

Exploring the Metaphorical Models of Transgenderism

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This article explores the metaphorical models English speakers employ in their understanding of transgenderism. Transgender is the term ascribed to those who have begun or completed a change in their sex characteristics from male to female or female to male. Using both qualitative and quantitative measures, I examine an archive of narrative data and a transition-specific corpus to show how spoken and written narrative support a spatially based representation of gender identity and transition. Two robust models are revealed in the data, each carrying a set of suppositions consequential to how speakers understand their lived experience. I show how metaphor-evoking trigger lexemes relate to each model and can be used jointly to demonstrate conceptual salience. This investigation should be seen as part of an ever-growing body of research directed at revealing the unconscious assumptions, which organize speakers' comprehension of complex topics with political relevance (cf. Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff, 2002, 2004; Musolff, 2004).

Gender transition is no different from other cultural issues. It is both conceptually and politically complicated. The purpose of this article is to provide not only a holistic picture of how gender transition is understood metaphorically, but to also explore questions of political relevance. As shown in a wave of metaphor research in and out of academia, the metaphors drawn on to understand personal experience affect attempts to solve social problems and have wide-ranging political implications (Lakoff, 2002, 2009; Lakoff & Wehling, 2012; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011, 2013). Transgendered individuals make up a frequently ostracized segment of the American population, suffering disproportionate discrimination and violence (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002; Kenagy, 2005; Stotzer, 2009). Hence, understanding the way transgender people feel and talk about transition at a conceptual level is a first step in exploring where this marginalization originates at a societal level. How gender transition is described to and understood by the American public facilitates or circumscribes what they believe is beneficial and even morally correct in terms of transgender acceptance. Therefore, personal descriptions of the transition experience play an important role in the public's perception of this minority population.

Like most physical changes undertaken by the body during development, such as those of puberty, pregnancy, and old age, gender transition is experienced through metaphorically driven conceptual models. Conceptual metaphors structure language use, co-speech gesturing, and most importantly, the way individuals reason through abstract concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Cienki & Müller, 2008; Lakoff, 2002). Metaphor is both embodied (arises from our physical

interaction with the world) and culturally constricted (Gibbs, 1999). There is no way to circumvent metaphorical cognition. Thus, the metaphorical models speakers rely on to understand complex topics are quite consequential (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2013). Source domains are typically concrete and literal and experientially correlated with target domains (Kövecses, 2010). That is, people tend to have direct involvement with and detailed knowledge of one particular realm, which they can touch, see, and feel. And their knowledge of that experience organizes the conceptual architecture of a corresponding idea. At times target domains are structured by more than one source domain, and each source domain can be elaborated through various means (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The idea of gender is one such target domain. The abstract concept of gender and transition depends on an experiential understanding of physical space, location, direction, and movement. In English-speaking societies, the assignment of gender is discussed as if located in a bounded region; English speakers use terms like *cross-dressing*, *transitioning*, *changing*, *male-to-female*, *coming out*, *intersex*. This language is indicative of a dual or binary category model of gender assignment, in which each category is understood as a bounded region in space. Although much of English discourse concerning gender centers on a spatially based understanding of bounded regions and movement between, deeper probing reveals that not all conceptions of journey through space involve the same trajectory, direction, speed, and continuity.

In the subsequent analysis of this issue area, I investigate various elaborations of this space-based model. I use qualitative and quantitative techniques to probe both an archive and corpus of transgender discourse, mostly in the form of coming-out stories. This analysis illustrates how corpus information can be used to build an argument for metaphorical salience. Apart from psycholinguistic research into metaphorical thinking, most metaphor research is qualitative in nature. I suggest simple ways to use frequency statistics to bolster an argument for research validity.

PAST TREATMENTS OF TRANSGENDERISM AND “COMING OUT”

The last two decades have brought about a surge of academic research in the social sciences, the humanities, and linguistics exploring the topics of sexuality and gender identity, and specifically, the construction of transgender identity (e.g., Armitage, 2008; Valentine, 2007). Some of this work includes linguistic analysis of transgender, transsexual, and drag queen communicative patterns (Barrett, 1998, 1999). However, with the exception of a few brief references to metaphorical labels relevant to this discourse topic (Persson & Richards, 2008; Kharlamov, 2012), there exists no comprehensive metaphorical analysis of the cognitive models used to understand transgender identity or the transition process.

