and like it's already so it's a really scary place to sort of try things out because people online are kind of crazy in like a bad way I guess, and sort of bigoted and will sort of like attack you mercilessly but at the same time it's like low stakes because like you know these are strangers on the internet, and so I've had like a lot of like affirming positive experiences online you know, speaking and making friends and having them refer to me I'm in the way that I would like and I'm most comfortable with before anyone sort of offline. I think I can think of a lot of negative experiences I can think back to when I was in honours and for example, I wasn't out and I was speaking to someone in my class and sort of we're driving back from class. I said driving because I used to use a wheelchair at Wits. I guess walking was better, I was walking, I was driving, and they were walking. They were saying to me, oh it's ridiculous that like we've got gender-neutral bathrooms when there's not enough disabled bathrooms. I was just like stuck the thinking oh my God I can't believe this is happening and she sort of went into that crazy sort of like tired about my car you know like if you have gender-neutral bathrooms it's going to increase the risk of like sexual assaults and things like that. So yeah, I guess like because I'm not out to a lot of people I hear a lot of negative things from friends and family. I've heard a lot of negative things from friends and family but make it really weird because a lot of people speak to you like you're not trans because they don't know that you're trans. That's also the case I guess online when like a lot of people, I guess assume that I'm a cis-woman and then they'll also go transphobic things because they don't realize I'm trans. So, I guess being a fly on the wall to sort of people's transphobic thoughts can be really scary, and I think just sort of... you know, like, on my own, I remember getting home from honours and just like sort of feeling really negative in myself. And I

remember times when I got out, just, and these might sound a little unhinged, but I would just sort of like sit on the floor and I guess like doodle on my legs and just like sort of like, you know, draw on my legs. I guess I don't know why I used to do that, but I just used to. It was a way to sort of cope with the frustration and I guess like the negative feelings I had towards my body and also how people perceived me.

Siphokuhle: What are some common challenges you face when it comes to legal documents, such as IDs or official records and how do they affect you?

Participant #1: I think, like for example, if I go to the doctor, and I'm in the reception area, it becomes one of those things, and I had this yesterday even, so it's like, “Oh my God,” I look at the form, and then I look at my mom, “Oh God, what should we put? Like sex, what should we put? What should we put?” Also, having an ID number that sort of correlates with digits of the sex assigned at birth, that can be so difficult because you can be walking around, but at the same time, you need to go like fill in documents, and there it is like, “Oh God,” like this is so, like, this little bomb I guess, which can wreck the whole situation. You have to think of things like for example, I'm aware that probably most people don’t sort of like know where the gender numbers are on ID. Sometimes I think like, “Oh God,” like are they going to know if… are they going to recognize that this number is over 49999 and realized that I was assigned a sex at birth. So that can be very difficult and make me procrastinate in like filling forms at university because I know I'm going to have to put like the wrong information on because you know as well I should say that like one thing I've taken to doing a lot is on forms that require a title and I am not sure whether or not I can actually put like miss on those because it doesn’t have like Mx on it and no option for none. I will unironically just pick advocates, I am just an advocates now, I guess even though I did not study law or something and this has become a thing and I do I just speak advocate so I'm just like an advocate now I guess even I have not studied law or anything like that, so those are sort of weird situations, where all of a sudden I just have to play along with it where people are just like, “Oh, you chose advocate, how did that happen, you should really read before you select the form” and I am just like “Oh, apology how did I do that” and also the idea to explain to someone at like Home Affairs is very daunting. Especially, someone who like I guess is like a little sort of like shut in and so I don't like out much and sort of like wear a mask and stuff. The prospect of having to go into Home Affairs and do all these things is

like really scary and it becomes even more scary for someone who is not very mobile I guess sort of like being very visible in that way. Then the more you delay the more you get frustrated with yourself like “Oh Gosh, I wish you just get on with it and get these forms correct”.

Siphokuhle: How does your transgender identity intersect with other aspects of your identity, such as race, religion, or ethnicity?

Participant #1: I think definitely sort of the intersection of my gender with my race is really important because, and again, I don't want to speak for other people's experiences, but I should say that it makes things, I think, a lot safer for me, I guess. Just because statistically, I know that when people speak about violence, queer people experience it is not predominantly white people. So, I think, in that way, that's probably the biggest way. But, like, my trans identity intersects with my other identities, but I think the other identity that intersects a great deal with it is my disability. Because, I think, my disability, especially being someone, that is like, that is like in a wheelchair and things like this, I think it almost sort of changes the way I am perceive things in terms of gender. I think, even before I realized I was transgender, it sort of makes you, I guess, like, it sort of makes you lack more like an androgynous in some ways, at least in my experience because you aren't perceived, I guess, in a typical masculine or feminine way. You aren't expected to sort of be strong in the same way, you are not expected to perform masculinity in the same way, I guess. And, in that way, I guess I didn't experience some of the same expectations around my assigned sex at birth. And then, consequently, I didn't realize how uncomfortable I was with those expectations until much later because I was sort of shielded from them by my disability. I think also, I'm also Jewish, and so, in some circumstances, I guess it's been a bit of a awkward, I haven’t experience this too much thankfully because I am sort of a shut in and I don’t go out much, but at like family gatherings where there is sort of like I guess it is a religious space where gender is very visible and segregated for example in Jews services in things like that way. I don’t experience this much because I am not religious and I don’t go out much where you sort of have like basically literally pick a side. And also sort of, you have to be wearing appropriately in sort of like religious clothing and things like that. I guess it does play a role.

Siphokuhle: Are there any support groups or communities that have been instrumental in providing assistance and understanding?

Participant #1: I didn't really go to any physical support groups. I think some support groups have been helpful through online resources, like South African ones that provide resources on legal documentation and stuff. That's been helpful. Knowing that there's this place to go to and at least ask these questions is very helpful. But I think, yeah, I guess online support groups or informal online support groups and like speaking to sort of like people I have met online or also trans, has been the most formative experience in terms of interacting with other people.

Siphokuhle: Have you encountered any unique obstacles in the workplace or educational place?

Participant #1: I think I have. Most of the difficulties I've faced are centred around documentation and bureaucracy. It's just knowing that, for example, some of the Wits forms are not going to have options that I can really choose. Like, you can pick an option that maybe is closest aligned with your gender, not so much Wits more just like things adjacent to Wits. So, for example, the NRF, Wits is pretty okay with certain things, although you can't change your name on your email address and things like that. But when it comes to NRF and stuff like that, then having to basically fill in an application because you haven't changed things legally with ID, having to basically swallow a bit and go, "Okay, cool, I'm gonna have to just put down something that I feel is just completely untrue and doesn't reflect who I am as a person," onto this form. And then I have to deal with the inconsistencies that arise, and it just makes things like coming up to your supervisor even more difficult, I think, because of all the bureaucracy around it. So, I think it's a really good thing that Wits has neutral options, and you can change your gender at any time and self-service that. But at the same time, yeah, it's still, I guess, like the University and jobs and things are still not removed from society in general, like all the concerns you have around society, so yeah, are present.

Siphokuhle: What would you like people to know or understand about being transgender that you feel is often overlooked or misunderstood?

Participant #1: I think one of the biggest things, at least for me, I don't think people, like apart from standard things of just like, you know, trans people are just like people as well. I think that, I think like… at least for me, there's like the popular narrative, you know? of people that like, it's almost a meme in trans places. I don't think people know that it's a

meme outside of trans places of, “oh yeah, I knew since I was a baby, and I was born in the wrong body” like that sort of thing. it's sort of like a stereotype that I think for a lot of people who realized that maybe a bit later it's like very like alienating. And the fact that, that's like the understanding for a lot of people I think is harmful. And I think also, a lot of the way people feel about trans people, the negative way they feel about trans people is a manifestation of both homophobia and also like misogyny. Just because you know towards Trans woman, you know? I cannot go inside the whole but just like, I think that a lot of the work people need to do around trans people is also work they need to do around homophobia and misogyny. I also think that understanding that there is sort of a diversity of sort of, trans experiences and not policing trans experience or deeming some trans people more valid than others and being like, “ Okay, as long as you are like this respectable, sort of trans person who perform gender in the way that I find appealing then you are okay then if you are anyone else, then you are not” as long as people don’t do that, I think that would be a positive thing.

Participant #2

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender for you?

Participant #2 So to be transgender, I actually don't know. I'm still trying to figure that out. I have been in the process of transitioning, or rather I started taking hormones, in April twenty-twenty two. So, I've been on hormones for just over a year. Um, and it's been difficult because to be transgender at the moment, predominantly most of the time, what goes through my mind is, wow, I feel like an alien. I feel like an alien and, that definition of trans, what it feels like to be transgender comes up because of some of my daily experiences. I walk in the street, and I start to notice that, hey, people are looking at me. And now wonder why are you looking at me? Because I'm passing, you see a woman who am I looking at, or are you looking at me? Because you see something that is just weird. Consequently, I had to fix my safety and it affects my safety, how safe and secure I feel in spaces and stuff like that. But then I also feel alien when I see myself in relation to other people or in relation to other women. Um, and I see someone bigger in physical structure, which is me. And then I wonder like me standing amongst these women, it will be clear that I'm the odd one out. So that is, I suppose, the answer to that question. Alien.

Siphokuhle: How did you know that you are transgender?

Participant #2: So, during like childhood, like during like my childhood and stuff like that, I would resonate much more with girls and it would be, just, it would be a much more comforting space. Like I wouldn't feel safe and secure in like, you know, masculine spaces or amongst boys, or I would with boys, but boys that are also as, I suppose, effeminate as I am. You know? that I could relate to like that. I considered myself to be like, you know, a gay male throughout my childhood up until I suppose, first year, I did my first year of varsity at twenty-seventeen. But I didn't go to varsity straight out of school. I was twenty-three when I was a first year. And I, at varsity, I got the conscientization to sort of like, you know, express, my gender identity, not just in the verbal sense, but also in the physical sense. And then I learned the term gender non-binary and, you know, cross-dressing and, you know, things like that. I became a bit more like, you know, conscientized to, you know, gender identity. And I started, you know, experimenting with, with, mask looks, where mask femme looks, where I would wear women's clothing, but I would still, this was obviously pre-transition. I would still have like a beard and stuff like that. I don't know if it would inform your research, but I can also say I don't mind sending you, like a picture or two of me in my old body. Just send me a reminder to do that after the call, just in case I forget. So, I experimented like that with cross-dressing by keeping my beard, not necessarily going into like full out, you know, femme, full out drag. But it wasn't enough. Um it wasn't enough in that I wasn't appearing in public like that. Yes, I was considered brave. Yes, I was confident to an extent, but there was something in me that still didn't feel like fulfilled. Like if this isn't, this still isn't me. And then, I can't quite remember the moment of conscientization to where I said, Hey, I'm trans. But I do, I just remember a process, undergoing process. It was in twenty-twenty one actually undergoing processes, listening a bit more. I think I'd also immerse myself into like the transgender nonprofit space. I went for a job interview and I just became a little bit more conscientized there. And then I decided, Hey, maybe it's time for me to, you know, transition. And it took a while. It really, really took a while. And then when I got access to stable job money, I then, left the state route to go just by hormones and, the money facilitated foster access to my transgender identity. And yeah, I think that was a very long answer to your question.

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #2: That is a conundrum. That is a conundrum because, you know, when you think about operation and the oppression that we face, we face oppression outside of the LGBTQIA plus community. That is like the big thing, like, you know, everyone that is not inside the community, but how do you even start fighting that without fighting the oppression that we face within our own community? Within the LGBTQIA plus community, even in that space or in those spaces or in queer spaces, transgender people are seen as alien. We don't always have allies in queer spaces. So that is the, that is the one thing that is why transgender equality is important because, I don't know. Why is it important? Well, it's important because it validates my existence publicly, like, but it also gives me the sense of belonging that I need, the sense of community that I need. I know that community can be formed in whatever spaces, but your gender identity is something so personal and something so, your whole existence depends on it. It's important. Your psychological state depends on it. And that's why it's important to belong and important to have community.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis?

Participant #2: I hate getting up in the morning, not because I don't want to go to work or whatever, but I hate getting up because of the administration that it takes in getting ready for the day. I found that hygienically, personal bodily administration from a day to day is way more intricate and complex for women than it is for men. So, I absolutely hate mornings because it means that I need to get up. I need to get ready. I need to shave. I need to do my hair. I need to do my face, you know, being a woman. Days are fine. Like I usually just immerse myself into a world behind my laptop, either with work or on social media or with personal projects or stuff like that. So, when I'm busy, I'm good. I think a lot of what I feel are heightened emotions. I feel heightened emotions, in my personal interactions with people. I think I'm, it's either I'm much more invested or I'm much more affectionate or I'm much more endearing or I'm much more compassionate, I'm much more hormonal or I'm much more, I don't know, like you know, chatting to a guy, like a guy that I like ,you know?, or guys that I like, like can really like, you know, like get like, you know, like deep, um, which is really different for me. I'm learning to navigate all of these new emotions that I'm experiencing on a daily basis. And then they, of course, also, you know, the days like today where I need to take my hormone shot again, um, my weekly hormone shot, um, where I feel, um, I feel, but dysmorphic, like I feel like very butch. Like I feel,

