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Transformation: From (Trans-) Gender Roles to Profiles

AQ1 Hans-Georg Moeller[1], Paul J. D'Ambrosio[2], Aglaja Stirn[3], GQ1 and Jorge Ponseti[4]

GQ2 **Abstract**

GQ4 Combining a philosophical approach with empirical psychology, this essay investigates the rela-GQ5 tionship between "profilicity," the formation of identity in orientation to profiles, and gender identity. We discuss empirical research that indicates a significant difference between transgender identity in traditional (collectivist) and modern (individualist) societies. We suggest that this difference is due to a shift in the formation of gender identity away from gender roles and toward gender profiles. To substantiate this claim, we first outline a basic theoretical terminology of identity and gender. Then, we critically analyze the representation of gender, including transgender, in contemporary popular culture. Finally—with a descriptive, but not therapeutic intention—we discuss several case studies of identity formation of transgender people. We conclude that theoretical problems arising from historical shifts in gender identity formation, including transgender identity formation, are best conceptualized in terms of profilicity rather than in the still prevailing semantics of authenticity.

Keywords

authenticity, gender, genderdysphoria, gender identity, gender incongruence, gender roles, identity, transgender, transsexualism, profilicity

Introduction: A "Dramatic" and "Surprising" Variation in Transgender Identity

Available data suggest that transgender[1] identity is far from identical and has in fact been highly diverse. Anne A. Lawrence found significant differences between transgender people in what she calls, following Hofstede (2001), "individualistic and collectivistic national cultures." (Lawrence 2010: 574).[2] While male-to-female transgender people in "collectivist" Latin American and East Asian countries tend to be largely androphilic (i.e., sexually attracted to males), this is not the case in "individualist" Western Europe and North America. Lawrence says, "the relative prevalence (…) varies dramatically;" (Lawrence 2010: 573) so much so that she found the

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"observed effect size (…) surprisingly large." (Lawrence 2010: 580)

The evidence analyzed by Lawrence is unambiguous, but the statistical fact that "collectivism" in some regions of the world correlates with male-to-female androphilic transgender whereas "individualism" in other regions doesn't, does not yet provide an explanation for this discrepancy. Lawrence offers an informed guess to explain it. In "many collectivist countries" transgender people can fit into pre-existing "socially approved gender roles" (Lawrence 2010: 575) which allow them to live, as it is sometimes put, as a "third gender": As examples, Lawrence lists the bayot in the Philippines, the hijras in India, the kathoey in Thailand, the mak nyahs in Malaysia, and the waria in Indonesia: all male-to-female transgender(androphilic communities (Lawrence 2010: 575). These transgender identifications, however, are typically exclusively available for "pervasively feminine" (Lawrence 2010: 573) gay men. Under these circumstances, "transgender" often equals gay male-to-female transgender. On the other hand, Lawrence stipulates, there is "greater tolerance within individualistic countries for socially disruptive gender transitions by non-homosexual gender dysphoric men" (Lawrence 2010: 573) so that any male-to-female transgender person, or, for that matter, any transgender person of any sexual orientation, has similar options of "coming out."

Lawrence's hypothesis seems convincing and almost self-evident. Upon closer inspection, however, it reveals a conceptual lacuna that goes beyond the categories of transgender and sexual orientation her study primarily deals with. Lawrence implies, rightfully as we believe, that in so-called "collectivist" societies, gender identity, including transgender identity, is oriented toward gender roles.[3] Here, a third gender role is socially available for a specific kind of transgender people (androphilic and feminine male-to-female), and, accordingly, transgender identity is predominantly shaped by this role—similar to how cisgender (i.e., people identifying with their biological sex) men and women in these societies shape their sexual identity by an orientation toward their respective gender roles.

Lawrence further implies, equally rightfully as we believe, that in so-called "individualist" societies, there are typically no specific "third gender" roles. With her emphasis on the supposedly "individualist" characteristics of these societies, however, she also implies—and here we differ from her—that along with the fading of gender roles, gender identity, or at least transgender identity, ceases to be oriented toward socially available constructs. Here, she suggests, society simply retreats and "tolerates" different gender identities as they are presumably grounded just in the "individual."

The main hypothesis of this paper is that gender roles, including transgender roles, of traditional societies have not simply vanished and freed up an individualist gender identity. True, traditional gender roles often no longer provide orientation for gender identification. This does not mean, however, that in modern societies the social no longer interferes with the formation of personal identity, including gender identity. We propose that the "dramatic" and "surprising" differences between transgender identity in different regions observed by Lawrence can best be explained by the replacement of gender roles with gender *profiles*.

Toward a Terminology of Gender Identity

Lawrence's findings about significant variations of transgender identity in different societies inspire larger questions about gender identity and, more generally, personal identity. In fact, Lawrence (2013) herself suggested that personal identity is so closely interwoven with gender identity that it is impossible to neatly distinguish between them. For the sake of clarity, we first chart our notions of identity and then the terms we use in reference to sex and gender.

Identity and Its Technologies

Our understanding of identity follows Anonymous (2021). This understanding, in

turn, is grounded in Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory (Luhmann 2012-2013). According to Luhmann, social systems, biological systems, and psychological systems are operationally differentiated. Social systems communicate, biological systems live, and psychological systems think and feel. They are mutually dependent on the operations of the other systems in their environment, but they cannot directly continue or connect with one another's operations. This makes them "autopoietic": they generate and regenerate themselves only by means of their own operations. The mind, the body, and the social persona of an individual *are* not identical. There are empirically observable correlations between their operations, but they are nevertheless not mutually reducible to one another. Mutually irreducible (although interrelated) social, biological, and social systems coevolve.

And yet, "identity" is indispensable for both society and individuals to exist and function the way they do. It enables humans to develop complex senses of selfhood in reflection of their perception by others, and it allows society to construct equally complex notions of personhood. In short, identity is an interactive sociopsychological "narration of the self," involving individual and communal feedback processes.

Along with biological, psychological, and social coevolution, identity evolves: Identity is not identical but changes over time. We distinguish between three major "identity technologies" enabling successful narrations of the self: sincerity, authenticity, and profilicity. These technologies overlap and can coexist, but they differ in impact in different contexts.