In a heteronormative cultural context, those who wish to claim a queer identity must, at some point, publically reveal their minority status. Whereas gay and lesbian coming-out narratives have existed now for several decades, transgender identity is a newer “culturally intelligible option” (Zimman, 2009, p. 68). Although there is a robust and active online community of trans individuals within the US, and a plethora of self-produced online content, coming out transgender remains largely understudied. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people have for many years been categorically grouped through the LGBTQ acronym (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning), yet the transgender experience is by no means a perfect parallel to the homosexual experience. Likewise, public disclosure of one’s transgender status is a distinct process from the disclosure of one’s sexual orientation. In fact, Zimman (2009) makes a very

convincing case for a separation between narratives of gay and lesbian coming-out events and those of the transgender community—transgender disclosure involves revealing not just a gender identity, but also a gender history.

THE COMING-OUT STORY AS A NARRATIVE GENRE

The gay coming-out story describes the speaker's internal experience of recognizing and acknowledging his sexuality and the external experience of revealing that information to others (Liang, 1997, p. 294). Coming-out stories are unique in that the event of coming out cannot be represented as one single act but must be thought of as a series of lifelong experiences (Wood, 1997, p. 258). Liang (1997) elucidates the ways in which narrators cope with the recognition and disclosure of their sexuality. Initially, each speaker elaborates a process of internal coming out, recognizing their attraction to same-sex partners. Internal coming out is followed by a vignette or sub-narrative that tells the story of external coming out, the revelation of sexual orientation to close family and friends. Coming out is "processual" in nature in that the speaker has to repeatedly claim and reenact his gay identity throughout his lifetime (Liang, 1997, p. 292). LGB individuals continually find themselves in situations in which they have to repeat their coming-out story to new audiences. Thus, the coming-out narrative is in its own right both iconic and performative in that the telling of the story is in fact the coming-out event (Wood, 1997).

Transgender coming-out narratives share many of the same characteristics with gay/lesbian coming-out stories. Often speakers reveal a historical episode in which they realize their external gender presentation conflicts with their internal identity. Speakers describe an extensive and step-wise process of deciding to disclose this divergence to friends and family. Like gay and lesbian coming out, transgender events of disclosure are in many cases performative—the disclosure of the transgender identity precedes the speaker's enactment of the claimed gender. However, in addition to these common coming-out themes, transgender coming-out stories include several unique characteristics. Regularly, there is an emphasis on the recognition of one's transgender status. In fact, many public transgender narratives include advice on "how to know if you are transgender." This motif is so frequent that it often thematically structures the self-produced video coming-out story on video sharing websites. The act of publicizing one's identity as transgender is motivated by the confusing nature of gender affiliation. As a consequence, the public transgender coming-out narrative serves to structure both the speaker's understanding of the transition process and to build a model of gender transition for the audience. Given this thematic arrangement, transgender narratives usually incorporate a heavy focus on decision-making and include a belabored segment in which the narrator describes all the factors that go into the decision to begin physical transition. Likewise, there are long segments dedicated to the description of physical transformation, from style decisions, such as hair and clothing, to medical intervention like hormone replacement therapies (HRT) and in some cases gender reassignment surgical procedures. It is within this thematic arrangement that we find the conceptual structure, the cognitive models used to understand the process.

LANGUAGE, POLITICS, AND A METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

In the last two decades, the attention of cognitive linguists and psycholinguists has turned to the analysis of political discourse and reasoning (Lakoff, 2002, 2009; Lakoff & Wehling,

2012; Fausey & Matlock, 2011; Matlock, 2012). Much of this research focuses on revealing the unconscious assumptions, which organize speakers' comprehension of complex political topics. A running theme throughout recent cognitive linguistic analyses is real-world applicability. Investigators in academia along with partner researchers outside use cognitive linguistic tools to benefit underrepresented communities and reveal how social inequality is embedded in and perpetuated by language use, covering issues including sexuality education (Real Reason), women's health and abortion (Real Reason), same-sex marriage (Face Value Project), education reform (Frameworks Institute, Cultural Logic) climate disruption (Skinnemoen, 2009; Cultural Logic), crime (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011), economic inequality (Shenker-Osorio, 2012), and immigration (Charteris-Black, 2006; Chilton, 2005; Hart, 2007, 2010; Lakoff & Fergusson, 2006; Lederer, 2013).