I mean, I have a little bit of like stubble growing, which is like freaking me out. I need to sort that out. Child, that's the first thing I'm going to do after this call. Um, uh, yeah. Um, you know? When I feel, start feeling dysmorphic, that is when, that is when depression comes, that is when anxiety comes. So, I need to take my hormone shot so that my hormones are regulated and balanced a bit. Um, yeah, that's a overarching summary of the emotions that I encounter as a transgender person.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #2: So, I started processes to become, you know? Start, gender affirming care treatment in twenty-twenty one. I went via a public route. And it was very bureaucratic. Like I needed to see a psychologist, psychiatrist. There was paperwork that I needed to get that I needed to do. There was paperwork that I needed to do. There was just so much administration. And then, so, I went back and forth through that process for about seven, eight, nine months to a point where I just gave up, you know? At the start of twenty twenty-two, I had to move back to Cape town to do my PGCE, post-grad certificate in education. And I then went to a nonprofit, the nonprofit that I went for an interview at a few years prior. And I asked him like, listen, like, I haven't been getting access to hormones through the state. How can I get access to this privately? I have access to a bit of money. Where do I get it? They referred me to a doctor, a transgender doctor. Also, in fact that I had met in twenty-twenty one, ironically. And she gave me, all I needed to do was book a consult, a doctor's appointment. Yeah. Do a doctor's appointment, um, pay for the consult. She would give me a script prescription for the hormones. She would even sell the hormones, legally, of course, um, should even sell the hormones, um, just pay for it. And that's it. The only thing she told me was before you take it, I need to have your blood work so that we have a basis for where you were when you started, you know, taking hormone therapy. So, I did that. I started my first treatment. Um, I even, I took my first shot. I even have a video up on Instagram. Yeah, but it's in my archives now, but I can briefly share it with you. I documented my process and I basically, I restarted my Instagram from scratch, and I've documented, it started with me documenting my physical, physical things, but then all of the emotional things, like the changes in the body, the PMS came and stuff like that. Um, that was very new to me. And all of these heightened emotions that I was speaking about, that was also very, very new to me. And then the breasts came, I remember waking up one day and I had the worst back pain

and I carried on throughout the day and I was like, what is happening? And then I realized that my breasts were bigger because up until that point I wasn't wearing a bra. Up until that point, I had to, yeah, my breasts had grown, and I needed back support. And so that started, you know, the going to buy the first bra, all of that, that whole era. Um, that was interesting. That was an interesting time. But then ever since it's just been, this morphine, this year in particular has been very, very difficult for me because, um, I wasn't as stable financially. I was back in Joburg. It was weird. I wasn't able to, you know, take care of myself, in the way that I could when I was in Cape Town. So, this year has been quite difficult for me as a transgender person. I've also found it extremely difficult in the dating realm. Oh, my word. Oh, dating. I find firstly, can I just put it out there that, um, I don't, at least quite nice as a transgender woman to be, to have women features and have straight men be attracted to you. Though, I have found that in most of my encounters with straight men that they have only, they've only ever wanted to be with me because they have fetished me, like they've had a fetish, a transgender fetish. Which to me is about, you know, like dehumanizing and stuff like that. So, I don't really engage in such encounters. But on the other side of the spectrum, in queer spaces or like on Tinder, if I indicate my preferences to show me like, you know, like gay guys or like LGBTQI people, show me to people who are looking for men instead of show me to people who are looking for women. So, I come up in the, in the gay circles and there I find like, I don't get any like matches. Get no matches there basically. I also, yeah, I get no matches there. It's like dead there. And I, and I think it's because, you know, gay people are not attracted to transgender people. Like, and they say it, like it's part of the reason why some of my relationships ended in the past. My romantic relationships ended where guys said," I'm sorry, I'm not interested in you. I don't date a woman". So yes, they validate you exist. Not just they validate that I'm a woman, but they don't validate. But, but that obviously it means that, uh, it closes off the dating pool. Do you get what I'm saying? So, and I don't necessarily feel that I became transgender because I wanted straight men. That was never part of the appeal. I very much would want, you know, like a queer partner who gets it, who understands it, you know, that kind of thing. So that has been like, you know, some of my, but I'm not finding that. So that has been some of my experience on the, on the dating side of being transgender. Family wise, it's been, you know, misgendering, dead naming me. My dead name is Linda*. My mother has been accepting of it. My father has been seeing my social media. I haven't been hiding anything from him. We speak openly, but just

not about my gender identity. And he, yeah, and he refers to me as, you know, my dead name and as a boy. That's my dad. Yeah, that's family life. But beyond my parents, like my siblings are chilled. My, I haven't received any opposition to my transgender identity. I've been very, very lucky in that regard. Yeah, but I do have experiences of paranoia and anxiety because of physical safety, walking in the road. You know? Engaging in spaces, going to church. I go to church, people at church know that I'm transgender and stuff like that. They're very like, you know, open about it. Also, they say, I mean, people don't even vocalize, you know, those things to your face. So, but I feel like what's also an issue is when I, I might be in front of you and appear fully as a woman, but the moment I open my mouth, it's a different case. So that is also like a, yeah. Anyway, you asked the question, what does it like to be transgender? That is the answer.

Siphokuhle: How do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #2: So," she, they", yeah.

Siphokuhle: What challenges do you face in your daily life that may be specific to your transgender identity?

Participant #2: Um, yeah, I could say a lot about, a daily thing for me is safety. Like that is something that comes up like all the time. But really like affects where I go, I rarely go anywhere at night, unless I'm in the car with someone that I know. So like, I don't get into like Uber at night and stuff like that. That obviously limits like a lot of what I need to do. It means like I need to plan my day around the fact that I ain't leaving this house once the sun sets. I think that a daily challenge that I've also encountered is, you know, like just navigating my emotions because my emotions also obviously affect the way I act. Affects the way I show up, affects the way I present myself on a particular day. And that is like physically like how I present myself, whether I decide to dress up, whether I decide to go to work looking the way I look now, that kind of thing. Navigating my emotions, like regulating my emotions to the extent where I don't look the way I feel. Yeah, that's challenges

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others would make your daily life easier?

Participant #2: Yoh. I suppose it would be just to like, you know, educate themselves, man. Like, and to, yeah, to educate, to practice the urgency, to educate themselves on issues of transgender things. And to not just come from a place of their personal beliefs but embrace for diversity.

That would help a great deal. That would really, really help a great deal. I also think what would help a great deal is like not to be like asked questions, like for them to like, yeah, not ask questions from a place of like ignorance. Like if they heard transgender, I don't know, in my life experience, or rather in my experience of living or how I go about things is if I hear, you say something that I don't fully understand, I go and like, you know, please go and read about it or just do a basic Google search on it so that I, I kind of like where you are coming from. But I'm speaking here like terminology wise. If you speak to me about critical reflexivity and I don't know what critical reflexivity is, I'm going to go look, I'm just going to go on Google and so that I can understand like, this is what you mean. If you hear that someone is transgender or if you hear that I'm transgender, like cool, like reserve comment for now. Let me just go and read up about like, you know, transgender identity and not come from a place of opinion or immediate opinion. And then we can have a conversation about it. I'm always open though. Personally, I'm always open to having discussions about my gender identity. I mean, if I had any like reservations, I wouldn't have been on the zoom call with you. Yeah, I, where was I going with this? I was saying that I'm always open to conversations about my gender identity. So, if the everyday person had a question about the transgender identity, I would expect them to not, I suppose the conversation we must have must be because of like something that they read or something like that. And not just like, so, um, Linda*, what is transgender? or like Linda*, does transgender mean that you still have your penis? You know? that kind of thing. Like I get questions like that on the outside. I'm just like, wow. Not having questions like that or rather having productive conversations around these things would really make my life easier.

Siphokuhle: How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #2: It’s been very different… in parts… At the start of it all, it was a repeat of adjustments where people had to wear my… where I needed to really lay it to my friends that listen… my body has changed… so we can’t do, or I can't do these very physical things. So, you can't send me there in the middle of the night because I'm at elevated risk. So, it's just that my friends having that consideration for the changes. My friends have just all been very supportive though, generally. So, if they haven't been supportive or if they haven't said anything about my gender identity, I don't know, they probably just respect me enough to not say anything. Yeah, that's basically been what it was. My family, I think I answered that in the previous questions. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender individuals that you often encounter?

Participant #2: I don't ever experience any like, you know, stereotypes or misconceptions. I do actually, I do think that the fact that I'm disclaiming that I'm transgender, particularly on job applications is, I feel like it's possibly hindering my success rate for job applications. Not to be pompous or anything, but I haven't like had this much difficulty finding a job before because I'm well-rounded, in that, in the career sense, at least. Yeah. So, I think that my transgender identity has something to do with that. I don't know. That's also just a hypothesis.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive and accepting of transgender people?

Participant: I think that, I actually don't know the answer to that question. I think that for me, personally, I've just always valued, you know, being in a society where if I come out at restaurants, people are just like, “hi, cool”. My personal experience has always been that from coming out, it's been fine. So, I don't have a sense of like what it is to not be included. I'm generally accepted in spaces where I enter, I don't have a, like an experience. I haven't experienced. Yeah, I haven't experienced anything for me to want to envision what inclusion is like. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity (jobs, insurance, reporting a crime)?

Participant #2: Yes, I have. I feel like yes, jobs, jobs is definitely a big thing. I am also generally a bit scared of entering public sector spaces, clinics, stuff like that. It's gonna be difficult. I had one experience at Woollies, when I was using my store card, my account, and the lady was like, I can't let you, sorry, I can't do the transaction because you're a woman and the ID says you're a man. So, I had to explain, which was a bit funny. Um, yeah, I didn't want to do that in Woollies. So, that is one thing that I experienced. I think that I'm very scared of like, you know, having the process of like having my name like legally changed. I'm very scared to do that because that means that I have to go to home affairs and probably face an official that is going to be so degrading, right to my mental health. So yeah, it holds me back from the process. It's the same with SACE registration and registering because I'm a qualified teacher and, SACE registration and, and getting my SACE registration so that I can actually, you know, get a job as a teacher at a school. Yeah, it's holding me back.

Siphokuhle: Are there any particular moments or incidents in your life that stand out as positive or negative experiences related to your gender identity?

Participant #2: No, other than, you know, the fact that I never felt, I didn't feel, I think it's that thing of I didn't feel comfortable with boys, around boys. And that would always be highlighted. Like I would always need to mask up around my father, especially younger and stuff like that. And I just was never that person. So, there's that. I felt like, you know, for a lot of my life, I needed to act up, act out to societal expectations of, of what a boy is supposed to be like. And I just failed miserably at it. And as a result, I just went through. And that's when I started, you know, just like doing like a lot of like alone things. I think I've always been like, you know, a person that's just like on my own doing whatever I want, existing in my own dream world. It was also just a very, very big protection from the reality of what is happening outside. So, yeah.

Siphokuhle: What are some common challenges you face when it comes to legal documents, such as IDs or official records and how do they affect you?

Participant #2: I have been delaying getting my ID or rather just undergoing the whole. I've been withholding getting my name changed at home affairs. I have, it's been a delay in getting my registration and stuff like that. It's just been very, very difficult. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: How does your transgender identity intersect with other aspects of your identity, such as race, religion, or ethnicity?

Participant #2: In terms of race, I haven't seen like, you know, any like intersection there. Maybe I suppose, maybe as, you know, in the dating sense, like I found like, I've experienced like a pattern with men on dating app, on Tinder specifically. With black men on Tinder, straight black men on Tinder, who I have found that, you know, it's been consistent, like where they have told me like that they are into coloured women. So, I've experienced that. In terms of religion, it's heightened my religion. I mean, I've gone to church. My church, the church I attend has always been very like, embracing of gender identity and gender expression. So, it's been, it's been okay. It's been okay like church wise. And also, I've had heightened experiences of faith since I've been a transgender woman, not necessarily because of the fact that I'm transgender, but it's like, you know, faith and spirituality has never left me. Ethnicity wise, I can't really comment there. I'm quite disconnected from my family generally, like only like speak to them

when I need to. So, any like, you know, connection as to like, you know, culture, you know, culturally, like family wise traditions, I just like, I feel my own… very much a family of one, if I can say it that way.

Siphokuhle: Are there any support groups or communities that have been instrumental in providing assistance and understanding?

Participant #2: In terms of my transgender identity, no, not really. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: What would you like people to know or understand about being transgender that you feel is often overlooked or misunderstood?

Participant #2: I would say that, you know, when we experience, when we say that we are transgender, like, we are not weird. We are not crazy. We are just, it's very valid in how we feel like we, the parts that we were born with, there is a incongruence with how we feel. And that is fine. You have your certain beliefs and that is fine. We are on earth not to dominate each other's beliefs. Not here to convince you that, you know, that I have a place in this world. I have a place in this world by virtue of the fact that I'm here. I feel like, there's like diversity, and I feel like diversity should just be embraced. Like for people to not comment on who a particular person is or what their gender identity is or to comment on whether their lifestyle is wrong. Like, I just feel like we shouldn't be doing that to each other. Yeah.

Participant #3

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender for you?

Participant #3: So, what does it mean to be transgender to me? It's a simple thing now: not identifying with the gender that was assigned to me and pushed onto me throughout my childhood. Yeah, that's the basic of it.

Siphokuhle: How did you know that you are transgender?

Participant #3: When I was around 13 or 14, about the time when people my age started to insist they were like young men, I realized that didn't feel right for me. At first, I thought maybe I was just too young, not feeling like I wanted the responsibility, whatever. Then, by the time I was around 17 or 18, that's when I had friends who were trying to give me assurance, and they kind of thought, 'If at this age, I'm basically a legal adult, and I still don't feel comfortable calling myself a man, there must be something up.' Yeah, that's basically how I felt. How important is transgender equality to you?

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #3: You know, from a political standpoint, I align with Connell, and social equality among various different groups is always important. From a personal perspective, there are numerous challenges that make life difficult, whether legally, socially, or medically. It's like a constant stress. Yeah, it would just make my life, and the lives of people I know, so much easier if there was more equality in that regard.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis?

Participant #3: Why do I feel quite fluctuating sometimes? I feel very, very happy, very joyous, very firm in my gender, feeling like I am living the way I'm supposed to. I mean, sometimes something will happen, someone will misgender me, or I'll have to dress differently because I'm going to a space with my family or around anything, and my mood drops immediately. I feel like I have to close myself off, put on a mask, and it doesn't just make me feel unseen as much as it makes me feel like I'm being seen wrongly. It's very vulnerable to me.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #3: Sure, so yeah, when I was about 17, I also had to figure it out. I was uncertain; I didn't use that time for myself because I didn't feel like I had a chance, you know? I knew I wasn't definitively male, and I was pretty sure I wasn't a woman either. I didn't really know what I was, so I didn't identify with any particular label. Over the years, that's been changing, and especially in the past 12 months or so, I've been much more happily exploring and since then, I've come to terms with my gender. In terms of legal or medical journeys, not much has happened there because I haven't come out to my parents and still depend on them. There's only so much I can do without coming out to them, and I'm not in the space to do that, you know? My journey, especially recently, has been a lot about allowing myself to do things that I often wanted to do but didn't think I could or could do in a way that would feel comfortable. Like trying to wear my hair in an interesting style. I always enjoyed seeing people wear their hair in various ways, but I never thought I could pull it off or look good doing it. Then, one day, I was with a friend, and they encouraged me to give it a shot, and I actually liked it. That's a lot of what's been happening again and again with how I hold my posture, how I talk to people, what I wear, and how I present myself. You know, all these things I kept thinking, 'Oh, I have the impression that I can't do it in a

way that is satisfactory,' and then I'm pushed a little bit, I try it, and it works. The shape that my journey has taken lately.

Siphokuhle: How do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #3: I use she and they as my pronouns. I don't know if it's going to change; it might stay the same. In other words, I don't feel comfortable with the word woman. I'm uncertain about other terms, but lady pronouns don't feel right. The only words I know I'm quite comfortable with in terms of gender are Trans, genderqueer, non-binary, and transfeminine. Yeah, that's about it.

Siphokuhle: What challenges do you face in your daily life that may be specific to your transgender identity?