Sincerity is a narrative technology that conceives of the self in orientation toward social roles including, most importantly, roles in the family or the kinship group. Moreover, traditional societies often constructed social roles in connection with stratification or professions. Religion and the military, for instance, supply social roles until today. Self-identification in orientation toward roles demands internal commitment so that morality or "regime" of sincerity emerges. Sincere enactment of one's roles strengthens a sense of identity and frames narrations of selfhood.

Authenticity emerges in opposition to sincerity. It became prevalent in modernity when social roles become increasingly unstable and fluent. In "the age of authenticity" (Taylor 2007) the orientation of the self-narration turns inward. A "true self" is to be found either by discovery or invention. Authenticity pursues originality. An unconditional commitment to social roles appears "inauthentic" because of the sameness and conformity attached to them. Philosophers of authenticity, like Heidegger, stress *Eigentlichkeit*—"ownness" and uniqueness—in contradistinction to a uniform social "they" (*das Man* in Heidegger's terminology). The authenticity narration is indeed "individualistic" and assumes that it is possible, and indispensable, to build identity on a singularity that lies "within." Anything external about oneself, our social representations, is supposed to accurately reflect and be grounded in what has already been inside.

Authenticity, though, is inherently paradoxical. We inevitably learn how to be authentic from others. The semantics of authenticity, of "finding your true self", of "being true to yourself", or of "simply being who you are" thoroughly permeated twentieth century Western societies in everything from pop culture to politics, Moreover, when everyone is unique, uniqueness turns into similarity. Authenticity becomes the norm everyone seeks to conform to. And: Like sincerity, authenticity, too, turns out to depend on recognition by others—if only by those others who claim to be authentic as well.

Although the individualistic semantics that accompanies the authenticity narration is just as alive as it ever was, its meaning has shifted. This shift can be illustrated with the rise of "identity politics" in recent decades. Unlike in authenticity, identity politics does not narrate identity in distinction from transindividual categories but, to the contrary, orients itself *toward* them: Transindividual categories like race and gender, for instance, are regarded as signifying who one really is.

Unlike sincerity, however, identity politics strongly objects to assigning specific social roles to such categories. If claims to transindividual social constructs like gender and race, unlike in authenticity, are regarded as central to identity narrations, but, unlike in sincerity, are dissociated from roles, then a different identity technology must be at work here. We call it "profilicity," and define it by its orientation to *profiles*.

As argued by Anonymous (2021), the increasing relevance of profilicity can be traced back at least to the eighteenth century and the emergence of the concept of the "picturesque." When, for instance, conceiving of a landscape as picturesque, we observe it not in the mode of first-order observation by simply looking at it, but we see it in light of landscape paintings, that is in light of how landscapes have been seen, presented, and thereby profiled in public. Eventually, we also learn to construct our personal identity in orientation to a public profile, for instance on social media. A personal profile is a form of identity that is neither based on conformity to a specifically defined role, nor grounded in the pursuit of originality, but constituted through social validation feedback loops.

Sincerity embraces roles and finds selfhood therein. Authenticity rejects roles and finds selfhood in the unique individual. Profilicity also rejects roles, but it finds selfhood not simply in originality, but in the dynamic curation of profiles in the social display.

Sex and Gender

Words like "sex" and "gender" tend to be used incoherently. To avoid such confusion, we briefly define a basic vocabulary in line with common usage in the scientific literature.

While we use "gender" with reference to the social and psychological perception and construction of sex-related differences,[4] we use "sexuality" and "sex" in their biological sense. Following two billion years of pre-sexual life, sexual reproduction of life evolved over a period of ca. 500–1000 million years, eventually resulting in the emergence of two distinct sexes: Male and female. Human reproduction is based on this binary distinction, although there is a small percentage of human individuals that do not clearly fall in either biological category.

In almost all sexually reproducing species, the male sex is defined by having numerous but small gametes and the female sex by having fewer but bigger gametes. In consequence, male investment in reproduction is smaller than female investment. Differences in sex-specific reproductive investment are pronounced in mammals since females provide internal gestation and lactation. Sex-specific differences in reproductive investment are more pronounced in larger mammals (like humans) because pregnancy and lactation last longer in them than in smaller mammals. In apes and humans, one reproductive act lasts generally less than 10 min in males, but several years in females (pregnancy plus lactation). This difference in reproductive investment between males and females translates into sex-dimorphic selective pressures leading to sex-typical traits. On average, human- and nonhuman male primates show higher intrasexual aggression, higher mobility, and related cognitive abilities like certain spatial abilities, and a gynophilic sexual orientation, whereas females show on average a higher interest in nurturing behavior and related cognitive abilities as well as an androphilic sexual orientation. These sex-typical differences are mediated by sex-specific differences in prenatal androgen exposure.

Possibly, the development of human language went along with the development of a consciousness of selfhood as well as of gender. Infants develop notions of selfhood within about 18 months, and shortly thereafter knowledge about gender differences. In preindustrial societies, life histories were highly sex-dimorphic. Sex-dimorphic division of labor was predominant, women often spent the most part of their adult life span being pregnant, breastfeeding, or nurturing children, while doing labor that was compatible with their nurturing activities. Consciousness of

gender difference, sex-dimorphic social structures, and differences in sex-typical traits fostered and maintained gender roles in traditional societies.

It is crucial to note, however, that while sex and gender differences gave rise to gender roles, human biology and human society are systemically distinct. Biological evolution and social history are different autopoietic processes taking place in each other's environment at a very different pace. This is to say that gender roles cannot be exactly determined by biology. They are social constructs changing much faster than biological evolution. There is, for instance, a decisive difference between biological motherhood and the social role "mother." In our sociological usage, the term "gender role" indicates specific and static long-term expectations and associated behavior.

Following our definition of identity outlined earlier, we conceive of gender identity as an integral part of a "narration of the self" that successfully constructs gender congruity of an individual in the absence of any substantial core. Just as identity in general, gender identity, too, is communicated in accordance with existing social structures. It has social validity and significance. In a functionally differentiated society like ours, gender identity is, for instance, related to legal status and personal specifications on legal documents. To be experienced as one's identity, however, such a narration, next to being validated in society, needs to be psychologically embraced.