Because much of this work is applied, and occurs outside the academic publishing sphere, the research methods involved in this practice are often vague. For the most part, communication analysts draw on small samples of data and reach conclusions that are best characterized as conjecture. For example, in a recent study by the Frameworks Institute (Volmert et al., 2013), the organization describes its data elicitation as “gathering . . . a big scoop of language” through cultural model interviews (p. 40). The goal of this research is to establish particular reasoning patterns as conceptually central and then offer advice on how to shift public thinking. Frameworks Institute refers to its process as “Strategic Frame Analysis™.” Other organizations reference the same idea as “cognitive strategic analysis,” “strategic framing,” and “framing strategies.” The goal of applied cognitive and conceptual metaphor research is commendable—to effect change by introducing models that align with a progressive value system. But that goal comes with questions about how conceptual dominance can be established and evaluated through discourse data. For example, how many times does a particular model need to be evoked in order to establish it as a “dominant” conceptual model? Does the fact that certain individuals rely on particular models translate to collective reasoning patterns at a societal level? Is there a way to quantify dominance? And, is there a way to prove conceptual dominance given a limited amount of data?

Although more transparent in their methodologies, metaphor analysts in academia grapple with these same questions. In his analysis of family-based metaphors used to describe the politics of the European Union, Musolff (2006, p. 24) questions the relationship between linguistic metaphor, particular manifestations and extensions of a conceptual metaphor, and the nature of the source domain. He maintains that certain discourse communities share specific means of evoking source domains through their reliance on common folk models and shared scenarios. Musolff argues for the cultural dominance of particular metaphor strains by counting the number of times each is evoked in his corpus. In his analysis, token frequency is taken as a measure of conceptual supremacy.

In a more recent exploration into corpus methodology and metaphor analysis, Oster (2010) uses collocation patterns to identify which lexical units may be most associated with metaphorical description of the emotion fear. Oster concedes that metaphor research is tricky using large-scale corpora. Without a corpus explicitly annotated for conceptual metaphor, there is no way to directly search a body of data¹. Instead, Oster (2010) uses co-occurrence information—the lexical units that most frequently collocate with *fear*—to find target-specific metaphorical expressions.

¹There are currently metaphorically annotated corpus projects under construction such as the one at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, <http://www2.let.vu.nl/oz/metaphorlab/metcor/documentation/home.html>

She then uses this data to build a source domain ontology. She argues the most “relevant” metaphors are those evoked by the highest number of linked linguistic expressions (p. 742). For example “*FEAR IS SOMETHING INSIDE THE BODY*” is evoked more frequently than is “*FEAR IS AN ANTAGONIST*.” Some metaphors, however, such as “*FEAR IS FIRE*” are more creatively produced because they are evoked by a larger set of linguistic expressions. Oster thus combines frequency information with lexical co-occurrence information to produce a source domain’s productivity and creativity index (p. 748). These are additional parameters by which she can compare source domains.

As Oster (2010) concedes, one difficulty in this algorithmic approach comes from the nature of conceptual metaphor itself. Most metaphorical data draws from multiple source domains at the same time. For example, when fear is *attacking from the inside*, fear is both an entity in the body and an antagonist at the same time. Thus, though useful for attaining certain types of information, Oster’s lexical approach falls short in providing a complete picture of how fear is understood metaphorically on its own and in relation to other emotions. Hence, the advantage of corpus-based, quantitative studies of metaphorical data is that they include a systematic approach to building and analyzing a representative corpus, direct means of assessing that corpus, and they are able to produce results that are replicable, transparent, and reliable. Nevertheless, “proving” conceptual salience has been elusive. Thus there remains a gap between the goal of the politically driven analyst and the corpus methodology currently available.