Participant #3: There are a lot of occasions where, I don't feel comfortable going to a particular space or talking to people or presenting… you know where it's like authentic because I know that… Either people are going to read me as a man; which is not going to be comfortable… Or they're going to read me as Trans, and they're not going to be very supportive of that… So yeah, it's like… there's always a sort of… before going into any social situation or doing any social situations there is like a constant calculation of asking about am I safe to seem like myself or if I'm already… if I am already presenting more feminine am I still safe? Do I have to get out of here? Then in a way… something that has been quite scary a couple of times is like… I've been driving and let's say I just come from a date or just come from seeing my friends, but I am dressed quite femininely, I have makeup. My Driver's license shows a picture of me looking masculine, it has… it has the word male on it. And I'm always worried if I get pulled over and the cops wants to check my license when they see that on their perspective there is a disjuncture you know… like you don't know what's going to happen then. There is quite a common worried when I'm on the road.

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others would make your daily life easier?

Participant #3: The main thing is being aware that you can't assume you know someone's gender just by looking at them. When people tell you who they are and what they prefer in terms of pronouns, etc., they know themselves better than you do, and you want to respect whatever they say, even if it doesn't match your impression of them. And on top of that, people understand their gender circumstances better than anyone else would. For example, if I tell someone I can't go out

because I'm going home and I'm not comfortable with my parents, it doesn't matter what they think about how passable or feminine I look. There needs to be an understanding that I know my situation, and I need to do this. I don't need comments like, 'How do they not know already? It's so obvious,' or anything like that. It makes me afraid that they do actually know, and that I'm in danger of being kicked out or something. So, in both situations, people understand their gender and situation better than you do. That's the main thing, and support should be built from that.

Siphokuhle; How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #3: With my friends, my relationships have stayed mostly the same. With some people, like classmates, who I've spoken to sometimes it's gotten worse because they're not very supportive, and so hanging around them, it makes me feel awful. But most of my friends have been very affirming, very good to me. Actually, it has improved my relationship with a lot of things just because you know, it takes a lot of vulnerability to come out to someone, and it takes a lot of, it shows a lot of strength to take that in your stride when your friend comes out, it just strengthen the relationship. With my family. I'm not out to most of them, and it always makes my relationship with my parents more strained because I'm constantly hiding from them, you know? I have most of my girl’s clothes and my makeup hidden away in my room. I change the way I dress before I go home. they use different word with myself. My siblings, who I am not out to, use different words with me. It's always this feeling of like I'm not telling everything. I know that they might be able to pick up on that. I don't know. There's a bit of strain there, yeah, okay.

Siphokuhle: Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender individuals that you often encounter?

Participant #3: Yeah, encountering from 6 people, people on trans. There is very much this narrative of trans feminine that basically grew up as boys who were really into cross-dressing, and if you just decide to take it a step further, there's people being like overtly sexual or overly invested in appearance and a number of people's bodies, and like quite shallow in terms of, just, I mean, we shall all very harmful stereotypes to me. And there's a little bit, not so much, but there's a little bit reproduced even within the trans community as well. And there are some, you know, there are some people who sort of buy into the notion that as trans women, we are inherently more sexual or inherently more invested in fashion and accessorizing and like

making ourselves extravagant. And that can become very uncomfortable if you're talking to someone and they're speaking with that assumption in mind when like, I'm not invested in those things, actually. It seems I am, but now I get quite upset when people do assume it. you know, yeah.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive and accepting of transgender people?

Participant #3: There's a lot, I think. Big one: it ties into general equality, just people sort of abandoning the ideas of what makes men and women different. You know, everything from ideas like men are stronger or more logical to things about women being more in tune with emotions. All those ideas of what, makes genders, different from each other. It's key to trans people as well. You think also just little things, like I said, like not assuming you know what someone's gender is just because you've seen them. Aiming to use gender-neutral language wherever possible, especially, especially, especially if you know. I could, there's been a recent push for textbooks to… instead using for instance "he" in their math questions or whatever, they use "he or she," and that's cool. There's also a lot of people who don't use "he" or "she" pronouns. It's freaking easy to say “they” but people have this very negative reaction against it, that kind of thing. You make a lot of trans people, myself included, feel very unsafe, I think, and undoing gendered assumptions and just subconsciously aiming for gender-neutral language is the big one.

Siphokuhle: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity (jobs, insurance, reporting a crime)?

Participant #3: Not really… no, other than, what I mentioned like not really being a bit afraid to interact with police if what I am presenting isn’t matching like my ID. Other than, no… I haven’t really.

Siphokuhle: Are there any particular moments or incidents in your life that stand out as positive or negative experiences related to your gender identity?

Participant #3: Yep, in terms of positive ones, like when I came out to a friend of mine, they offered to basically go through their wardrobe and look for anything that would look good on me. Basically, I didn't sprinkle in any places, all kind, and yet it was basically an afternoon of me trying on clothes I'd never tried before, feeling very affirmed the entire time, which was really exciting. Yeah, that was quite early on in my transition, so this was very impactful to me, you know? In terms of, like, a naked experience that is every day, every week is like lots of

little negative experiences, but in terms of big ones, there is my one tutor, for course I was taking, knew that I was trans and knew that I was trying on different names every day because I wanted to figure out what name suited me. And despite that, she insisted on... she was giving an example, she's using people's names examples to discuss one of the authors we're reading, and she used, using an example a lot, but only ever using my dead name and my old pronouns. And just... and just, I found, like, for a span of half an hour I was misgendered, probably a thousand times, and it felt really awful in part because it felt so targeted. And yeah, it didn't just feel like she didn't know and it was, you know, a happy accident, yeah, except that was a quite distressing time.

Siphokuhle: What are some common challenges you face when it comes to legal documents, such as IDs or official records and how do they affect you?

Participant #3: So, because I haven't personally gone through as much legal change myself, it hasn't affected me directly. But I know from my friends' lives how helpful it is to have someone stand by their side while they try to do things. One of the big ones is just there's so many steps, and each step takes so long, from changing the legal gender to changing the name. I know someone who, because the old ID was basically outdated and not appropriate, the new ID had come through the process, yet they had no ID for nearly a whole year. And when you think of all the things that you need an ID for, everything from getting a job to simply learning to travel at all, it's so many things. It really, it was really, really difficult for them, and that kind of thing happens a lot just because there's so much bureaucracy tied into it. So stressful all the time.

Siphokuhle: How does your transgender identity intersect with other aspects of your identity, such as race, religion, or ethnicity?

Participant #3: So, I am Jewish and in South African Jewish culture, it's not very accepted to talk about trans issues. It's quite conservative, quite a sort of old-fashioned culture, if you like. So, I feel quite conflicted because while I'm not very religious, I do appreciate and love my cultural practices. Jewish theology, even if not Jewish culture, actually leaves some space for transgender people in the discussions of holy texts. So, it puts me in this weird position where even though I'm not very religious, I'm still brought up with these quite obscure religious texts that discuss why my faith is not in contradiction with my identity. There's a lot of complicated emotions in there. You think, first of all, in South Africa, there's a bit of a

perception that being queer in general is a bit more of a white thing, yeah, for various reasons. And in the queer spaces I go to, I'm very conscious of the fact that there is a much higher proportion of white people than the country's average. And a few times, I've felt a bit uncomfortable, questioning whether this is a cultural thing or whether I and other people are making this feel unsafe or uncomfortable for people, especially black people. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: Have you encountered any unique obstacles in the workplace or educational place? How have you dealt with them?

Participant #3: I think a big challenge for me has been grappling with the fact that all my assignments, all my exams, everything should have my legal name, which is my dead name, right? I don't want to use it. I hope to change my name in the middle of my degree, but I wonder about the possibility of professors or examiners understanding the difficulties there. I'm also worried that, especially if I take a gap in the middle of my degree, it will make it very difficult to actually have those marks reflected. But if I get things legally changed after my degree, then I have to go back and ask them to reprint all of my certificates with my new name, and that's also a huge hassle. And that's the sort of thing that I stress about a lot because, well, I don't like writing my dead name. I don't enjoy it, and like reading it can be quite painful. But I have to put these things, and I can't write my new name, even if I had one, because the legal process is always stressful. On a more day-to-day basis, pretty much all spaces, both educational and business-related have gendered bathrooms and sometimes other gendered spaces, and it can be quite difficult to tell where I'm supposed to go. If I am dressed masculinely or if I haven't changed then okay cool, I go the man's room… it's fine I don't enjoy it, but I am used to it. But If I'm dressed very femininely, I think I'm looking feminine, I will sometimes go to the women's room. Often, I'll just go to the men's room because I'd rather be read as a woman in the men's room, and if something happens, I can just be like, "Oh, sorry, I was in the wrong place." than being read as a man in the women's room because the I will be read as predatory which feels so much worse. And that's a horrible decision to have to make every day. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: Are there any support groups or communities that have been instrumental in providing assistance and understanding?

Participant #3: Support groups, no, but communities definitely. I've joined this one group where we mostly just hang out and make puzzles and stuff. It's very relaxed and informal. Most people there are trans, and it's been such an important part of my weekly routine just to go into that space

and know that I'll be accepted for my identity and pronouns. There's not going to be any issue. It's absolutely instrumental to me.

Siphokuhle: What would you like people to know or understand about being transgender that you feel is often overlooked or misunderstood?

Participant #3: Well, I think probably one of the biggest issues is that transgender people are really diverse, you know? We don't follow a single story or a single trajectory. About how we change or don't change. The thing that unites us is that we're not the gender that people told us we were when we were children, but beyond that fact, we have so many differences among us. And I think that's often overlooked in favour of basically one or two almost caricatures that are imposed on us. Yeah.

Participant #4

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender to you?

Participant #4: It means to have a different gender than the one you were born with, I Suppose.

Siphokuhle: How did you know that you are transgender?

Participant #4: My whole life I felt different. I knew something was… I thought something was wrong with me, and I had never heard the word trans before… Until… you know… I was twenty-one when I heard the word transgender for the first time before that, I felt like I was different, but I couldn't articulate why… I thought maybe I'm lesbian but it didn't feel right because you know, I just had this clear feeling without it being cut-and-dry like being into girls because I felt like I was into guys more… in a fair way. I mean when you're like nineteen You can't really explain that feeling if you don't have the right vocabulary, which I didn't… and then I remember sitting in a tut room at Wits and just watching YouTube videos and this YouTube video about transness came up and the floor just like fell out from under me. This is a thing!!! like other people have this feeling like to hear someone else explain what I was going through was life-changing, but it didn't like… it took me another 6 years for me to really do anything about it or come to terms with it because it's a Mindfuck man. But I don't think I answered your question like how do I know I am Trans? I feel like Trans kids will always have a similar kind of upbringing way from early ages in exhibiting the wrong behaviour you know like… I had short hair as a kid and I only ever wear boy's clothes so luckily my parents didn't try

and dress me any way, they were just like… whatever do your thing and you know I was playing with action figures and cars instead of barbies I was kicked out of ladies bathrooms because everyone thought I was boy I used to tell people I'm a boy and then I wasn't. I would ask my parents why I don't have a dick, like a pre-teen… just being like as a kid being like… something's missing. I remember trying to pee standing up and being so crushed when it didn't work. You know, one of those kinds of when you look back at it, it makes so much sense but at the time it's… I don't know, you are just confused.

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #4: Ethan Jenner and the states have just fucked it up for all of us. Like… I think trans people account for less than one percent of queer people, more like there is more red head people than they are trans people you know like… We account for such a small percent of the population and yet somehow America has managed to convince everyone that it's a pandemic, of like parents wanting to chop-off their children's genitals or whatever. This is honestly not the case. I feel like trans equality is so important because there's so much misinformation out there. It'd be great if you know everyone could get decent facts, you know. There was a study done where it showed that less than point one percent of trans people de-transitioned. Of that percentage, ninety-nine percent of them had only de-transitioned because of their social situation. So, they were outcasts from their families and thought that if they just went back, their families would take them back. If you read anything online about transgenderism everybody argues that "no, but I know a transperson that de-transitioned because they were so unhappy". I'm telling you now that it's not a reflection of what's actually going on, so I definitely feel like equality is important and miss information isn't. The thing people think of when people think of trans people, You know when people think of transpeople they think of child abusing drag queens or mentally ill teenagers. I don't know, it's not that at all.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis?

Participant #4: Well, I'm an engineer. I work in a manufacturing environment with a lot of factory men, which means the kind of environment that I'm in for most of my day is very intolerant to any sort of queerness… Like if you are queer you try at best to hide it, you know… which is fine, but it does mean that I internalize a lot of that homophobia. To give you an example a lot of the guys I work with don't even know that Trans is a thing, like if you don't have access to pretty much… it's not

that you have misinformation about transness, it doesn't even cross your field of reference, like me before the age of twenty-one, I had no idea that trans is a thing and that's where these guys are. Because that's my normal and that's kind of where I come from, I internalize that a lot. It means that there's a full-time transphobe that lives in my head and tells me what I'm experiencing isn't real that I am just mentally ill, that I'm just making this shit up, which you know… You got to fight it and there is like a lot of internal conflict for me every day. I am trying to convince myself that this is real. You know that just sounds crazy, but you know because it is real and as soon as I'm out of that work environment, and I'm like "what am I even thinking about?". Of course it is real, this is what makes me happy. Why am I even question it? but then as soon as you get into that environment and People ask you questions that makes you doubt yourself like you know it's shit.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #4: As I said, I found out about what it is at the age of somewhere around Twenty-one. I kind of buried it really deep, I suppressed it. I had really long hair, I wore girls clothes, I was in his straight relationship. I don't know, I wasn't girly but like I would paint my nails, and just try really hard to not listen to the voice that was telling me all of this was wrong. It really fucked up my mental health a lot, I was really unhappy. My relationships were disasters because I wasn't being myself, I was trying to play a role that wasn't real; I got severely depressed. I got to a point where last year I was living in Cape town and it got to a point where I was like I have to confront this or I'm going to kill myself because I can't live like this. So, I like stored up all my pills and I knew how many to take for it to end it all, I sat there, and it was like I have to make the decision right now about what I'm going to do; and then I was like "well, fuck it" I've relatively got nothing left to lose. So, I'm just going to come out and I just came out. I told the people in my immediate kind of vicinity, at the time that was my boyfriend, my parents, my sister, and my two best friends. My boyfriend dumped me and kicked me out. My one best friend also dumped me and wasn't cool with it. My parents were super supportive, my family has been super supportive. I mean, it took them a while to come around like they still struggle a little bit. But, you know, they didn't cast me out, they were just like cool. That was last year. Then, I came up to Joburg to visit And I met up with a bunch of other transpeople who were all much older than me and old transfem, but this is my first time being around transpeople in real life and I found something that

clicked for me. I was just like this is actually ok!!! it's not as extreme or as Wild or as crazy as it is when you're alone you know. To see transpeople just kind of existing, in their authentic selves just gave me a lot of comfort and it gave me the courage to just start transitioning. I booked an appointment with an endo, I started T, and yeah I have been on T for like seven and half months now.