Gender and the Shift from Sincerity to Profilicity

The Demise of Gender Roles: Simone De Beauvoir

Following this conceptual framework, we now approach the specific notion of "gender profile." This concept is central to our main hypothesis, namely that sexual identity in contemporary society is best understood neither in terms of sincere gender role commitment nor as an expression of an authentic inner self, but instead as a gendered narration of the self under conditions of what we call profilicity.

The transition from gender roles to gender profiles takes place within a broader transition from sincerity to profilicity. Both transitions are dialectically mediated by the rise of authenticity in opposition to sincerity. Under conditions of sincerity, gender roles, and especially those within the family, were arguably the most vital guideposts for self-narrations.

As Lawrence's (2010) cross-cultural study on transgender shows, identity formation by orientation toward social roles and mental and behavioral commitment to them is not limited to cisgender people. A third gender can be added without disturbing the mode of sincerity. In sincerity-based social contexts "kathoey" and "bayot" are broader gender role categories, just like "man" or "woman;" and just like men or women, kathoey and bayot construct self-narrations in *conformity* with their gender roles. The orientation to conformity with gender roles by transgender people under conditions of sincerity has also been observed in societies lacking a "third gender." In such societies, as Jen Manion (2020) has documented, transgender "female husbands" adopted masculine gender roles and identified with them. Sincerity-based gender roles can structure the identification of cisgender and transgender persons alike.

Along with the transition from stratified to functional differentiation in modernity, orientation to social roles, including orientation to gender roles, became less convincing in self-narrations. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sex*) is a philosophical classic analyzing and critiquing the suppressive function of gender roles (de Beauvoir 1953). In her feminist existentialism, authentic individuality can only be achieved if the unequal asymmetry between men and women generated and maintained by their respective roles is broken. Relying substantially on the ideas of Hegel and Marx, she shows how millennia of gender-role-oriented moral, cultural, political, and economic regimes established a state of perpetual alienation of women. They are socially forced

into self-narrations that define them not on their own terms, but, as members of the "other" or "second" sex, which is merely in an inferior and dependent relation to men. Historically evolved gender roles have entrenched an almost unassailable internalization of female inauthenticity.

At the outset of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir quotes the American writer Dorothy Parker (1893–1967): "'I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman … My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings." (de Beauvoir 1953: 14). Beauvoir extends Parker's critique of books applying and enforcing gender roles by treating women as women to a much more fundamental critique of a whole history that has done the same. Precisely the "treatment of women *as women*" has prevented women from being what they—not essentially, but existentially since "existence precedes essence"—first and foremost are, namely humans, that is individuals *not* defined by those definitions that society is imposing on them, and among which the gender definition is the most intrusive and restrictive. For de Beauvoir, "the fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual." (de Beauvoir 1953: 14) However, this simple fact is overshadowed and suppressed by another fact, namely "that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that they do most obviously exist" (de Beauvoir 1953: 14). As long as this unequal gender division exists, the authentic existence of women *as individuals*, rather than merely *as women*, is impossible.

The age-old social distinction between gender roles in a sincerity-based society has led, according to de Beauvoir, to a socialization where women tend to remain immature, childish, and often cannot develop, as de Beauvoir sometimes calls it, "sovereign individuality." (de Beauvoir 1953: 686) The sovereign individuality of a woman as, first and foremost, a single individual, is not obstructed by sexual or psychological differences between men and women, but by her existential identification with her inherently alienating *role*. In line with her existentialist philosophy, de Beauvoir encourages a fundamental shift in the self-narration of not just women, but all humans, from an orientation to external roles to an orientation of the individual to itself, or, in our terminology, a radical turn away from sincerity. Her main point is not to demand that women or men ought to completely dissociate themselves from their respective and distinctive biological or psychological traits—this would be not only an absurd, but also an extremely violent claim—but to finally achieve *authenticity*. For women to become authentic, they must neither cease to have a female body nor female sex-typical traits but determine themselves individually *as themselves* rather than *as women*.

The Rise of Gender Profiles: The Nasty Bitches

Today, the semantics of authenticity spread by philosophers such as de Beauvoir is still popular, but its contradictions become increasingly evident. The semantics of authenticity made sense at a time when sincerity waned. But the waning of social roles by no means left, as authenticity hoped, the individual all on its own. Instead, we can now see that the waning of roles was accompanied by the waxing of profiles. The shift from role—to profile-oriented self-narrations particularly concerns gender.

Methodologically, De Beauvoir's critique of gender roles relied in large parts on analyzing literature. To analyze gender profiles, we will use a similar method, albeit on a minimal scale given the limitations of this essay. We will refer to pop culture texts.

Following Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 2000), we argue that the construction of identity in orientation, for instance, to the mass (and social) media system does not follow an

"individualistic" logic, as stipulated by Hofstede. Just like in sincerity-based (or so-called "collectivist") contexts, contemporary profilicity-based identity construction does not emerge "authentically" from some supposed individual self, but rather by orientation to a social supply. Sincerity supplied individuals with roles. Profilicity supplies them with profiles. Roles, and in particular gender roles, were supplied—not only, but importantly—by the family. Profiles, and in particular gender profiles are supplied—not only, but importantly—by mass and social media. And while gender roles are typically relational to copresent individual peers (e.g., husband/wife, mother/child), gender profiles are projected to a nonpresent transindividual general peer (e.g., the specification of gender pronouns on a CV) (See Anonymous 2021).

During the time of writing of this essay, the major US American TV network ABC has published a music video of a song called Nasty Girl (2021) on YouTube. It serves as a trailer for the show *Queens*. Just two days after it had been posted, it had more than two million views. *Queens* is produced by ABC Signature production studio for the Walt Disney Corporation and premiered on October 19, 2021.[5] *Nasty Girl* is performed by four female singers who are the main characters of the show. Wikipedia explains that the plot of the show revolves around these women who "once appeared as the 'Nasty Bitches' in the 1990s," and "turned the world of hip-hop upside down." Now, they reunite, "but will the former megastars, also known as Professor Sex, Butter Pecan, Da Thrill and Xplicit Lyrics, manage to achieve this ambitious goal?" (Queens 2022) "Nasty Bitches," the name of the group, and "Nasty Girl," the name of the song, we argue, function as gender profiles.