BUILDING A COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE DATA

Preliminary data was compiled from various online sources, culminating in an archive of transition narratives that includes 30 self-published coming-out stories on YouTube, 10 television interviews from broadcast networks such as ABC and CNN, five published autobiographical works, multiple internet forum postings, and message board commentary. All data is publically accessible and no one-on-one in-person elicitation took place. To supplement the archive of narrative data, a transition-specific corpus was built by drawing on posting from one specific thread within the *Experience Project* website (www.experienceproject.com). The Experience Project is a public website in which members can join and build online communities centered on a wide variety of life experiences.²

A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACH TO MINING FOR COMPLEX METAPHORICAL MODELS

Can Frequency Lists Give Clues to Metaphorical Models in the Data?

Unlike the investigation of a lexically encoded metaphorical concept like fear, a corpus approach directed at a concept like gender transition isn’t straightforward. Because transition is understood

²The thread I accessed is called “I am Transgender (Personal stories, advice, and support)” (IAT). There are 2,010 subscribers to this thread. From it, I culled 200 consecutive postings from the years 2012–2014. Each posting ranges from a few sentences to well over 10 paragraphs. The full corpus is comprised of 73,839 words.

as a process, not an abstract entity, a corpus investigation cannot begin with lexeme specific searches as was done by Oster (2010). That is, searching the IAT corpus for the word *transition* isn't going to reveal the complex model(s) and/or source domains involved in understanding gender transition as is the case with an emotion like fear.

A more fruitful starting point is to examine thematic trends in the data as a whole. To gain a big-picture view of the transition data, we can review a list of the most frequently used words in the IAT. At the lexical level, these corpus frequency statistics confirm the common themes hinted at both in preliminary data and in the sociolinguistic work on coming-out narratives, e.g., Liang (1997) and Zimman (2009). Table 1 includes the 500 most frequent words in the IAT corpus. Excluding functional terms (which are not bolded) such as pronouns, articles, quantifiers, adverbs, particles, discourse markers, auxiliary verbs, common prepositions, and very high frequency verbs, the lexical set reveals several semantic constellations.

Word frequencies indicate that when discussing transition, speakers focus on physical change and the effect of their transition on friends, partners, and family. The bolded data in Table 1 reveals the following semantic fields: FAMILY (*mother, father, sister, brother*), GENDER (*male, female, feminine, guy, girl, hormones, transition, HRT*), PHYSICAL APPEARANCE (*dress, makeup, hair, clothes, beautiful, body, face, drag*), COGNITION (*think, believe, ask, hear, learn*), TIME (*year, week, day, moment, second*), RELATIONSHIPS (*wife, marry, love, sex, gay, community*). None of these concepts are surprising.

What the lexical grouping doesn't reveal are obvious metaphorical patterns. As preliminary qualitative analysis suggests, transition is understood metaphorically, but it's not clear how so, based on a survey of word frequencies alone. The narrative archive was, thus, manually searched for metaphorical language, e.g., Charteris-Black (2004) and Stefanowitsch (2006).

A FIRST LARGE-SCALE MODEL

Transition Is a Long, Slow Journey

Data in the narrative archive suggests that transition is primarily understood as a journey through space. This specific source domain comes as no surprise since change in general is understood as motion through space. In this metaphor, known as the "event structure metaphor" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 219; Peña Cervel, 2004), states are locations, change is motion, progress is forward movement, and purposes are destinations (i.e., *fall in love, come out of depression, reach a goal*). In (1), Janet Mock, a transgender rights advocate, explains the conceptual origin of certain labels used in the trans community:

- (1) . . . So there's "trans-," right . . . I think most people understand what trans is, and "cis-" is kind of the opposite in terms of a prefix. "Trans-" means, um, **to cross**, and "cis-" . . . means **on the same side of** . . . so when you're talking about cisgendered or cissexual or transgendered or transsexual, "trans" often means **to cross** and "cis" means **to stay on the same side of**. So often we're talking about relationships with your assigned sex at birth . . . which are based on the way our genitals may look. When we're born, as babies, you're assigned a sex, which is often different from your gender expression . . . For cis people, they oftentimes, most likely, identify with the sex and gender that they were assigned with at birth—they **stay on the same side of**. Whereas trans people, **they cross that, or perceive to cross some kind of invisible barrier** that we have about gender and sex and sex that's assigned at birth.