Siphokuhle: How do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #4: Like He, them. Male.

Siphokuhle: What challenges do you face in your daily life that may be specific to your transgender identity?

Participant #4: A lot, because most people don't know what it is. So, if you appear gender ambiguous which is what I appear at the moment because I'm still like early in my transition; people do a lot of staring, a lot of double takes some people just try to ask you what you are, which is uncomfortable to everyone I mean unless you want to be androgynous or like gender fluid or gender ambiguous or whatever; I don't, I'm nonbinary. I'm not trying to be anything but male, so you know… just kind of any sort of public… and I'm a very social and outgoing person so it's really shit like any kind of public interaction is like a thing you have to segregate, you have to like to disclaim by your own life to complete strangers, and it's just kind of suck honestly. If you are away with a bunch of strangers like at an event in a crowd in the mall everyone kind of has the sense of belonging in like a social group like you know humans are social pack animals and everyone kind of knows where they fit, knows the roles they're supposed to perform, you know kind of… it's a great source of comfort as people to have that. If you're trans you are excluded from that, and it's really destabilizing and you kind of live on the fringes of society. If you pass it's okay but if anybody knows you are trans, you get this back. It's the first thing they see about you. You know, I'll never just be Bob**that dude. For a large amount of my life, I will be Bob**that trans guy and I fucking hate that. I don't like being trans, I would never no one wants to be trans, I'm not proud of it, I don't like, it it's embarrassing. Nobody needs to know anything about my gender possibly it's like broadcasting what your genitals are. What I mean it's like I'm a dude, but I have a vagina everyone, that is humiliating; and everyone is uncomfortable around that, and you know before I knew what trans was I wasn't comfortable around that I think that in my first year we had a trans woman but I didn't know that that's what they were. Like to me I just saw someone who wasn't quite passing,

and I judged the fuck out of them, like everybody did. Only to find that I, myself, am trans and I look back to my behaviour then, and I'm like “the fuck is wrong with you?” but at the same time, that is kind of what society reaction to trans people is; because it is uncomfortable. So, you know a lot of that is internalized transphobia but that is the nature of… and it is not even like a limited access to education thing or like a third world thing, it is a everyone thing, it is a people thing. Sort of “yeah, that's the sucks”.

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others which make your life easier?

Participant #4: I feel like there are only two types of people that know or care about trans people. And those are people who know a trans person excluding trans people themselves and are now learning about transness and people that are worried about this global pandemic about transness. I feel like the rest of the population doesn't give a second thought to it because It's not something that you kinda come accross. It's like having a niche interest in a type of bird like no one gives a fuck except for people that do. I'm not even sure if increased visibility will resolve the issue or education is key. What matters to me is not changing the world's mind about what it means to be transgender, as there aren't enough of us. There is way more intersect people than they are trans people. None talks about intersex people. The world is only just coming around about gayness and then not even. So, adding laws into employment equity actions, adding classes at high school or whatever. I am sure those will help but me in my personal capacity about going through the day, I don’t think I can answer that at a Global level.

Siphokuhle: How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #4: As I said. My family has been a very supportive. In the beginning they kinda denied it. They were Like, are you sure? Which, so someone told me once, they were like” How long did it take you to come to terms with yourself? How long did it take you to come out to yourself?” and my answer is twenty-seven years. And they said it took you so long to come to terms with that. How can you expect those around you to come to terms with it overnight, you know? You're not just transitioning; you're grabbing your family and your friends and you're pulling them along with your transition with you. And also, you've got to give them the patience to adjust. And you know, that really struck a chord with me because before, you know, I'd get irritated when my parents would misgender me or whatever.

And it's like, but you know, I would do the same, because this, you know, if you asked me to start calling my dad, mom, and my mom, dad after twenty-seven years after knowing them I will fuck it up every time, you know, I can't get it right instantly. So, and there's definitely trans people that take it extremely personally and get really upset about it, but I'm not one of them. But you can mess it up a hundred times. It's your reaction after you messed it up that matters to me. If you're like, "Oh, sorry," then I've learned, or if you correct yourself, then your heart is in the right place. My family, you know, it's taken time, but they're willing to move with me. You know, they love me enough that they recognize I haven't changed. I'm still the same idiot that they know, if anything, I'm getting better. Friends, some of them try too, some couldn't give a crap, found this too much admin, too much work, and they just peace out. But yeah, it's always amazing how little people care, you know? Not nobody, really. If people know you enough and care about you enough, they're just like, "Cool story, bro. Are we still getting drinks on Saturday?" And all right.

Siphokuhle: Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender individuals that you often encounter?

Participant #4: Yeah, I mentioned a few earlier, you know, those basic ones. But also, I feel like people don't quite understand the difference between sexuality and gender identity, so that gets confused a lot. For instance, during a conversation at my local café, I was wearing a trans flag in like a cap and this gay dude comes up to me and asks, "What does flag mean?" I say, "It's a trans flag, I am trans man." He's like, "Oh, so you're a lesbian?" I was like, "No, I'm a trans man. I'm a man." And he was like, "Oh, so you're a lesbian with extra steps." I was like, "Not even into girls, not lesbian at all". And this is someone pride who is gay; he's still just confused. It's a lot, and again, if you're not exposed to it, why would you know? The other day, I had a bunch of friends over who are also transgender, and then another day they came to my house and gave me a presentation on non-binary because I didn't get it. I'm trans, and I don't understand non-binary, they had an intervention for me. So, like, I get it, misconceptions everywhere. I have misconceptions about what other people experience as our journeys are different. Well, different. Some people are kind of happy to be in the middle. My trans journey has been very binary. Like, I'm not interested in being in the middle. I went from female pronouns to male, but that's how it is. But other people like that. So, because there's so much nuance, it's really impossible to understand someone's gender. You'll have all misconceptions unless you ask them. Think about it; what is your

gender? Which we're not there yet as a society. So that's just how it is. But yeah, basically every misconception you can think of, and some old approaches. The other day, someone was like, "So you're trans and everything. Can I ask you some questions, and you promise you won't get offended?" And I was like, "Sure." He asked, “What if I just decided to be a woman tomorrow so I could use women's bathrooms and spy on women” I am like, “Cool, you are a creep” and He was like,” What if I just decided to be a woman tomorrow so I could compete in women's sports so that I could win.” I was like, “Cool, I am gonna leave now”.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive and accepting of transgender people?

Participant #4: I think I could say just cared less, just care less what I am doing is what I am doing. You don't go to a job interview and someone's like, 'So, are you gay?”. So, why would you have to disclose that you are trans in a job interview? If I say there, please address me as Bod, even though my ID says something else. If people just cared less, if there wasn't such a stigma thanks to Ethan Jener and the whole transphobia thing that’s happening in the states, I think that people would care say and they would just like, 'Okay, cool, you're just doing a weird thing. I don't even actually want to know, just whatever.' And then in like three years when I have a beard, everyone will stop asking questions and not care at all. So, you know, while you're in this weird phase, where you, you don't quite look like your old gender but not quite in the new one yet, in this uncanny valley in between, that's when people suddenly really care. And if they didn't, that'd be great, you know what I mean? Yeah.

Participant: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity (jobs, insurance, reporting a crime)?

Participant #4: Yes, so my current job. I'm actually unemployed and applied for this… so for some background my boss was a family friend that's how I got a job, and I started working there. I applied for two weeks unpaid leave to go and get top surgery and I said to him I'll work from when I'm gone because I know two weeks is a lot, we are very busy at the moment, so I was basically offering to work for him for free for two weeks to let me go to my top surgery. The problem is my sick note, the doctor’s letter, the letter head said Plastic and reconstructive surgeon because that's who the Doctor is right that's who does top surgeon, I am not getting plastic surgery, but she is a plastic surgeon. So my boss calls me into a meeting with these HR guy and they like you know can't give you two weeks leave for plastic

surgery and then they turn it into this whole thing where they like it's not God's plans for you the media has just misled you you're just really confused you know a woman will always be a woman and the HR I was offering to share some YouTube videos with me about what it means to be a woman. It was bizarre. To be clear as my boss I'm not asking you for permission for me to go to the top surgery I am asking you for unpaid leave can we just stay focused about what this is actually about. Yeah, also, you're lucky you're a family friend because I would take your asses to court, but I didn't. But I did resign; I'm gonna go get my top surgery anyway so!. Yeah, I resigned, and then we're no longer family friends, but now I'm in the process of looking for new jobs, a bunch of interviews, stuff. But because my home affairs stuff hasn't gone through yet, I haven't been able to change my ID, my birth certificate, my university certificate, my fucking driver's license, and you know, when you're applying for jobs, you have to submit all that shit. So, I can't be in a position where I don't match my credit, so that means I have to go through what I should again. I will have to apply for a job as my dead name and then, like, 4 months down the line, be like, "Surprise, everyone, call me Bob*," and they're gonna either be like, "We don't know," well, they're going to, I don't even know what the situation, you know? I'm just going to go through the same shit over and over again. So, that's from the work side, I forgot the rest of the examples you asked for…

Siphokuhle: Are there any particular moments or incidents in your life that stand out as positive or negative experiences related to your gender identity?

Participant #4: Moments... I mean every time I get gendered correctly like by a stranger, like if I get called "sir or whatever," that's a positive, like, it feels good. Even though I do look fifteen. Negative ones, I mean, like, yeah, there's a lot, but I can't dwell on them because it will drive me insane, like I really, really gaslight myself, just kind of forcing myself to ignore bad interactions if you know what I mean. Like that job one being... just a recent example but you know all these small ones add up, all of your, all of interpersonal things like, you know, my boyfriend dumping me, kicking me out, all of that shit, like, you know that hurts, it really hurts. I can't let that override my experience; you know? I still gotta live a normal life. So, you know, some days, yeah, some days it can overwhelm you, and you'll be like, what is the point? I am never gonna be a cis, why even bother with all of these heartaches? And on other days, what is the alternative? I can't just kinda go back, I just need to keep on going, you know.

Siphokuhle: What are some common challenges you face when it comes to legal documents, such as IDs or official records and how do they affect you?

Participant #4: So, the Department of Home Affairs is a challenge. You have to bring with you two doctors' letters stating that you are in fact trans, which have to be from registered practitioners. So, that means you have to pay for two consultations just to get a letter confirm that you're trans. If you're broke as fuck, it's a problem. I don't know how much a doctor's consultation costs nowadays, like R700 each, just for that stupid little thing. And when you go to Home Affairs, they can deny your letters based on bullshit. I got denied the first time, had to go back. Nobody sees you standing there in long-ass lines. Then, You get to the front and you meet someone who does not want to know the problem. Then, some have some special trans person that deals with trans cases. If you don't get that person, then it's just hell, like it's uncomfortable, it's embarrassing again. Then, it takes approximately six months for the documents to come through, so for six months, you're in limbo, or a year. You can't change anything in your life. For example, if my driver's license is expiring but my gender marker hasn't come through, I can't renew my driver's license. So, now you're left in this weird place in between. And then for some people, like I have a friend, she's trans fem, and she has been waiting for her documents for a year and six months now. Like, it just went into Home Affairs and got stuck, and no one can find it. She has a representative who keeps going there to meet with their legal team to try to figure out what's happened to these things, and it's just lost in the system. So, you know, I'm waiting for mine. I went in, I think march. Yeah, I tried to follow up yesterday and I was on hold for thirty minutes, and then the call just got cut. So, I don't know. I'll try again today, just want to know, maybe just kind of see what's happening. But yeah, it's just kind of wait for your stuff. And then after you've gotten your ID number, your gender marker, your passport, it's a significant change. Then you start the real hassle of updating all your certificates, going to all your universities, all your schools, updating your driver's license, your banking details, your tax number, your medical aid, all insurances, it just a shitshow of admin all the time, passport, everything is linked to your ID number, which changes because of the gender marker.

Siphokuhle: How does your transgender identity intersect with other aspects of your identity, such as race, religion, or ethnicity?

Participant #4: I went to a Catholic all-girl school. I, myself, was not really religious. My parents kind of gave up on the religion too, so I am not too concerned with what God thinks of me, and If He doesn't like that I'm transgender, then He shouldn't have made me this way. No, I am just kidding. I don't think there is a God anyway. If necessity, kind of a weird one it's like, in the societal ladder, I have major advantages of being white but being transgender just put you at the bottom; and then presenting as male put you higher. If you really want to have a really lack life, be a trans black woman, life is just hard. Yeah, I do think about this a lot, just how hierarchical our society is and if you're trans you just have to juggle it, just spice it up.

Siphokuhle: Are there any support groups or communities that have been instrumental in providing assistance and understanding?

Participant #4: Oh yeah, QueerFight club. Just being around other trans people, it's the most affirming thing because, you know, if you're left alone by yourself, you can start to criticize yourself very critically and then become to think you are crazy, you follow me? And then you're around people who are going through a similar thing, and they just understand without you having to explain anything. It's just a mutual understanding, which is, you know, everybody talks about how diversity in schools and workplaces is important, and how, you know, you got... though, like, on school poster, like whenever they're always show the perfectly racial group of friends. And I'm just like, in real spaces, that is not the case because if you're like a minority race, you're gonna find people to stick with. You know,it's a thing about safety, you know? You gotta... you gotta be around people that understand your struggle. Then, I feel like that translates to being around other trans people. I don't have to explain to you why this is hard, you understand.

Siphokuhle: Have you encountered any unique obstacles in the workplace or educational place? How have you dealt with them?

Participant #4: I mean, like I answered it. Just resigned from a job in a weird place, now looking for work and not telling people I'm trans. Only bringing it up later. I've no idea how that's going to go, especially since the industry I am in is so backward. Like, people who came out during covid did the best thing, you know? They just disappeared for a few months, then came back already through a lot of the transition weirdness. But to be employed during this transition stage just makes

it awkward for everyone. Like, you know, since I started working there my voice is deep, my face is changing, my body's changing. I have no tits anymore. Like, you don't have to know to know that something's happening with me. You know, most people won't directly ask, but some will. And what do you even answer? And like, most of the guys I work with just assume I'm lesbian. And like, I'm never going to correct them. But it's also like this whole front I am putting on all the time, yeah.

Siphokuhle: What would you like people to know or understand about being transgender that you feel is often overlooked or misunderstood?