The hip-hop group members are presented as it is customary in this music video genre: Displaying promiscuity and highlighting sexualized body parts, demonstrating individual wealth, consumerism, and a hedonistic lifestyle. Nothing in the videos portrays them in accordance with traditional female gender roles such as wife, mother, or daughter. The very first scene in which one of the group members appears shows her wearing a huge golden necklace identifying her as a "Nasty Bitch" and expressing her dismay at being addressed as "Ma'am." The traditional gender role-related designation is explicitly dismissed by her and implicitly replaced by the prominently displayed "cool" name of the group that supplies her with her profile. All this serves to show right from the start that the Nasty Bitches do not conform or commit to traditional gender roles such as described by de Beauvoir. And yet, they hardly represent "sovereign individuality." Instead, they supply viewers with an attractive virtual gender profile—they offer non-individual models of individualization. By observing how the Nasty Bitches are observed by their millions of viewers—and these observations are readily accessible on YouTube—"individuals can select," to quote Luhmann again, "what they are psychologically in need of and able to stomach" and use these selections for profiling their own "individual" gender profile.

At first sight it might seem as if the Nasty Bitches represent the realization of the socioeconomic, cultural, and political equality of women that de Beauvoir envisioned as necessary for their transition to true authenticity. Not only are they shown as filthy rich. "Professor Sex" informs us first off that her "poom poom nani nani" (an allusion to her vagina) is "dripped in gold" and that "Ferrari's fly me around the globe." All four women have more than fully emancipated themselves from male repression. In most scenes they socially or sexually dominate their male counterparts who are depicted in the guise of male strippers. Butter Pecan explains: "Nasty women, we about nothin but winnin. It's money over men you never catchin us slippin." To confirm that she has cast away the restrictions tied to core traditional feminine gender roles of wife and mother and achieved independence Xplicit Lyrics sings: "This is queens madness rep my borough thorough as men. And when it

comes to the paper they wanna borrow my pen." Xplicit Lyrics also points out that she crossed traditional racial boundaries with her talents: "I made a hit list, I'm a queen, young, black, and gifted." (Kasseem, Bridges and Lanier 2021) However, the group members are actually not that young; after all the show is about their second career after a hiatus of twenty years. Some of them show body weight and do not conform to earlier beauty standards that expected women to be slim. In this way, the group also conveys the overcoming of ageism and gender-related bodily norms.

And yet, all this economic, political, and cultural female "equality" hardly leads to the pure emergence of "sovereign individuality." From beginning to end, the iconography of the Nasty Girl video focuses on a standardized "coolness" in the form of (dance) moves, gestures, and expressions highly familiar to most viewers from similar videos. In effect, the video displays extreme consumerism and brand-consciousness through the display of luxury items and the mentioning of brand names in the lyrics: "I pull up with the Louis luggage, I made it a set." Moreover, the video itself is not just a music performance, and thus entertainment, but at the same time a trailer for a TV series, and thus simultaneously advertising for the large media businesses ABC and Walt Disney. In this hypercapitalist context, all the symbolic markers of "equality" and gender emancipation are commodified. The "socially progressive" gender profile of the Nasty Bitches serves the function of profiling the Walt Disney Corporation as socially progressive. In this way, a sort of profilic synergy between the corporation and its customers (viewers) emerges. The profile of the Nasty Bitches is intended to increase the "coolness" of both.

The gender profile Nasty Bitches is an example of profile curation. Rather than emerging as a representation of authentic individuality, it emerges in the context of commercialized second-order observation processes. A synergetic observation-feedback-loop between the media industry that produced and distributes the video and the individuals who watch it emerges. It constructs the "coolness" of a specific gender profile, and thereby its value. This profile value has an economic and a narrative side. They are the two sides of the same coin.

No one woman is born a Nasty Bitch—but neither is a Nasty Bitch "taking charge of her own existence," as de Beauvoir hoped authentic people would do. A woman becomes a Nasty Bitch by curating such a profile, and this curation is dependent on social supply. In a capitalist, neoliberal society, this supply is significantly influenced by commercial and political interests. In this regard, sincerity and profilicity do not differ. They equally lend themselves to commodification and political or ideological appropriation.

As in sincerity, the manufacturing of identity in profilicity relies heavily on gendered self-narrations. Gender profiles, such as "Nasty Bitch" enable the simulation of personal identity through second-order observation-based "validation feedback loops." (Anonymous 2021) They do not simply reflect a "true self," but represent a *claim* to a social construct of individuality. Nasty Bitches are no less women *as women* than wives or daughters are. They are women *as women*, however, not in reference to "woman" as a gender role, but to "woman" as a gender profile. We assume that, just as gender roles in sincerity, gender profiles shape the identity of cisgender and transgender people alike.

A Transgender Profile: Always Jane

As the pyroclastic flow of profilicity burns through the hopes for authentic sovereign individuals, the jargon of authenticity becomes fragmented, though remains. From these residual tephra profile-based self-narrations are curated. Inaccurate in terms of referencing self-making and self-discovery in the way envisioned by thinkers such as de Beauvoir, or even the cultural milieu of the "age of authenticity" as it operated until only very recently, "authenticity" today refers to a specific

purchase of profiles. Especially in cultures that have valued sovereign individuals, profiles must be curated according to the semantics of "authenticity".

Amazon's *Always Jane*, a four-part docuseries following a transgender teen, provides an excellent demonstration. Here we comment mainly on the presentation of Jane by Amazon and through her own self-narrations.