TABLE 1
The 500 Most Frequent Words in the IAT Corpus

i	up	see	own	getting	later	gay	pain	wonderful	weeks
the	do	many	world	since	place	parents	rest	alone	bed
to	more	our	little	last	wearing	reason	show	bus	changing
and	how	good	course	tell	night	along	step	clothing	decided
a	know	did	live	wanted	remember	coming	therapy	each	difficult
my	from	things	same	enough	start	doesn't	transsexual	guess	example
of	now	most	year	happy	anything	else	turned	hear	haven't
that	there	over	down	its	believe	his	yourself	heard	head
in	been	their	though	until	called	morning	beautiful	post	issues
it	being	hair	change	big	dressed	simply	becoming	sister	knowing
was	get	he	dress	part	family	sisters	during	won	level
me	no	gender	should	real	far	age	genetic	word	meant
as	some	started	living	today	hormones	born	it's	bad	money
have	girl	find	thought	true	used	changed	line	case	open
you	your	than	told	able	yes	early	question	certain	personal
is	then	us	again	ago	began	H.R.T.	quickly	certainly	realize
for	an	love	cross	doing	experience	nice	relationship	comfortable	skin
be	really	which	ever	dressing	least	re-	use	community	somehow
with	feel	friends	need	every	nothing	story	wanting	doctor	wonder
but	years	look	help	others	room	together	without	fun	already
on	don't	both	knew	feelings	changes	wife	between	god	answer
not	myself	day	having	friend	days	yet	either	happened	bring
this	transgender	make	new	point	does	care	forward	helped	call
so	were	say	take	try	feel	pretty	idea	learned	closet
she	by	few	these	anyone	feeling	problem	left	feels	closets
all	could	after	times	asked	give	thinking	matter	gave	gave
are	very	why	body	away	makeup	almost	mom	gave	gave
I'm	even	didn't	off	different	once	gone	pass	gave	gave
at	people	something	lot	great	quite	mind	questions	gave	gave
or	way	too	transition	took	accept	often	seeing	gave	gave
had	back	went	better	fact	ask	probably	support	gave	gave
we	going	another	surgery	him	months	stop	thoughts	gave	gave

(Continued)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

out	into	female	hard	past	wish	act	truly	outside
am	has	said	name	understand	became	comes	couldn't	situation
just	first	came	self	wrong	group	don't	deep	stay
her	go	trans	sure	done	however	future	easier	store
who	them	long	two	hope	keep	happen	inner	strong
like	well	man	while	men	making	inside	issue	talking
what	women	right	may	I'd	met	kept	lives	totally
would	never	always	next	everyone	needed	less	lost	transitioning
about	still	come	someone	girls	read	mean	mirror	treatment
if	any	through	work	I'll	several	mother	moment	working
one	because	those	guy	become	side	number	ones	young
woman	think	around	let	clothes	talk	public	perhaps	asking
will	want	where	looking	found	accepted	reality	second	completely
can	much	felt	made	old	dresser	saying	seemed	
when	only	also	put	such	full	school	seems	
time	other	before	thing	home	house	seen	sense	
life	here	finally	best	process	married	starting	soon	
they	person	got	feminine	society	openly	taking	stopped	
				wasn't		whole	tried	

TABLE 2
 “TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY”

<i>Journey</i>	<i>Gender Transition</i>
Traveler	Trans individual
Origin	Sex assigned at birth
Destination	Identified gender
Path	Transition process
Intermediate locations	Transition milestones
Vehicle	Hormone therapy

Mock’s use of spatial language stems from a cultural understanding of a journey from origin to destination. Table 2 includes the details of the “JOURNEY” frame and how it maps over to the target domain, gender transition. Humans are assigned a sex at birth. This sex assignment is thought of as the origin of the transition. The destination of the completed journey maps to the gender with which one identifies or feels to be true. The journey’s path represents choices and actions taken to reach the desired gender identity. These are both steps taken to recognize and accept the gender mismatch and practices that affect one’s physical appearance such as clothing and hair choices, hormone therapies, and surgical procedures.