Participant #4: It's not my choice. I did not choose this. I would never choose this. Someone's doing this for attention, or 'you're special and different'? No one would choose this. It's just honestly a shit way to live, like you know, so I can't tell you how much a trans person hates themselves and their body. you question yourself every day, like why, why me, why is this happening to me, why am I broken? Like, Why do I feel this way? So, okay, no, I'm not asking for people's sympathy or empathy. When I think, I just think that it's having this understanding that this isn't a choice, you know? And it's also none of your business. You know, it's just I don't have to explain. So, this was actually one of the main reasons I took so long to come out, is because I knew I was gonna have to be a trans spoke person, that is not my personality. But I don't look for conflict. I'm really bad at articulating what I feel and explaining things, and you know, describing or explaining, whatever, it's not my strong point. So I knew that coming out, because I'd be the only person, only trans person, that everyone I know knows, I would have to answer all the fucking questions all the time. And at some point, like, okay, I'm grateful that you're curious enough to be asking. And I'm grateful that your curiosity is not coming from a place of judgment, it's just coming from a place of 'I want to understand, it should be better.' But at the same time, like, I don't want to have to explain myself to everyone I know all the time. I don't want to have to go to this thing of explain what trans is, what is the difference between trans and sexuality, what it means to have gender the disorder. But I don't want to have to do that every time. Like, nobody else has to do this. Nobody else has to justify their existence. It's the risk of being completely denied, judged or offended all the time as well. Every person in my life I have come out in my life, you don't realize how many people you know until you've been saying until you have to come out to them. And everyone one of those, it's

a gamble, you like, Am I about to lose the friendship, and Am I about to lose this cousin, and my bosses, you know, a people I respect too alike, you know, people I hold in high regard, how are they going to react to this, you know? Then you start kinda a juggling like Do I have to come out to this person? Will they? You know, what if they never have to know? And I do have some friends like that where I haven't come out to them because I just don't want it to go south yet. So, I guess it is a bit of a… you are in the middle ground where you like I have a social responsibility to other trans like I can't demand for equality if I'm not advocating for it myself. You know, but at the same time why do I advocate for my own existence. I should just be allowed to live on-passage, but now, I'm not. Probably, stop asking trans people what's in their pants. That will be nice you know.

Participant #5

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender for you?

Participant #5: Vague. The question's kind of narrow, but for me it entails, it entails not conforming to how I would, not conforming to how I would have, how I've been assigned my whole life, and it entails being, expressing and being myself authentically and living authentically without the, without the internal struggle of feeling, without the internal gender conflict I feel inside of the way, of how I present versus who I am actually. Yeah, I think that's kind of just brought like, in very summarized form what that would mean, and that could, that could be expanded if needed.

Siphokuhle: How did you know you're a transgender?

Participant #5: Initially, I was, I identified as non-binary for quite a long time. I've always been very, being assigned male at birth, I've, but I was assigned male at birth, but I've always been fem, feminine expression through how I would engage with people. I've surrounded, I've been surrounded by femininity my whole life, so I have been always comfortable in that manner and around femininity, and it's been something that I feel like became an inherent part of me that would, that would, that would be part of my identity and my expression of my personality, and but over time, and over time that kind of started the, the, I initially it was the, oh you're just a more feminine man, to, I guess we can call it a pipeline, it was like I was the feminine man, and then I started identifying as more, gender became less and less of an important kind of, an important, an

important aspect or principle in how I was present, like being myself. It was never, it had never ever really been a thing my whole life, and I think the only reason I would, as when I was like growing up, is that I would do sort of masculine things, it's sort of because it was a default to how society would kind of guide me there, but I have always been the, I've always felt in inside that I'm inherently just devoid from gender. However, then some time, some time was passing when I was kind of still identifying as non-binary, exclusively non-binary, towards, towards being more femme identifying, is that I started, I started kind of really feeling this detachment from masculine identity, even if I was not practicing, practicing it in principle, it felt like a necessary thing, and a comfortable thing for me to be more femme identifying, and that's kind of, and I've found a lot more comfort in doing that, in sort of detaching myself away from masculinity overall, and I have, and that is, I feel right now, gender has always been, it's always been like a moving thing for me, but this is the most, I feel like, for lack of a better word, stable I felt in being in a gender identity, because being non-binary or not necessarily having a gender identity, having a gender assigned to me necessarily still felt ambiguous sometimes, and, but, and that was okay with kind of the exploration, but starting to be more femme identifying and was a lot more comfortable for me, and felt more authentic, yeah.

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #5: To me, well, I think it's one of the very first things is just to be recognized for who I am, and that entails having the same human rights protections that any other human being deserves, and being able to be recognized, and for who I am, and be able to express that without, without, without being questioned. It's about balancing, it's about it's about finding, for me, for me, it's about finding also the, I don't know how I'd phrase it, but we, we are not all treated equal, however, we should all be treated humanely, and we, I guess we all, as human beings, have a moral kind of contract that we sign at birth, like that we, the sort of virtual contract that we sign, to all treat each other as equal as possible, and I think maybe virtually, and this is, this is, this can be questioned, but it is virtually impossible to do that, but we should all strive to do that, and it's essentially, I think, the principle of harm reduction, that we are, we all do our best to minimize the harm caused among different identifying people, and not to discriminate based on someone's identity, that I'm able, that I, as an individual, I'm able to be treated as, with the same kindness that someone else might treat someone else, for example, and not be discriminated against just because I am, or treated differently just

because I am this different identity, and I identify differently, and it's a lot, I think I'm, I'm also rooted in the idea that we, that at the end of the day, we are, again, we are all human, so I, it, it really comes down to giving the same kind, equal treatment to everyone, as opposed to treating each other differently, just because I seem to be something else that you don't agree with.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis?

Participant #4: Confusion. Lately, it's been, I, I would feel like it'd be something bordering along the lines of anger, frustration. I, I often do go, depending on my environment, or the space I'm in, I am I do experience a lot of joy being surrounded by this, the community that I'm, that I'm with, and the people who recognize me for who I am, and people who identify similar to me, or in the same spectrum as, sort of in the same part of the spectrum, and where I, and, yeah, I experience joy sometimes. I do experience euphoria oftentimes when I tend to be, when I, when I find myself more physically expressing feminine, femininity. Sometimes I feel slightly indifferent, is not the word. Let me think about this. Incomplete. I don't know if that's necessarily an emotion, but it's, it's certainly something that, that would evoke some kind of emotion. I cannot, there is, there's a very specific word I'm trying to think of, but that kind of is along the lines of incomplete. Insufficient, yes, that's the word. I sometimes feel insufficient in my identity because I feel like I'll never be able to fully be, find the comfort. Like, I'll know, I feel like I'll never be absolutely, absolutely certain about where I am in my identity, and I feel like, but I do feel that, however, where throughout my entire life, I will always be more femme identifying. It's just, I guess that then becomes its own spectrum and where in that and how far leaning toward that idea do I want to be, but at the end of the day, so it always just feels insufficient. Like none of this ever feels complete. I'm always going through, going to have, be questioning my identity. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #5: So, let's see. Since sort of started, since I started identifying more towards being a transgender as opposed to being non-binary, the, even, even without the kind of direct, even without the direct physical appearance that I, that I give in quote-unquote, the way people have put it is looking transgender. I still get the, when it, when it becomes a topic of conversation or something to talk about, or it's something that's, it becomes a point of, point of knowledge. It's, I've always, it's become, I've become, I've become more of a question in people's

eyes. Nothing that really answers that. I'm not like a, my engagements with people often have become filled with questions and not necessarily any answers. And that would also, that would mean I get questioned a lot about how my identity and, and I also just, my experiences feels like they're, I'm indirectly, I'm indirectly being, what's the, what's the word? I'm indirectly being questioned a lot either through just the way people treat me or how the case may be. But then it's also, I, I seemingly, just because my appearance doesn't answer any questions for people and that's kind of exhausting for me because I feel like I have to explain myself all the time and I don't want to do that. I just want to be myself and live and I guess at the very minimum be just acknowledged, you know, whether that be through using my pronouns correctly or being, or being affirmed in however manner that may be. My experiences have also kind of in dating as well have not been the best, particularly with women because, because I'm so overtly more mask-identifying in the eyes of, I guess, how society perceives masks people. I'm, I'm still, even though I, there are some people who will, I guess, do the, do the work to verbally affirm me either through my pronouns or how we talk to each other or what the case may be. There are still, and this is, there are still many ways that women will kind of view me and treat me as a cisgender man which is very, very uncomfortable and it, it often, it does definitely take away the enjoyment and the, take away the enjoyment away from experiencing dating and love and the freedom and the, and the, the freeness of all and of that and it's not fun and it's not something that's going to stop me but it certainly becomes something I've become less and less inclined to experience. My experiences also, even sometimes with other, with other identities, sometimes with men it's very, I don't often date men or get involved with men in dating wise but still, I experience attraction to men and when we engage, I'm, I'm still viewed as this kind of cis-man as opposed to this, as opposed to just a mask-presenting trans person and I guess that sometimes becomes a complication for them or like a question for them to answer and at times it feels like that's a projection onto me which I understand but still uncomfortable to experience so it's not fun. I think, what else would there be? I think I've only realized, I think I've noticed a lot of the prominence of my, my kind of struggles through dating which is not great but I think I'm often, I think I'm, because of my day-to-day experiences or engagements with people, often are surrounded by people who are in my community and we're not, it's not often we are engaging so deeply in a topic like this, it's my, my experiences are normal for what it would feel like to me, they're comfortable and

they're great but I think where a lot of these questions, a lot of my experiences start becoming more of a question. I've used, I'm using that word a lot today but they've become more of a question when I start engaging things where you, you require more answers or more clarity on things like dating and or things like, I'm just going to bring up a random example here, like sports, like if I am now on a sports team, do I then go into the mask onto the men's team because I'm more mask presenting? If I go into a bathroom, does that make, does that become, where, where, and where would I go because I'm more mask presenting, does that mean I just go to the men's bathroom even though I'm not comfortable there? There are all these questions and that's tiring on its own, that's also really tiring but I don't know, there's a lot of, there's a wide range of things I experience, some great, some not great at all but yeah, it's a journey on its own, I'm just, I'm just living through it.

Siphokuhle: How do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #5: I still resonate a lot with being non-binary, just the idea that sometimes I just want to be completely devoid of gender, I just want to be viewed as Leo*, you can cut that out, it's okay, it doesn't matter but I just want to be viewed as myself. But I still resonate also with being more femme presenting, there are days where I definitely do and I just want to be known as she, they, through pronouns at least but that's not necessarily where the work stops. I think our pronouns are just, are just a method of communication, to allow us to communicate with each other and to affirm each other through communication but the work in, the work and I, the work doesn't stop there in affirming transgender people or non-cis-gender people shall I say, yeah.

Siphokuhle: What challenges do you face in your daily life that may be specific to your transgender identity?

Participant #5: I'll see if I can like kind of expand on what I said but sometimes not, I experience sometimes not knowing whether I'll go out and be safe and that's always a concern for me and sometimes I always feel like some of the things I say because I'm so openly expressive and I say a lot of things that would be up for questionable debate, that would be up for debate. I think I'm, I'm always thinking sometimes my days are filled with like being at the centre of attention even if I'm not trying to be because I'm a very, I wouldn't say divisive but I am even just in my personality and sometimes myself as an artist, I am very expressive about things, opinions and my art and what I say and I

have a lot of things to express and I think some of the things that I do express leave people with questions when it comes to then my identity and how those, how what I say integrates with my identity and I feel like that's a question I've, whether it's always, it's always sometimes worrying and scary for me to say things and not know if people are going to question me because maybe not, not necessarily because the thing is wrong per se but just because of my identity and people often might think like is what I'm saying right or wrong or yeah. I think also sometimes I do a lot of things that are quote-unquote viewed as masculine or men or what men might do and that is very challenging because those are things I just enjoy, not because I'm anything specifically identifying, I'm just, I just enjoy those things like I'm, I program and I, you know, I love playing sports but given my identity it seems as if I'm just viewed as oh well you're just a, like you're just doing this because you're just a man and that's it and you're not, so being viewed in that sense is always scary, like worrying and exhausting and sometimes it takes away from me enjoying things I love doing, yeah.

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others would make your daily life easier?

Participant #5: I think oftentimes I, I would like to be more affirmed and not just through my pronouns but in how I'm treated and I'm not expecting people to dedicate their daily lives to me in bettering my life but I think as I said earlier we all, we all have a sort of moral contract with the, the, the people we meet and the people we engage with to treat them with the kindness and I feel like the struggle people seem to have and the more we learn about differing people identity the less people become interested in trying to learn about this and therefore they kind of find the easiest way out and that's sort of exhausting when, because I'm not, because then I'm not being treated the same because of my identity, I'm just being, I'm just being treated however this person wants to treat me because that's the easiest way for them. Yeah, I just like to be more affirmed, I'd like to be questioned less, I honestly, I would just like to live my life, I don't like being questioned on why I dress, on why I don't dress more feminine, I'm comfortable in my clothes but then also on the flip side I also don't want to be questioned when I'm dressing so feminine, feminine and then being asked aren't you, aren't you wearing your normal clothes because I don't care, I just want to dress however I want given whatever my comfort is on a particular day. I wish there were a lot more, and not just, I wish there were a lot more affirming spaces to be in that weren't, where the focus is not just being translated, like

just in regular places like at school, you know, or if I'm at like, if I'm going out to an event or whatever the case may be, I just want to feel like sometimes there are spaces in which I could be comfortable and it's affirming, if that makes sense, yes.

Siphokuhle: How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #5: With my family that doesn't exist because they don't know, and that's kind of a, I'm okay with it, I feel like maybe one day it'll come up and it'll be fine, but it took a lot of work to kind of just be comfortable with the idea that it's, that they don't know yet. I, but, so I don't know how it would be if I did eventually bring it up with my family and how I actually feel. I feel like there'd be some, some of them would be somewhat understanding, some of them would be confused, and it's something I don't even have the energy to do right now, so I'm not trying to find out. With my friends, I've always been surrounded by queer individuals, so I think, and a lot of queer individuals who by gender identify similarly to me, or their journeys and being with gender identity resonates a lot with me, so we are seemingly all kind of understand each other's struggles and affirm, and our experiences kind of affirm each other. So, my experience has been mostly great, apart from maybe one recent experience where I felt like my identity was put into question heavily, but I guess that was just one experience. Most of my general experiences are pretty good because I'm surrounded by queer individuals and that's good. Oh, let me think. Okay, very briefly, because it's a very long story, but essentially, I was with, I had a friend and we had a bit of, I had a friend and we'd been friends for maybe a few months at this point, and every now and then we'd see each other and talk to each other, but, and then we had, we had a, we had a sexual, we had a sexual engagement, and it was fine, it was all normal, and then at some point, they kind of taken, I don't know, they started pulling away from me as a friend and I was like very confused and whatever, and there, I kind of confronted them about it to ask like what had happened, if there's anything I'd done, or what had led to any of this, and we, there was a whole initial conversation which was all fine up until when they started stating reasons why they didn't trust me, and one of the reasons was that they had stayed, they had the idea that I am, I am a cis-man pretending to be a queer person just so I could sleep with women, and I guess by, by that, by that extension, they were assuming that I was doing all this to harass women or whatever the case may be, and that they didn't believe I was actually queer, so yeah, and that's kind of where that ended, I'm sorry.