Always Jane is marketed as a "true coming-of-age story" about Jane Noury, a transgender teen who, during the documentary, participates in an all-transgender fashion show and eventually gets her confirmation surgery. The TV series is advertised as an "intimate and unguarded look at the Nourys reveal[ing] a family with unconditional love that shines through as they tackle obstacles head-on so that Jane can live authentically." The main poster for the series shows Jane: An attractive young women in a low-cut shirt staring off into the distance with the wind blowing in her hair. She is looking toward the sun, standing in a field with a town in the distance. (Always Jane 2021)

In words and images Amazon projects *Always Jane* as a story about authenticity: "Coming-of-age" is often synonymous with "finding oneself". Jane herself utilizes authenticity vocabulary, she says, for example that the documentary is, "about finding your true self, being happy with your true self, being confident in your true self" (Yu 2021). She also says that she was "born to transition" (ep. 3).

The first episode of *Always Jane* opens with a scene viewers will quickly become familiar with: Jane filming herself. She has not begun shooting herself for the show, though, this is something she has done for years, and continues to do now. In front of her own camera, Jane talks to no one in particular. She poses for an unknown audience, but an audience who is, for whatever reason, interested in her. The video presentations are more or less like social media post. There are pauses for kissy faces, "duck face," and other cute and sexy gestures (including standing twerking)—even in the midst of discussing serious issues such as her confirmation surgery possibly being delayed because of COVID-19. The words and style mimic these poses—all correspond to what one would expect from any social media post. Sometimes they are intimate and speak to her feelings, but always as presented to an audience of "those interested in Jane." Questions of identity, personal conflicts, or even addressing difficult thoughts and emotions are mostly absent. In fact, the show has been criticized precisely on these grounds, that is, for not being "deeper." (Hirsch 2021) While *Always Jane* is advertised as documenting an authentic struggle for identity, it in fact shows a common teenager's engagement in carefully developing an identity in a mass and social media context.

As suggested by the title *Always Jane*, a main point the series wants to stress is that Jane never truly was "Jack"—the assigned male at birth. The boy Jack is described by the parents as shy and troubled. They were worried he might commit suicide, and he often starved, cut, or hurt himself in various ways. This all changed once Jane came out: She went alone to a school dance and started introducing herself as "Jane" to her classmates. The shift in gender is depicted as sudden transformation that allowed Jane to be her authentic self and overcome her mental troubles. However, in contradiction to the narrative of an instant emergence of individual authenticity, the series highlights Jane's struggle to adapt to the feminine gender. As Jane says, she "had to learn to be a girl." Even after "a year out" she "was so new to everything." (ep. 2) What was it that Jane had to "learn"? If "everything" was "so new", then it cannot have been the "true self" that she had "always" been. This "new everything" is clearly related to gender—but it is not role-oriented femininity: Jane never discusses being a wife, a mother, or anything else having to do with traditional gender roles. Instead, Jane "learns to be a girl" by modeling. She poses for pictures made for a "general peer"—an anonymous social audience that perceive her in a strongly gendered profile signaled by dress, make-up, and pose.

Her coming of age is not simply a discovery of what has "always" been inside of her, but, similar to the growing-up of most teens of any gender in Western societies, a process that builds comfort with one's personal identity by exposing it for public (or, in this case, commercial) validation.

What matters for Jane is not just her gendered self-expression as such, but also the gendered perception of her profile. She does not simply shed a "fake" gender to reveal her "true" self. Instead, Jane's journey is much more complex and consists in negotiating different socially supplied gender options and their *perception*. At birth, Jane had been assigned the male gender, but she became increasingly uncomfortable not just with being male but with being seen as male. When she first became Jane, she explains, she was "fixated on being a 'women' and not being perceived as anything else." Saying "women," Jane uses quotation marks with her fingers, demonstrating a consciousness of the term as a constructed gender category. Her "fixation" on female gender perception, however, does not last. In the context of being casted as a transgender model, she eventually becomes truly invested in being seen as transgender.

Key to Jane's shift from being a "woman" to becoming transgender are the other trans models she meets. She bonds with her coworkers and learns to share both their gender and professional identifications. In this way the profiles "transgender" and "model" merge, and the agency promotes them in a commercial context. A profile symbiosis between the agency and the employees is established. The same profile symbiosis happens between Amazon and Jane—each contributing to the profile of the other. By featuring a transgender-themed story, Amazon can present itself as progressive and inclusive. On her part, Jane, who is still an aspiring actress, model, and film producer, is enabled to show herself on her social media pages as the protagonist of a popular miniseries.

When still in hospital recovering from the procedure, Jane sees her new vagina in the mirror for the first time. Turning to her mother she says, cheerily, "That looks like a vagina, right?" Her mother laughingly confirms. Jane then repeats the question. Later on, Jane shows her vagina to her friend and asks somewhat seriously "What would you say my vagina looks like?" The friend replies "any other vagina." Jane is very happy with this response (ep. 4). She does not relate to her new vagina in the mode of unique inborn nature (authenticity) or in orientation to female gender roles (sincerity). Her satisfaction with her vagina being "just like any other vagina" indicates a perspective of second-order observation that has an eye to the general peer. Most importantly, this perspective does not differentiate Jane from her cisgender peers. Gender is no longer primarily about traditional social roles, and it could never really be associated with authenticity. Although often linked to biological traits, there is no necessary connection. Nowadays "gender" often means "gender profile": the successful validation of gender identity in dynamic, performative feedback loops.

Transgender Profiles: Empirical Evidence

Commercially produced TV shows like *Queens* and *Always Jane* show that gender identity today, including transgender identity, is not necessarily best described in terms of authenticity—although the semantics of authenticity still often dominates the public discourse on gender. Their rejection of traditional gender roles has not made the Nasty Bitches "sovereign individuals" in Simone de Beauvoir's sense—instead they communicate, and market, feminine gender profiles. Somewhat similarly, *Always Jane* conveys, and commodifies, the curation of a transgender identity within a complex process of image presentation, perception, and validation.[6]

As Lawrence has shown, in sincerity-oriented societies, transgender persons can shape their identity in accordance with transgender roles. Commercial TV productions like *Always Jane*

suggest that in profilicity-oriented societies, transgender identity can be shaped in orientation to transgender profiles. In this section, we will discuss several clinical cases[7] to present some preliminary evidence that transgender profile curation not only takes place in media representations but also in actual human experience. We do so by formulating three claims.