Siphokuhle: Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender individuals that you often encounter?

Participant #5: We all, that we all are just, that we are all kind of, transgender people get fetishized a lot, and particularly in sometimes the way they appear, so a lot of people might start dressing a lot more, and that they get fetishized, and, but also, they, a lot of transgender people, there's a misconception that you need to physically transition, as in do body modification, or have surgery, whether it be bottom or top surgery, to validate your transgender experience, and that is not the case, and I am a prime example of that, I am just here to live my life, and if I want to, sure, there are options available for me, but I don't need to, I just want to be me, and experience being, experience the joys of being myself in my identity without having, without needing other people's valid, like external validation, not doing anything to externally validate, to be externally validated, I'm just being me, but yeah, I don't need to dress, and I don't need to do a lot of other things, I don't need to voice modulate, just to validate my own queer experience, I can just be me, I think that would be it for now, yeah.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive and accepting of transgender people?

Participant #5: Well, that's a very broad question, there's a lot of things, but I think just being more creative, not projecting. I feel there's a lot of projecting from everywhere, like everywhere I go, it feels like someone projects something onto me, whether it be the experience of, whether it be their opinions of me, or my identity because of their, excuse me, religion, or whatever beliefs they may have, or how they think something should be because of their own experiences, or whatever the case may be, there's projection, I think like there needs to be less and less of, I'm trying to answer the question broadly, because a lot more specific things I think this question should be addressing, but it'd be too long to answer, but I think that we should be very, society should be more understanding that everyone's experiences are different, and that we cannot just do, there are shared experiences in which I think we need to understand, but there are also individual experiences which should not be invalidated, because they may not entirely fit in within the shared experience, and we need to be more accepting, and understanding, and affirming of that, and yeah.

Siphokuhle: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity (jobs, insurance, reporting a crime)?

Participant #5: Yes, a little bit, not directly, but like for example, like filling in a form, there's most of the time, about 98% of the time, there's never a, there's either male or female, and sometimes I went to aunts and nuns, but that option's not there, it's a binary thing it seems, and I'm just not there. There's also, so I think also like if, I have fears sometimes that if I, you know, eventually do want to go through a lot of the process of making it a legal thing that my identity is, that of my identity, I'm just not going to be accepted, because however, for whatever the case may be, but like my presentation or whatever, what else, um, sometimes I have the worry that I may not get into certain queer spaces because I may not fit the quote-unquote, look. Yeah, I think on top of my head that would it really.

There's this experience I shared. Um, joyful once, when I am invited to queer spaces, and being invited to spaces that affirm my gender that would be great. Not because I had asked to be there, because I was invited, because they recognised me, that was really good. There was a party last year, that was cool to be part of, um, being able to dress, like be, put on a dress, like me being happy about that, and being joyful, and enjoying it, but then also, going out and having people compliment me, aah that's a cute little experience, and I enjoy that. This was at uh sort of an event. What else, let's see. I didn't enjoy this kind of has to do with the shared experience, I didn't enjoy my, some of my, I didn't enjoy my, some of my, my identity being questioned, and then, and then those questions being put into the public. Um, and having my identity publicly questioned, which is very uncomfortable to unpack, but that happened. So, yeah, I've had, most of my, yeah, I've had terrible experiences and good experiences, but yeah.

Siphokuhle: What are some common challenges you face when it comes to legal documents, such as IDs or official records and how do they affect you?

Participant #5: Most of the time they don't because it's not something that comes into question because I'm going to a club and they ask for my ID, because of the way I dress, it's not necessarily a topic of conversation, or something that comes up. But there is a worry that sometimes, that if, there is a day I dress more feminine, there is question, there can be things that can be put into question, and that is not great. So, yeah, sometimes I do sign forms, either, um or, like either online or physical, and I would just tick the feminine box, but I

don't know if that's legal or not. But I do it anyway, because I'm like, you asked, and that's what I'm comfortable with. Yeah, that's it.

Siphokuhle: How does your transgender identity intersect with other aspects of your identity such as race, religion and ethnicity?

Participant #5: Sometimes I don't feel like I, so um, oh okay, very broad question, okay, I'm going to try and answer this question. By kind of identity then I fit into the identity of a black woman, but I look so far removed from what the quote-unquote, black woman might look like. I don't do braids for example, I don't, I don't do a lot of the things that physically might resonate with black women, or might affirm black women and their identities, or whatever the case may be. So, I often feel like I am not valid in that experience, which is not necessarily correct, but that's how I feel, and it sometimes feels like my argument, or, sometimes why I don't like debating or having my identity in question, especially publicly, because it gives people a space to look at me and see that I don't fit in a very conventional transgender box. And it's having my identity thrown into question a lot of the time, that's not fun. What else? I don't have a religious battle, I'm not religious. I think that's like one of like my main struggles, I'm trying to think if there's anything else. Yeah, I think that's it.

Siphokuhle: Are there any support groups or communities that have been instrumental in providing assistance and understanding?

Participant #5: I'd say that, at times a very particular section of the kind of creative community I find myself in. The experiences are very similar to me, I think that's really cool and affirming. I think that would be mainly where it is. I have an online community as well, I think. I have a lot of shared experiences with non-cisgender people. We talk a lot about our shared struggles, dressing, and being in a dress, and how we are addressed. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: Have you encountered any unique obstacles in the workplace or educational place? How have you dealt with them?

Participant #5: In simple terms, no one looks the same. Our experiences are different, and no one, and transgender people are going to do whatever it takes to affirm themselves, and only themselves, not to validate anyone else but themselves. The experience is, the experience is more challenging than you may imagine. What is put in media, and what is, and how transgender people are often fetishized, and there is a certain brand of transgender people that seems to be portrayed as the kind default, that is the experience at all, we all look very, very, very different. Even though you might think

in your eyes, look, and fit in the box, the experience is like guaranteed you are much more complicated than you imagine, and, that is something, that is the experience you can't take away from them, no matter how much you try to, it's stripping away from them through how you portray them in the media.

Participant #6

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender for you?

Participant #6: I would say it means that it's not a catch-all thing, you know? How I am does not match with how I was born per se, and you know, I'm more comfortable, like, I'm still the same person. The body was wrong, and people's perception has been wrong.

Siphokuhle: How did you know you are transgender?

Participant #6: From little, I'd always felt like I never want you to be girly and everything cause since you know?, I will always want you to be much more like one of the guys I was much more comfortable when I was perceived as masculine and then in twenty-twenty covid hit a started you know doing research and stuff like that because when I have this time cause I'm not spending all the time-traveling and I found stuff about people like me and I was like I am not alone, there is a word for who I am.

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #6: I would say absolutely, it is important, even from a medical standpoint. I cannot access the gender-affirming healthcare that I would like to access without paying an insane amount of money because medical aids won't cover anything related to it. And then, just as a general point, we have a very big history of violence against transgender people and anyone in the LGBTQ spectrum. And I believe we deserve to be in the same space as everyone else with access to the same quality of care as everyone else.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis?

Participant #6: For clarification, I do have depression and anxiety. I don't know if it's related to being a transgender, but you know, I'm being treated for that. But its relation to being transgender. I struggle to look at myself in the mirror. Seeing my chest just makes me feel uncomfortable and sad. There's a lot of general uncomfort within my own body, a lot of,

I think, sadness and just seeing this feeling overwhelness if that sense that makes.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #6: So, like I said, when I was younger, I never wanted to be girly; I always wanted to be one of the boys. I found videos on YouTube that resonated with me when I was around thirteen. I grew up against being perceived as a girl. I would even ask myself, "Could you be a paradise?" Like, no, I'd make a terrible mom. It's crystal clear. I think I could be a good dad, unrelated. I started coming out and researching being non-binary and being a trans man. I had a supportive community of friends online on Discord who helped me navigate my journey. I experimented with different pronouns to see what felt right and eventually settled on “He, They”. And I was trying to figured out what name I wanted and I picked my name because I have always liked the name of Shawn. I went with Finn because my dad really liked my old name, and that’s the masculine version of that. And then Peter for my granddad who passed away in twenty-twenty one, I think. Thankfully, most reactions were positive when I came out. People were genuinely excited for me, which was amazing. Luckily, I haven't encountered many negative responses. However, it is not something I tried to make a big deal about all the time, especially when it comes to things that required my legal name. I just have to run with it, even though I am not comfortable being referred to by that name because I have not yet changed my name, and the legal process is frustratingly confusing. Eventually, I first came out to my friends online and my partner. Eventually, I came out to my parents and my siblings. And then I came out to people in the office, and they were so excited. My supervisor was so excited and gave me a really big hug. So far, it has been a very positive experience.

Siphokuhle: How do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #6: I prefer “He, They”. and I'll take Mr. over miss, whatever, yeah.

Siphokuhle: What kind of challenges do you face in your daily life that can be specific to your gender identity?

Participant #6: I have a big chest, so hiding that is quite difficult even with a binder; it’s not enough. And my voice is a very big source of insecurity for me. There is nothing I can do until I go on testosterone, and I can’t

do that because of medical aid. It's mostly been a dysphoria thing through daily life. That is not a problem.

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others would make your daily life easier?

Participant #6: I think a lot of the support I have right now definitely works. My family has gotten quite better at referring to me by my chosen name. My granny is working on it, she doesn't quite understand but she is working on it. I think it would help if my name, if I didn't have to tell everyone individually. Just like hey here is a email, I prefer this name. But I can't do that until I have officially changed my name legally so that I can change my name with the university, which means I will continue to get dead name by people who don't know.

Siphokuhle: How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #6: With my friends, I have seen an unexpected amount of support from some of them, and some have been very helpful with me figuring out what was going on and how I felt. My family at the beginning it was a bit difficult, my dad grew up catholic so it doesn't really comprehend for him but he seems okay with it now. My brother and sister took it pretty easily; they just said, "Okay." It took them some time to adjust, but whatever. My mom was a bit worried in the beginning, I think because of would I still be the same person or whatever. But now, everything seems to be okay, and my Granny is learning. She isn't as uncomfortable about it anymore.

Siphokuhle: Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender individuals that you often encounter?

Participant #6: None that I can think of right now, but there are stereotypes out there, like the idea that someone transitions because they were just unhappy with how they were being treated as their assigned gender, so they wanted to be treated like a boy. That's not the case for me, and I've never felt right. Now, I'm starting to feel more comfortable in my identity. I've never come across the conservative belief that if you ask someone who's transgender about their experience, they'll get angry and yell at you or become defensive. I've heard so many people say things like, "If I ask you a question, will you blow up at me?" But no, I'm happy to answer questions or whatever. That's the main thing I'd say.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive and accepting of transgender people?

Participant #6: I think if there was a way to informally change your name on things without having to go through the whole legal process, that would be great. And I think if the process of changing your first name could be clearly explained as it is for changing your surname or whatever, that would be incredibly helpful. And if medical aids would stop considering gender-affirming care as purely cosmetic and actually supported some of that, that would help so much. Because going through public health care right now, you're talking wait lists of twenty-five years for top surgery because we don't have enough doctors who are actually qualified to do so. And going private is an insane amount of money. So just even being able to get some form of medical support on that would be a game changer.

Siphokuhle: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity (jobs, insurance, reporting a crime)?

Participant #6: No, not really. That hasn't really come up a lot. I have had situations where I just didn't disclose that I'm trans because that could have influenced how people responded.

Siphokuhle: Are there any particular moments or incidents in your life that stand out as positive or negative experiences related to your gender identity?

Participant #6: Yes, there are. When I was in second grade, my mom cut my hair really short. I don’t remember exactly why. I look like a boy from the back. When I went to ask a teacher a question in another classroom, one of the other kids piped up and said, "Who's the new boy?" That just made me incredibly happy. That perception was amazing. The excitement I've received when I came out has been incredibly encouraging. When I came out to my supervisor, she was so happy and she said, “I am so glad for you that you have figured it out”, then gave me a big hug. Then when it was my birthday, she was like, "Happy Birthday, it’s your first year with your birthday as your proper name", and that was really nice. Just things like that.

Siphokuhle: What are some common challenges you face when it comes to legal documents, such as IDs or official records and how do they affect you?

Participant #6: So, because I currently have not changed my legal name, it means everything I do has to be under my current name. And this means when I do change my name, I'm going to have to then apply to get

all of those things changed. I'm going to have to get every single one of my degrees changed, which is a whole process. Not every university has a clear outline on how to do it, so I still struggle to find it at Wits. I'd have to change my name with banks, show proof, and literally anything that I have an account associated with be like, "Hey, here is proof that I am the same person and I changed my name," kind of thing, which is a very daunting prospect and kinda scares me a little bit.

Siphokuhle: How does your transgender identity intersect with other aspects of your identity, such as race, religion, or ethnicity?

Participant #6: It's an interesting intersection with religion because what I am used to under Christianity, “you are what God made you bla bla bla”, and anything else is seen as disobedient because I am Pam. So, according to that, I should just go to hell or whatever. I have been told explicitly, "You cannot be a member of this church unless you are a natural man or woman," which is fucked up. So, there is a bit of an internal conflict just in what I've been told, growing up, and then how I am now. Because I know who I am now, but there's sometimes the worry that I will be punished for being who I am or that I was just a fuck-up that was created. Ethnicity wise, not really. Race wise, not really.

Siphokuhle: Are there any support groups or communities that have been instrumental in providing assistance and understanding?

Participant #6: There is a support group at Wits, I just haven't had the opportunity to access it due to my own research and the amount of time I had versus when they were doing their thing. There is support from many people online, and I've had groups of people who've been really supportive and helped me figure things out what the hell was going on.

Siphokuhle: Have you encountered any unique obstacles in the workplace or educational place? How have you dealt with them?

Participant #6: My current Varsity mail address has my old name attached to it, so when I haven't personally told someone, "Hey, this is how I'm going now," and I'm tagged in an email to ask me to help with something, people get very confused. They're like, "Wait, who's this Shawn? I thought you were talking about someone else," like, "Do you have the right email or something?" That has happened a couple of times. Otherwise, it's generally a thing of, “have I told you yet ? I don't remember “. And any official dealings that I have to do with like

emailing the head of school or anything like that, I have to do it under my old name, unfortunately.

Siphokuhle: What would you like people to know or understand about being transgender that you feel is often overlooked or misunderstood?

Participant #6: We are the same people you knew before; you knew that we were trans. Being trans doesn't mean that we are fundamentally different people from the ones you used to know. Most of us are not going to blow up at you if you ask us questions. If you ask us questions in an aggressive way, we are more likely to respond aggressively, but we are more than happy to answer questions you may have as long as you ask respectfully. So, that's it.

Participant #7

Siphokuhle: What does it mean to be transgender?

Participant #7: Okay, so I'm thinking that to be transgender to me simply means to be affirmative, that's the first thing. Affirming rather than to be affirmative. The reason why I'm saying it means to be gender-affirming is because I am affirming who I am from the inside, projecting that person to the outside. So, I affirm the Sarah* that I am from the inside to the outside. Well, I usually have this thing of when I was growing up, I would come with phrases such as, I am a girl trapped in a boy's body, you know? So, I'm a girl inside that is trapped inside this body that people see from the outside, which is a boy's body and I do not align with it. So now, because I am now transgender, I am in a position of affirming who I am from the inside to the outside. That's what being transgender simply means to me.

Siphokuhle: How did you know you are transgender?

Participant #7: I don't know, I never knew. So, growing up, I never knew that there was such a term, or a word called transgender. It's just, I just didn't know that there was a term. I grew up seeing myself as a girl, putting on lipstick, you know, whenever my mom buys a wig, I'll put it on, wear my mom's clothes. I'll be much more inclined into doing what my mom would do than what my other father or brothers would do in the house. And people would just call me *Sis'Bhuti* (a term typically used for gays in the Xhosa community, it basically a combination of a lady and guy), you know? In the street and stuff like that. And I would be like, not a bad term after all. I don't blame them. They see a *Bhuti* (Guy), but at the same time, I'm behaving like a *Sisi* (Lady).

So, I didn't really know until the first time I discovered the term transgender was in grade ten. You know, in high school when you go and do your sports activities and you go to other, you know, the sports tournament, you go to other schools and stuff like that. So, we went to these other schools. That's where we integrated with other learners from across other high schools. And then in every sporting tournament, we would be told that there are ground rules. You don't discriminate on the basis of gender, whatever. And all of those things. And you'll be told about transgender people, gay people, bisexual people, and stuff like that. And then I was like, what does transgender people mean? And all of those things. And then when I started to research and discover it, then that's when I knew that, oh, so this is exactly who or what I am, you know? But it was up until high school in grade ten when I discovered the word transgender. Then I was like, okay, I'm transgender then. But not to say that I never knew growing up that I was transgender. But I just didn't know the term of, yeah. I just, yeah, I didn't know that it existed. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

Siphokuhle: Why is transgender equality important to you?

Participant #7: Transgender equality is very important on the basis that, okay, well, specifically for me, I am an intersectional feminist. So, my feminism, I'm an intersectional feminist. It speaks around intersectionality. Intersectionality then, it simply means where we respect a human being, irrespective of these multiple dimensions that our passes cross by. So, for example, you can be black, and you're disadvantaged. You can be a woman and you're disadvantaged. You can be a trans person and you're disadvantaged. You can be living with disability and you're disadvantaged. Now, imagine all of these disadvantages in one person. For example, a Sarah* that is black, a Sarah* that is identified as a woman, a Sarah* that is already queer. *Uyayibona ukuthi indaba injani?* (Can you see how the situation is?). I'm discriminated on the basis of my race. I'm discriminated on the basis of my gender. I'm equally discriminated on the basis of my identity. Now, it goes on further when I'm even living with disabilities like your chronic what-what, I'm unable to hear. I have to put on glasses because I'm visually impaired and all of those things. So, that alone is what makes us to be able to firstly acknowledge intersectionality and why then transgender has to be treated as equal. There's a lot of inequalities, by the way, even within the LGBTQI community. There's an inequality such that the society can tolerate gay people, right? Yes. They are welcomed by society. That's the honest truth. They're even loved. *Kuthwe ngabo tshomi* (they are

called Friend), when they're being called and stuff like that, they are romanticized. Then *kubekho thina* (there's us), the trans people, then the society gets confused. *Ngobani ke ngoku aba?* (And then who are these ones?) Why, do you go to taking pills, injections, hormones? *Hayi uyabona lena iComplicated* (No, see this one is complicated) and stuff like that. Much as we are all queer, we are members of the queer community, but there's a lot of inequality as well. So transgender equality is very important because it sort of bridges and brings about inclusiveness. So, this simply means that you are being inclusive on who you treat with respect, not necessarily because of what they are. You don't have to choose them because this one is lesbian, this one is gay, then this one is trans- no I don't clearly understand it. You just treat people with respect equally and inclusive. So, this simply means that before you see a Sarah* as a trans person, see a Sarah* as a human being. And that's what then is going to guide you in terms of treating Sarah* with respect or rather treating trans people with respect. When you first treat them and see them as human beings, than you see them as this token of being trans. And that's the honest truth. Yeah.

Siphokuhle: What are the emotions you go through on a daily basis?

Participant #7: Well, I'm going to speak for myself because also trans people, I mean, they, emotionally, yes, we are there, but we, our emotions are not necessarily the same, but they might be similar, you know? Also, how we experience them might not be necessarily at the same degree. You know, other people can be too emotional while others aren't necessarily that emotional, but I'm going to just speak for myself. What are the emotions I go through? First and foremost, mood swings, a lot of mood swings. And I think I should applaud this because people who are married to transgendered people tolerate a lot of mood swings. I mean, you can just imagine a situation where a heterosexual couple is married and then they are dating, they stay together, and then *umfazi* (the wife) is pregnant. Already, when someone is pregnant, you know the amount of mood swings they may have and how sometimes it can be a little bit boring to another person. When cis-gender women go through your period, you can just understand sometimes you can get moody and how you may necessarily be boring to other people. Now, all of those things are periodic. *Umzekelo* (For example), like your menstruation, your periodic cycle, it's just, it comes five, six days in a month. Same with pregnancy, it's just nine months. Now, with trans people, for example, *mna* (me), I have to take hormones each and every day, meaning that my body is hormonal twenty-four-seven. Each and every day of

my life, I live. It's not a periodic mood swing that I would say I have. It's daily, you know? So, I experience quite a lot of mood swings and I think also beyond just being emotional and all these hormones playing their role in influencing these mood swings. Also, working with different people with different personalities may contribute because now, let's see, I started my day in a bad day.

For example, this phone call. I received it at nine, I had a meeting at eight o'clock and I was shouting at someone in that meeting. I was losing and I was fighting in the meeting, but I lost emotion. Now, I have to come and have this phone call. *Ndizokhuphela iFrustations zam kuwe* (I will take out all my frustrations to you). But the frustrations I am taking out on you are not normal because already this person called Sarah* is already moody, twenty-four-seven. So, these frustrations come in bulk, you know? So, it's something like that. Besides mood swings, I feel lonely. That's another emotion I have. And specifically, I feel lonely. When I'm saying lonely I mean, I'm sure you'd understand just to have a physical interaction with someone who's not necessarily idealistically going to fill you up fully. So, for example, you still need a relationship, you know? And it's very difficult for a trans person to have a relationship because when you see a Sarah*, you see a girl, that's the honest truth. You see a girl. If I go out clapping, putting on my heels, putting on my dress, putting on my makeup, on my nails and doing my hairstyle, boys are going to see a girl and they're going to ask me out until we have to go into that department. And now I have to disclose that, actually, I'm this type of a girl. Then they start to get rude, that you mislead them. Sometimes it puts you at risk. *Bafune ukubulala* (They want to kill you). They beat you up, they insult you. All of those things are challenges to us in terms of having to find the right partner and a relationship. So, there is that thing of being lonely as well, you know? Another emotion or sets of emotions that I've gone through daily is when you just sometimes want to cry out of the blue, you know? You just want to cry out of the blue. You don’t have control over this, it just comes The you start thinking of what you’ve been through, or perhaps what you are going through. You think about all those emotional moments then you break down. And that is why people, in fact, I’m always advised to have psychologists because this is not an easy journey. So, I experienced quite a lot of sets of emotions on a daily basis, man. I mean, I can go on and on. I even have a file. I have a file with my doctor that records all these sets of mood swings and patterns. To be quite honest with you, I'm on medication. This medication helps to stabilize my mood. It's called a stabilizer. It stabilizes my mood for the day. So, it helps me to control, because

remember I said earlier that I can be moody. My mood swings and I can be boring to the next person. So, it helps me to at least try and stabilize all of those things so that I don't become a nuisance to people. *Uyabona, xa kuthethwa ngoSarah *, kuthwe aarg lowa uMoody, hayi suka uyandidika* (See, when they talk about Sarah* they say, the moody one, ai she is such a nuisance) and all of those things. Yeah, so it helps me to be at least regulated and stabilizes my mood. That alone just goes to show like a set of emotions, man, that trans people go through daily. But these are, of course, the things that people don't know. And I did say that I will speak on myself. Because *uzofumaniseka ukuba omnye* (you will find out that the other one) is less moody, *omnye* (the other) is more moody, *omnye* (the other) rudely moody.

Siphokuhle: Can you tell me a bit about your personal journey and experiences as a transgender person?

Participant #7: I can tell you a bit. *Ndikhe ndilungise ukuhlala* (As I position myself). I don't want to clown. No problem. As a transgender person, 80 to 95% of my experience is quite negative and positive. I've been isolated and singled out. And every time this isolation comes, and this singling outcome, it only comes in the form of being trans. *Umzekelo* (For example), in a group of people, let's say we are friends and stuff like that. I will always be that person. *Hayi mani nankuya lo uTrans* (There is that trans one), you know, something like that. And *ufumaniseke ukuba ibetha mna ndodwa* (you find out it singles me out), it doesn't come down to us, while the rest of the people that I'm with, they are not necessarily referred to by how they identify in terms of their gender.

But when it comes to a Sarah*, it's a special case. When I must refer to Sarah as *lowa uTrans* (the trans one) and stuff like that. What that does, you are outing me in public. Such that even the person who didn't know that the Sarah* is trans now knows. And you don't know when, I don't know how comfortable am I to be outed in public or was I even ready for that person to know me that I'm trans. Because this thing of being trans is so sensitive and delicate to me. *Uyabona* (You see), you can't just talk about it and actually it's, I don't know, *ingathi yinto nje* (as if it's nothing), you know? That's the first thing. Secondly, being trans is, well, in my case, is demonized. I'm coming from a family that is conservative traditional Christian. Who believe that the only constitution they respect is the Bible. And any form of any whatever law in South Africa is nothing. Such that, I was threatened by, I'm gonna get disowned, you know, I'm going to be closed in

processes. For example, if there is a will and a source distribution of my family, I will never get anything. Because *ndilihlazo* (I'm a disgrace). It's a disgrace in the family. All of those things. And I'm just talking about my own experiences *uyabona* (you see). In high school, it has always been the case because in high school, during morning prayers, I'm not sure if all high schools are the same, but there's what we would call an assembly or morning devotion. At an assembly, there's always a line of boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, girl, you know, grade eight, boy, girl, stuff like that. Then there'll be a Sarah* who firstly is a boy, when you see her, that is a girl inside. Where do you put a someone? And I've always been discriminated by the system of education, by the system of my high school, by my teachers, the SGB, the SMT, the school management team, you know, everyone. Even like my classmates themselves were schoolmates. And I'd always be this person, all confused, who's suffering from mental disorder and whatever, you know? Also, my uniform would not be as accustomed to me if I wear a tunic. *Ndijikiswa ndisangena egeyithini kuthwe voetsek phuma* (They turn me back immediately after entering the gate. They would say fuck-off, get out of the gate) without necessarily being allowed to come to high school. Xa ndifika endlini kuthwe, ubuphume unxibiTunic? wara-wara (You left the house wearing a tunic? So on), all of those things. And secondly, if I wear a tunic, I'm not allowed to wear a tunic, you know, all of those things. I'm discriminated all across. So, I'm just talking about my experience. Now, another thing that maybe perhaps you might not necessarily know about my transgenderedness is that I've experienced a lot of negativities that sort of thing, like in terms of when I had to go to my learners. I mean, the ID, they classify me as a male and whatever. Ngoku funeka ndiyobhala iLearners yam (Now I have to go write my learners), and it has to say, she, her. The system I battled, I got discriminated at home affairs. I got discriminated at the traffic department. I got discriminated at the road and safety department as well. It was just a whole lot of mess. People discriminate you, laws are discriminatory against you, and even the system discriminates you. *Uyayiva lento ndiyithethayo* (Do you hear what I am saying). Even if I were to get arrested now, I would be forced to go stay in a male prison while I'm identifying as a female. Because there is no law in South Africa that specifically talks about the inclusion on transgendered people and stuff like that. I mean, that again, legally, I'm discriminated. Now, here's the tricky part. When I'm driving around*, ndimiswe yiTraffic Cop* (and a traffic cop stops me), you know. On the one hand, they see this Sarah* with lipsticks and whatever and hairstyle. On the other hand, when the license,

they see me, *le ndoda* (this man). Who is this? And you have to be taken to questioning, go to a follow-up in the traffic department or in the police, whatever. And let's say I was running for a job interview, I'm in an emergency, all of that has to stop. Funeke ndiqale ndiyophendula imibuzo (I have to first go answer questions). And I have to be asked about my identity. And these are things that only happen to trans people. They don't happen to ordinary, normal, gendered people. Because transgenders are considered as abnormal. It's the same thing, I'm on the last point now. It's the same thing when I have to go and let's say I'm called for a job interview. The job interview, they will take me because of my CV and my ID and certificates. They say male, whatever, *yonke lonto leyo* (all of those things). But when I'm shortlisted and then I go for a job interview, they see a female. So, your papers are not necessarily consistent with your identity, who you identify as. And then that also plays a very negative role in terms of your chances of getting work. Because you frustrate them, they don't know who you are and now you identify as this, whereas the system says this. And then they end up saying you will also frustrate them in their company because our system is not accustomed to this. We don't want to find ourselves in the wrong side and stuff like that. Then by virtue of that, irrespective of whether or not you were capable of the job, you just get denied. All these things are negative. We are both, I don't think from what I've just told you are negative, I don’t think there’s any positive thing from the things I’ve just told you. So being trans to me is not necessarily as romanticized and as nice as one may think it is. Because when you look at the reality of things, and these are very essential things, like your IDs and your Wills and your license and whatever, it hits hard. For example here at Wits, I’m studying, but my certificate has to come out as a Mr, not as this, because it has to be in line with what the Department of Home Affairs classifies me as. We have quite a lot of a mess, and now if I come up with a certificate to me as a degree, when I go and look for a job, and I apply online, it will show Mr and I get shortlisted. When I go for an interview, I say Miss. We have a lot of other things. And I can't even fly out. That's another thing, sorry. I can't even fly out. The reason why I can't fly out, remember that flying out is also a huge process. Your visa applications, your passports and stuff. Now, flying out, you have to identify as what the system wants you to identify as. I can't fly out and say I’m Sarah* Goda* a he, and there is no way I would allow them to refer to me as a he. Now imagine going to the United States of America, or going to another country, any country, by the way. Then you say I am she, but in the system, you are he, and you have to enter the borders of that

country. You are going to be classified as a very, something, something, security threat. You've got different personalities, and you're coming to our country, going across the borders. We are going back, it's just a whole lot of mess, man. So, so far as my experience as a trans person, I can say 80 to 90% of the time, it's negative. Then the remaining few percentages is somewhat positive. And this remaining few percentages is when, for example, people who are my friends get to say, no speak, they refer to me as the correct pronouns, like she and her, you know, those things to me matter, because they affirm who I am and stuff like that. When my, my, my, my temporary boyfriend at the time would say, I, let me go, let's go out Babes, I'll buy you dresses, pick up what you want. All of those things, they matter. It is the people who see me for who I am, and respect me for who I am. You know, so there are those few, few moments and few experiences where I can say they are positive. But most of the time, and these most of the time experiences that are negative are really, are realities. They are either a breaking or a making point. So, most of the time, my experiences as a trans person are very negative.