Claim 1: Transgender identity today often differs from sincerity. Unlike in sincerity-oriented societies, transgender people often do not orient themselves to the traditional gender roles associated with the gender they transition to.

Case A *is a biological female and lives together with their husband and a young daughter. A is suffering from medical and psychiatric conditions like overweight and emotional instability. In their opinion, their overweighed body looks disgusting. A often feels exhausted and not sufficiently respected by their family members and colleagues. A states that more than their husband, A lovingly cares for their daughter. In their free time, A enjoys stitching. A declares to have a nonbinary gender identity (neither male nor female). A compresses their breasts to give the appearance of a flat chest. After about one year in psychotherapy, the patient asks for prescription of opposite-sex hormones. The psychotherapist informs them that according to treatment guidelines cross-sex hormone treatment is only admitted to persons identifying with the opposite sex but not to non-binary people. One month later, A declares that after profound contemplation A now recognizes that their inner self is male. In addition to the breast binder, A now wears a penis dummy, a so-called packer, to give the impression of having a male genital.*

Case B*, a biological male in their fifties with three children, is an engineer and loves to work with and repair machines. Since several years, B has been divorced. B often feels lonely and depressed. During the last years of the marriage, B's desire to cross-dress became stronger. The rejection of cross-dressing by B's ex-wife was one of several problems leading to the divorce. The patient came to psychotherapy dressed as a woman, wearing a breasts mockup, and reported to have self-identified as a woman for more than half a year. Later, B appeared in male-typical clothing and without breasts mockup to psychotherapy. At this time, contact to B's ex-wife had been re-established and B hoped for reconciliation. Some weeks later, the hopes for reconciliation were disappointed and the opinions of the ex-wife were no longer of crucial importance for B. B dressed again as a woman and asked for prescription of cross-sex hormone treatment*.

Case C, *a biological male in their fifties, is an electrician and has no children. C has been married for about 25 years. Since many years the couple has ceased to engage in sexual activities. As part of C's job, C needs to travel frequently and stay away from home for several weeks each time, C used these trips to dress as a woman in public. C did so for many years without informing C's wife about the cross-dressing. C was afraid of being rejected by the wife because of the cross-dressing. However, due to changes at work, C was no longer able to travel professionally. C then informed the wife about the cross-dressing habit. To C's surprise, the wife accepted the cross-dressing. C then adopted a female identity. Since then the couple has been living together as friends. C asked for cross-sex hormonal treatment and genital reassignment surgery. After some months of hormonal treatment, genital surgery was applied. C decided to get a relatively short neo-vagina (ca. two centimeters), because C was informed by a physician that this made the surgery less complicated and less risky. The surgery went well. In hospital, C shared a bedroom with another male-to-female transgender person who had gotten a longer neo-vagina (ca. 6 centimeters) and told C that women do not have such short vaginas. Some weeks later, C applied for a second surgery to get a longer neo-vagina.*

Neither A, B, nor C aspire to change their relational gender role along with their gender transition: A does not strive to adopt a male gender role in their family or to give up

being "mother" and to becoming "father" instead. Similarly, B hopes to reunite with their wife but does not want to adopt a female role in the relationship (e.g., as a "housewife"). Likewise, C wishes to continue to live with their wife as a transgender peer but has no desire to change their previous gender role and to become the "wife." However, in some cases, transgender individuals choose or develop sex-typical traits in orientation to traditional gender roles.

Case D *is 25 years old and a biological male. D has been living for about seven years as a woman. D is sexually attracted to men. Some time ago, D lived with a male partner. In this relationship, D adopted a traditional female gender-role and chose to do housework while D's partner worked as the "breadwinner." Now, the patient has no partner and suffers from depression and feelings of loneliness. D states to be longing for a male partner who really cares for D while expressing the fear of being sexually exploited by men., D took opposite-sex hormones for several years without medical prescription. Accordingly, D developed breasts. D's appearance, interests, and behavior are convincingly female. However, D still has a male genital and went to psychotherapy to reflect on whether to get a neo-vagina. Eventually, D stated: "I will keep my penis because I know that I will never be an authentic woman."*

Whether transgender persons change their gender role along with transition seems to be not only related to their identity technology but also to their sexual orientation. A, B, C are heterosexual with respect to their biological sex. Sex-typical traits are more prevalent in heterosexual than in homosexual individuals (Lippa 2000). Therefore, heterosexual individuals might be less interested in orienting themselves to the gender roles of the opposite sex. For example, independently from their gender transition, A maintains a strong drive to motherly care for their daughter, and B continues to love repairing machines, a male-typical activity. In contrast, D, like many androphilic men, is less interested in such male-typical activities. Whether related to a stronger preference for a gender profile rather than for a gender role or to a stronger prevalence of sex-typical traits of their biological sex, A, B, and C's gender identity appears more flexible and more as a matter of choice (A, B, and C express different gender identifications at different times) than in D's case. Possibly because of a lesser sense of such flexibility, D aspires less validation via investment in a transgender profile and decides to keep the penis.

Claim 2: Transgender identity today often differs from authenticity. Contrary to the assumption of an invariant inner gender that "always" has been the "true" core of someone's gender identity (as expressed in the title *Always Jane*) transgender identity is often constant work in progress in response to shifting external circumstances and social availability.

Case E*, a teenage biological woman, committed a suicide attempt as a consequence of severe depression and emotional instability. After the suicide attempt, E spent some weeks in a psychiatric clinic. There, E discussed with another young patient whether E might be transgender. Following these discussions, E declared for the first time to be male and asked for the prescription of cross-sex hormone treatment and sex-reassignment surgery. E's parents were astonished by these claims since they had never noticed any gender-atypical behavior in E.*[8] *Photographs show E with long hair, wearing a bikini, and laughing together with girlfriends at the beach about one year before the attempted suicide. E now declares having been male since birth and requires the parents to remove such pictures from the living room because they do not resemble E's inner self.*

Case F *is a 40 years old biologically male bus driver. F has been married for 20 years and has three children. F loves their wife, their children and enjoys repairing cars. In addition to such male-typical traits, however, F has also been experiencing foot fetishism and transvestic fetishism (in combination*

with autogynephilia) since puberty. At times, F interprets these sexual feelings as a proof of being a woman. Therefore, F enquires about sex-reassignment treatment. In contrast to many other transgender people, F is unwilling to wear female clothes in public before having completed sex-reassignment treatment (i.e., without having female breasts and a neo-vagina).