Siphokuhle: How, how do you prefer to be addressed in terms of gender and pronouns?

Participant #7: So, in terms of gender, I identify as a female. In terms of pronouns, I prefer to be referred to as she and her. So, you can either use my name, Sarah* saying, or you can just use the she or her pronouns, she says, or something like that.

Siphokuhle: What challenges do you face in your daily life that may be specific to your transgender identity?

Participant #7: I think I've just addressed that one. It's a long, long one I addressed. Like, challenges I face in my daily life. When I have to go to the bank, for example. And the bank only questions me, that who am I? My bank card says I'm a Mister, the bank profile I have is a mister, but I'm coming to them as a miss and whatever. What is this? Am I in breach of bank and stuff like that. When I have to go to a clinic, I have to also try to explain myself, who am I? Because it's so simple. So, I'm he, I'm Mr Goda*, stuff like that. Now they want to create a file for me, for my whatever medical condition I'm going through. Now I have to be she and her. This also goes for medical aids and stuff like that. Who am I? All of that. These are like the typical normal day-to-day things that you research. When I have to write my assignment, when I have to submit my test, my exam, I have to write my ID, name, surname and they appear in the system. Because, I mean, who is this person? You know, it's always, who are you? You know? If I go

to a club, people just get confused, especially clubs, where there's this nonsense of, it's free entry for girls, but it's payment for guys. So, where do we put you, you know, and who is going to search, by a male or female? It's always a question of, who are you? So, first of all, is it a male or a female? Even daily, when I have to come to use the toilets, people are like, ooh, I'm not comfortable sharing a toilet with a guy who considers themselves as a girl. It's not, those daily things, man. You know, in a student accommodation, let's say you have to go apply, let's say you stay at South Point. At South Point, there's a male roommate, but I don't have a female roommate. And this is the person I have to constantly stay with, stay in. I must go take a shower and come back and be butt-naked in front of him. Those are like silly, daily things I go through, but they are very impactful in terms of my mental health, in terms of my mood, in terms of my emotions as well. It goes on that negative experience than the positive experience.

Siphokuhle: What kind of support or understanding from others would make your daily life easier?

Participant #7: Like, respect me for who I am, and not what I am. By the way, being trans is not what I am. It's who I am. So, if people can respect me for who I am and what I am, it would be a good, good support. So, for example, when you consider someone as a what, you know, what are you, you, like, it was a choice. For example, you can choose to be a teacher. What are you? I'm a teacher. What are you? I'm a police officer. What are you? I'm a doctor. All of those things people have got power over, you know, things you choose to do in life. But you don't choose to be trans. You don't choose to be who you are. You've never chosen to be black yourself. You see, so how are you? They are not going to say what are you? You're gonna say, no, I am a black person. Yeah, but so who am I? I am a black-identifying person. So even me, if people can just look at, and the fact that respect someone for who she is than to respect her for what she is, then it would go without saying that would be necessary, important for me, yeah? Also, small things like pronouns. Do not misgender me. You know, stop misgendering me because when you misgender me, you are eradicating or undermining how I identify myself. So just don't, refer to me as a correct pronoun, respect my pronouns, respect my space, respect how I identify, and all of those things. So, they do come in handy, they assist me a lot.

Siphokuhle: How has your relationship with your family and friends changed since coming out as transgender?

Participant #7: My relationship with my family, ooh, I can't even talk about my family. Like, I think I've already explained to you. Yeah. They are traditional, conservative people. To them, it's either it's black or white, there's no in-between. They don't live in a grey colour. So, with Sarah* was born a boy, so full stop. This thing of now we have to consider you as a girl and whatever doesn't interfere us. Yeah. And my friends, I can say it's pretence, especially for these days. My friend's pretence to me. It's basically on, is Sarah* working with us at that time? Because, you know, I've had friends who would respect me as she and stuff like that. They say to me with the correct pronouns, and when we have a fallout, they swear at me and say I am confused and they were tolerating me. So, you see, with my friends, it's really, the reality is based on materialist conditions and all material conditions. If things are favouring them, they are going to align with me. If things are no longer favouring them, then they're going to start to dissociate themselves from me and be very much insulting about it and stuff like that. And then for my family, I told you they stand by their word, full stop.

Siphokuhle: Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender individuals that you often encounter?

Participant #7: A lot. I mean, the sex part. Yeah, a lot. Apparently, we, okay, the first misconception, let me, if I can talk about the first misconception, which are we are mentally disturbed. You know, which are, it's a mental disorder. Also, the stereotypes, which where they say it's a stage, it's a stage. Yeah. You know, we get confused. Some say *senzwe eMkhathini* (we are made eMkhathini, eMkhathini is where they practice witchcraft). Some say there should be a depopulation agenda. We're coming to enforce triple C. There are a lot of misconceptions about us and stereotypes. And then with sex, we are reduced to, experiences, you know? Much as many people would never say, but there are quite a lot of number of people who just want to have sex with trans people just to experience. You know, some say, imagine having a girl with the breasts and a dick at the same time. Like, how fascinating is that? How do you think they have it? How do you think they are? How is it? Lsike, all of those things, you know? We are reduced to, truly, quenching people's curiosities. Yeah, those misconceptions about our sex, misconceptions about depopulation, triple C, satanism, freemasons, misconceptions about

mental disorders, and misconceptions about demons and whatever. All of those things.

Siphokuhle: In what ways do you feel society could be more inclusive in accepting of transgender people?

Participant #7: In a way of seeing me for who I am, one, and what I am. I think I've covered that. Two, if the government can create and enforce laws that would breach inclusiveness. Because obviously, you can't expect society to be inclusive without being guided into being inclusive. For example, there was an end of apartheid, but the end of apartheid, there were necessary laws that had to be introduced to come and enforce the inclusiveness of all races and to do away with racial discrimination. Now, the same can go for transgender people. You have to enforce necessary laws to do away with transphobia, to do away with all the discrimination on the basis of sexual identity, or even gender identity, all the identity politics, basically. So that is another way of being inclusive. In a way of society that also can be inclusive is to be open into learning. Don't say that we are, but we are pushing things down their throat or whatever. But we're not shoving anything down their throat. We just want you guys to be inclusive and free and open and a fair, democratic, and inclusive society. We don't expect you to accept us, but all we just want you to know is to respect us. At least, no one needs to accept us. Because there are things I don't accept in life but I have to respect them. So that's also the same thing we are asking. To say, much as you may not necessarily accept a prostitute, but you at least respect their job enough that they put food on top of the table they provide for their family. So even with us, you don't have to accept us, by the way, as a society, but it's saying, in order for us to be an inclusive society, let us respect one another. We don't have to be friends, we don't have to like each other, but at least respect each other. Yeah, I think I've covered that question. Respect us, than to accept us, and you'll be an inclusive society. Also, the government must create and enforce necessary policies and laws which will bridge and guide society into being an open and an inclusive society. Free, based on democracy, by the way. Yeah, and, society must be open to learning every day. They must be conservatives. They must transform rather than to conform. You can't conform into a norm that is exclusionary. You have to transform into a norm that is inclusive and acceptable and respectful, yeah.

Siphokuhle: Have you faced any difficulties accessing essential services due to your transgender identity, for example, jobs, insurance, reporting a crime, all those things?

Participant #7: Yeah, I think I've covered their job I'm not gonna talk about it. I have to report a crime, they would also arrest me. If I could be arrested, they will not take me to a female cell because the law is not accustomed to favouring me. The law is just the law. Yeah. Yeah, you're going to jail. Even me, if I have to report a crime and let's say maybe my boyfriend hit me, the question becomes how are you reporting another man, you should also fight for yourself, and they don't understand how traumatic that is. And again, I want it to be classified as gender-based violence, but the law won't classify it as gender-based violence because it's not a gender issue. You all guys just say it's a common assault between two guys. We can't say it's a gender-based violence. We are women in general, so those are silly, stupid things that we come across.

Siphokuhle: Are there any particular moments or incidents in your life that stand out as positive or negative experiences related to your gender identity?

Participant #7: Okay, I've highlighted the negative. The positives, I've also seen, I've touched on them, like small things such as pronouns, referring to my pronouns, like people are saying who I am, taking me out for lunch, buying me dresses, you know, like those small, but positive things. I'd like to add, also, to have a very good bond with my psychologist who helps me to navigate this life situation, you know, and who's just generally there for me. There are positive things, man, such as, like, your NGOs who advocate for trans people, like, for example, here at Wits, there's an office that tries to advocate for us, a gender equity office, it does try to help us in terms of policies, policies that are informed by the university towards trans students, trans workers, you know, also assisted by the Transformation Office of the university, not only gender equity office, those small things. Also, the School of Language, Literature, and what-what Media, they also assist in terms of decolonizing language and also influencing the Department of Higher Education in curriculum planning and all of those things so that language can be inclusive for trans people and stuff. I mean, those small things are very impactful, and positive to my life, because they speak on how and who I identify as. Who am I? We talk about this, but, oh, what is this? I feel it. Organic, oh, how is this? Also, I'm saying, you know, nobody does, but people need to see who I want them to see and who I specifically am from the inside. So, I can say,

yeah, those small things are very much affirming, then. The support groups we have at Wits every Friday for trans people, you know, at least the Transformation Office is also trying, so the university is trying, so that we can have support groups because they understand what we go through daily and all of those things, so, yeah, yeah.

Siphokuhle: What would you like people to know or understand about being transgender that you feel is often overlooked or misunderstood?

Participant #7: What would I like people to know about transgender people? Yhoo, Pronouns. Um, not everyone wants to be identified as she or he. Some trans people, they are just, they don't, they are transgender non-conforming. In fact, they are trans, but they are gender non-conforming. So, their pronouns are they, them. And then, I remember having this heated debate with my friend, who was like, how do you identify as a transgender person, but you also, at the same time, identify as gender non-conforming? By virtue of being transgender, you are transitioning from one gender to another, and then now you come and tell us that you're gender non-conforming. What are those things? And I said to people that you must understand, there's a difference between a gender and pronouns. You know? They might be used interchangeably, but my gender does not necessarily define my pronouns. I told them that. So, I said to them, some people can say, look, I'm transgender. I'm trans because I don't identify with the gender that which I was born or was given at birth. However, equally, my pronouns, I am dating. I'm not binary. I am non-binary. Yeah, well, all of those things. So, people don't understand the transgender and the pronouns. And I feel like they may think they understand pronouns, but they're really overlooked when it comes to trans people. Yeah. Also, not all of us are, like, sex dolls. And also, another thing that people must know about trans people, but they're overlooking it, not every trans person is on medication. Oh, yes. And being trans is not dependent on medication. You can be trans. And I'm saying this because people always ask us nonsense. People will ask, so, have you fully done the whole process? how far are you with your transitioning? Look, people must understand that there is no such thing as quarter trans, or half trans, or full trans. So, they shouldn't ask us questions of, are you halfway through? Are you fully transitioned? If you're trans, you're trans, full stop. And us being trans is not dependent on medication. Another person, will tell you I don't need to inject myself in order for me to see or feel I am trans. I can identify as trans anytime. And more than enough to be valid. I mean, no one's identity can be scrutinized and depend on medication, you

know? So, yeah, I feel like people should not overlook that particular aspect of trans people.

Appendix C (Participant Information Sheet)

Participant Information Sheet
Name: Siphokuhle Keseni
Student Number: 1108896

Good day,

My name is Siphokuhle Keseni. I am a Masters student in Drama Therapy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project. I will explore the emotional experiences of people who identify as transgender through the Rasa Theory, under the supervision of Leila Henriques. *Rasa Theory and Transgender: Exploring Stigmas and Emotions of Transgender People*, is the title. The aim of this research project is to create awareness about how transgender individuals feel and how their experiences are influenced by the stigmas surrounding them.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in this research. You will be required to take part in semi-structured qualitative interviews that will inform my ethnographic performance. The interview will take around 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interviews using a digital device. This recording will be stored in a password-protected computer and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be stored for possible future use.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any questions when you feel unsafe. The research process will be confidential, and you will be required to sign a consent form that you will not disclose any information to a third party. All data that is captured in digital devices will be stored in a password-protected computer. Written journals or fieldnotes will be stored in a lockable cupboard accessible only to me. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or the rehearsal/ workshop or resume another time.

The data collected from this research will be written and published as a research report that will be stored in Wits Online Library. I can share the report if you want to read it. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0)11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,
Siphokuhle Keseni

RESEARCHER:	**SUPERVISOR:**
Siphokuhle Keseni, 1108896@students.wits.ac.za, +27(0)73 958 4350	Leila Henriques, leilafleur@mweb.co.za, +27(0)82 330 2063

Appendix D (Consent Form)



Name and Student Number: Siphokuhle Keseni, 1108896
Research Title: Exploring Stigmas and Emotions of Transgender People Using Rasa Theory and Rasaboxes in Drama Therapy

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio/ video recorded	YES	NO
I agree that all information shared in this study will remain anonymous and confidential during the research process and in the research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded and journaled	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained	YES	NO
I agree that there is no remuneration or any form of benefit for me in this project	YES	NO
I agree that if I feel any discomfort during the process, I should let the researcher know and be allowed to continue	YES	NO
I agree that may withdraw from the process without consequences	YES	NO

…… (Signature)
…… (Name of participant)
…… (Date)

Siphokuhle keseni (Signature)
Siphokuhle Cleopathra Keseni (Name of person seeking consent)
16 December 2023 (Date)