Case E's rapid-onset gender dysphoria followed an attempted suicide and subsequent experiences in the hospital. While E claims to have always been male, there is no evidence of E having expressed or displayed any discomfort with female gender identity or experienced gender dysphoria before the suicide attempt. An external event (talking to a fellow patient) triggered E's change in gender identity. Case F moves back and forth between genders, hesitates to adopt a firm female gender identity, and seeks external help for this. Similarly, cases A, B, and C adopted a different gender identity in response to external events or shifting conditions. After having learned about regulations on hormone treatment, A shifted from anon-binary to a transgender identity. B and C changed their gender identities in response to their partner's reactions. In all these cases, gender identity is flexible in negotiation with social possibilities or available options.

Claim 3: Transgender identity today often aligns with profile building. Transgender profiles are validated by true investment and are oriented to second-order observation by a 'general peer.'

***Case G**, a 17 years old biologically female patient, has claimed being a boy since G began suffering from feelings of inferiority. In G's view, boys are much more respected than girls. G's parents, however, remember G as a girl who enjoyed life and present photographs showing G as a 15 years old female teenager having fun at parties with friends. G asks for urgent sex reassignment treatment. G rejects their female sex organs and does not allow their female partner to touch them, including when G is sexually aroused. G wears a chest binder every day. Prior to getting a prescription for testosterone, G worked hard to masculinize their body by consuming aromatase inhibitors and doing extended workouts. Thereby G managed to halt the menstrual cycle and to stimulate muscular growth. G states to be proud of "overcoming biology" and that after sex reassignment treatment G will be a much more respected person than before.*

G works hard to become masculine. A (trans-) gender profile of an individual can become true to them by dedicated personal investment. Like in sincerity where a sense of personal identity is enhanced by a dedication to a gender role (e.g., dedication to motherhood), in profilicity a sense of personal identity can be enhanced by dedication to a gender profile. In both cases, this pronounced commitment to oneself "as a woman" or "as a man" is distinct from de Beauvoir's insistence that the authentic self ought to define itself primarily "as a human being." In G's case, self-respect is essentially tied to a gendered identity. Social validation relates to a continued practice of sexual and physical self-discipline oriented to a gender profile. G aspires to struggle against their bodily functions and features to live up to the "more respected" male gender profile that G identifies with. As a result of this struggle, G is proud. This pride is not just about being "me," but about "me being a boy."

Case F is similar to case G by measuring one's gender identity by a personal commitment to a gender profile, albeit with opposite consequences. F feels not truly female and does not wish to display a female identity by dressing as a woman before having shown an adequate investment in this gender by completing sex reassignment treatment.

In addition to investment in a gender profile (which functions similar to the commitment to a gender role in sincerity), a second aspect of successful gender identification in profilicity is validation by second-order observation. In *Always Jane*, Jane can happily identify with her artificial vagina because it looks to others like a regular vagina. In contrast to the authenticity ideal expressed in *Little Prince* as "what is essential is invisible to the eye"

AQ2 Please change (Saint-Exupéry 2000, 9) to (de Saint-Exupéry 2000, 9). The reference "de Saint-Exupéry" is included in the reference list.

AQ2 (Saint-Exupéry 2000, 9), but similar to Jane's feelings, several of our transgender clients stress that their gendered perception by others is of central importance for them. D is strongly concerned with the display of pictures from the past. Most of our female-to-male transgender patients bind their breasts (although this can be painful and damage breast tissue). Some of them, like case A, wear a packer. Clearly, the point is not to have a penis, but to be seen as having one. The profile of the body part is crucial. C ceased to identify with the neo-vagina once being told that it was too short to be seen as truly feminine. Therefore, C asked for a second genital surgery. The more gender identification relies on observing how one is observed by others, the more damaging is the lack of social validation. Most of our patients react depressed, angry, or dysphoric when they see that others regard them in terms of their biological sex.

The cases reviewed here are representative of many transgender patients we treated over the course of the past two decades. We feel that as in *Always Jane*, the gender identity formation of most of our patients is best described in terms of profilicity, although Jane and nearly all of our patients often use the socially available authenticity semantics to describe themselves. In two important respects, however, current media representations of transgender people significantly misrepresent the empirical reality of transgender experience we witness in our clinical practice

First, "Western" media still often tend to present transgender as an overlooked topic and thereby somewhat paradoxically imply that it does not receive due attention in the media. For instance, *The Guardian* writes on *Always Jane*: "The series offers a compassionate and understated window into a late adolescent experience still massively underrepresented on-screen …" (Horton 2021). In fact, however, as the *New York Times* already noted in 2014, there is a steady and significant growth in transgender representation in popular culture and in political discourse (Bernstein 2014). For corporations such as Amazon, transgender representation can serve the curation of a progressive profile. However, in practice transgender is statistically still very rare with a prevalence of about 1 in 10,000, (Dhejne et al. 2014, Griffin et al. 2021, Kaltiala et al. 2020, Meerwijk et al. 2017) which is, for instance, about two or three hundred times less prevalent than homosexuality.

Second, and more importantly, Western media representations of transgender people are seriously tilted toward the glamorization and curation of male-to-female transgender celebrities. They massively underrepresent female-to-male transgender individuals and tend to overlook the relatively large number of transgender people coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and/or struggling with medical and psychological issues. An article in CBS News entitled "Transgender Celebs You Need to Know" presented fifty-three transgender persons. In total, forty-three of them are male-to-female. Nearly all of these forty-three persons are either sexually attractive or successful sports competitors (Capatides 2021). About the same ratio (nineteen male-to-female to six female-to-male) is found in an online article titled "25 Transgender Celebrities Who Broke Barriers" (Compendio 2022). Here, too, most of the transgender females are attractive. Like in *Always Jane*, the media typically present well-to-do middle- or upper-middle-class male-to-female transgender personalities. However, the reality of transgender is different. Until 2010, the gender ratio was about 1.6 female-to-male to 1 male-to-female transgender person (Dhejne et al. 2014). In the UK, a 25-fold rise in referrals of children and adolescents with gender dysphoria was recorded since 2009. Three out of four of these individuals were biological females (Griffin et al. 2021). These numbers reflect our own clinical experience. In sharp contrast to media representations, the patients approaching us for gender reassignment treatments are mostly biologically female and frequently of lower class background. Often, they are poor and afflicted by social, bodily, or mental disadvantages. The media, however, construct a

stereotypical transgender profile of males becoming sexually attractive and successful females. In real life, however, this exact profile is rarely seen.

A Short Conclusion

In the 1940s, Simone de Beauvoir established a conceptual distinction between sex and gender. Prior to her groundbreaking work, it was commonly assumed that gender roles were not contingent social constructs but biologically determined. De Beauvoir's conceptual paradigm shift was based on her existentialist philosophy. In collaboration with Jean-Paul Sartre, she developed an elaborate notion of authentic being, or "sovereign individuality," in critical rejection of the traditional orientation of individuals to social expectations. Her famous proclamation that women are not born, but become women is not just a provocative descriptive proposition, but also a normative plea: Women should no longer define their identities in conformity with traditional gender roles but develop unique individualities instead. In our terminology, de Beauvoir's demand amounted to the proclamation that it was time to leave sincerity behind, i.e., identity-formation in orientation to roles, and to move on to authenticity, i.e., identity-formation in orientation to one's individual self.

We agree with de Beauvoir's fundamental insight that gender is socially constructed. We further stipulate that individual gender identity is shaped on the basis of the respective biological, psychological, and social resources available to a person. If so, however, it is not realistic to expect that identity can ever emerge primarily from "sovereign individuals." As a social construct supplied and validated by "other people," gender is likely to be around as long as individuals live in society. In other words: It is impossible to have an identity that is not significantly informed by the social supply of gender constructs.

The main hypothesis of this article is that the demise of gender roles did not lead to the liberation of a purely authentic sexual identity. Gender, we argue, is still socially constructed, despite the prevailing semantics of authenticity. However, the technology of constructing gender has substantially changed in highly modernized (sometimes labeled "individualistic") societies. Here, gender identity is no longer primarily oriented to roles, but to profiles.[9] The shift from roles to profiles has enabled society to move beyond traditional binary or triadic gender differentiations and to introduce a variety of novel gender differentiations, now often summarily called "transgender." We suggest that the sometimes significant psychological, medical, sociopolitical, and philosophical problems arising from this shift can be more clearly identified when replacing the vocabulary of authenticity with a conceptual framework of profilicity. This paper is merely a first step toward developing such a framework.

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Notes

1. The term "transgender" does not commonly appear in psychiatric manuals and is therefore informal. It is a widely used umbrella term for

people not identifying with their biological sex. Corresponding and roughly synonymous terms in psychiatric classification systems are "transsexualism" (ICD-10: F64.0), "gender incongruence" (ICD-11: HA60) (World Health Organization 2018), and "gender dysphoria" (DSM-V 302.85) (American Psychiatric Organization 2013).

2. While accepting Lawrence's findings, we regard the notion of "national cultures," and the labels "individualistic" and "collectivistic" used by Hofstede problematic. We doubt the theoretical value of connecting the concepts "culture" and "nation." More crucially, it seems to us that so-called "individualist" people may not be that individualistic, and "collectivist" people not that collectivistic." In our terminology, we (rather than "individualist").
3. Our concept of "orientation" is derived from Stegmaier (2019).
4. We agree with an anonymous reviewer that the "use of 'gender' to refer to both social constructs *and* psychological perception" is somewhat problematic because it can undermine our conceptual distinction between social and psychological systems. However, as the reviewer also notes, this is "a broader problem in the discourse as a whole" that we feel unable to resolve in this paper. We agree that it would be desirable to develop a terminology indicating the difference in question.
5. Although the show has been discontinued in 2022, it received positive reviews: "The review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes reported a 100% approval rating with an average rating of 8/10, based on 13 critic reviews. Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned a score of 75 out of 100 based on 7 critics, indicating 'generally favorable reviews.'" (Queens 2022).
6. It would be interesting to address the question why especially transgender identity has gained so much political and media attention recently. However, this question is beyond the scope of the present article.
7. The cases discussed here are documented by one of the authors of this essay who is a clinical practitioner working with transgender clients.
8. A sudden shift in gender identification is labelled rapid-onset gender dysphoria. (Littman 2018)
9. This paper is limited to proposing *that* such a change has happened and to outlining some of its core features. We do not however, address the issue *why* individuals, including transgender people make use of profilicity.

AQ3 American Psychiatric Association. 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Fifth Edition. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Publishing.

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Biographical Notes

Hans-Georg Moeller is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Macau He authored numerous books including *Profile Yourself: Identity after Authenticity*, *Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* (with Paul D'Ambrosio), *The Moral Fool: A Case for Amorality,* and *The Radical Luhmann* (all with Columbia University Press). He is the content creator of the YouTube philosophy channels *Carefree Wandering* and *Philosophy in Motion*.

Paul J. D'Ambrosio is a fellow of the Institute of Modern Chinese Thought and Culture, associate professor of Chinese philosophy, and Dean of the Center for Intercultural Research, all at East China Normal University in Shanghai, China. Additionally, he is the founder of the 四海为学 "Collaborative Learning" lecture and seminar series. He has authored around 100 articles, chapters, and reviews, and is translator of over a dozen books on Chinese philosophy.

Aglaja Valentina Stirn is a Professor of Psychosomatic Medicine and Sexual Medicine at Kiel University, Germany. She is a specialist in Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, psychoanalyst, group analyst, and deputy director of the Tremsbüttel psychiatric clinic.

Jorge Ponseti is a Professor of Sexual Medicine at the Kiel University, Germany. He authored numerous studies in the area of sexual research, particularly about transsexualism, pedophilia, sexual offenders, sexual responses, and sexual brain processing. For more than two decades he is working as a clinical therapist with patients that are suffering from various sexual disorders and transgender patients.