The “JOURNEY” model is corroborated in data from the IAT corpus. Table 3 includes a set of lexical items that evoke the “JOURNEY” frame. The data is organized by source domain element and corresponding trigger lexemes. The number attached to each lexeme indicates the number of tokens directly evoking the “JOURNEY” model in the data. This number is a subset of the total token frequency.³

TABLE 3
 Journey Source Domain Language and Examples From IAT Corpus

<i>Conceptual Elements</i>	<i>English Lexemes</i>
JOURNEY	<i>journey</i> (34)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On July 26th, I will celebrate my ninth year of being out as a transgender woman. It has been an interesting journey which is still continuing. ● Perhaps you’re just starting out, or perhaps you’re a loved one of someone who is on their journey and you’re hurting, confused and scared. ● I can admit it now, I am a transgender woman and I’m ready to start my journey! ● I Am Ashton Marie. I’m transgender M2F. My journey so far has been a test of strength and courage, I have fully come out about who I am to family, friends, and work. ● Plus you can see by the year, I had a long way to go! I knew I was too far from home on my gender journey. I wasn’t sure if I ever would get back-or if I even wanted to! ● I’m biased but it’s hard to imagine many tougher journeys through life than changing ones gender. 	
PATH	<i>road</i> (6), <i>path</i> (9), <i>step</i> (26)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you have to walk the same road - or are trying to understand someone close to you who is doing so - my thoughts and prayers are with you. 	

(Continued)

³The full data set is accessible electronically by contacting the author.

TABLE 3
(Continued)

Conceptual Elements	English Lexemes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● So September again is a big month for my progression down this transition road. ● I know I've walked a path that for many is still shrouded in mystery and tainted with anxiety. ● I believe that transition is about M to F or F to M paths, and if you chose to take that step you should know a little about the difficulty in getting to the end point. ● She calls me her butterfly. I just worry once I start further down the path. Will she be there. ● The next year, 2010, I went through the next major step in my transition. I knew I wanted the surgery to get a vagina, but I didn't know when it would happen. ● But with breasts and half my male part now gone, it seems I'm one big step away from being a complete woman. 	
LOCATION ON PATH	<i>place (3), here (4), far (12), stage (7)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I became quiet and withdrew into myself. I could see a doorway and I was on one side of an open door, staring through into another room. As I watched, I saw my body walking from the room I was in into the other room. The place I started was my male-centric life. The place I crossed into is my female-centric life. During this I saw myself turn and stare back through the door in which I just passed. I could see my old self standing there, unable to come with me. I looked down at my new self and there I was, the woman I am becoming. I paused and wondered if I would miss the person I once was. I know there will be parts that I, indeed, do miss, but nothing can compare with what lies ahead. After a pause, I stepped into my future. ● It's taken 5 years to get here, today was a mile stone, soon I will be complete and by 2014 hopefully I can pee and make love like other woman do. ● I guess I never realised how far I have come. ● The first stage of coming my coming out was acknowledging to myself how I feel about my gender. 	<i>back (10), forward (9), direction (3)</i>
DIRECTION ON PATH	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I'd grown increasingly weary of constantly, year after year, waveringly breaching my feminine nature and then stepping back into the masculine role offered me at birth, disgusted at not only my lack of sophistication at the task, but also at how like a trapped animal it made me feel. ● Because I love her I want her to be happy. My own happiness, it seems, does not conflict with that (especially once she understood for me) there was no turning back . . . ● I now have the power to be who I'm about and I've lost that fear that kept me from moving forward ● At this stage, I would say that I am adolescent in terms of my emotional feminine development. I have a long way to go to achieve some kind of wholeness and a definite sense of direction for my life. 	<i>arrive (3)</i>
DESTINATION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can see that some percentage of newly arrived F's and M's want to do something aligned with their attained gender and not risk that position by entering politics. ● I was naive enough to think I had arrived as a trans woman then reality set in. ● But more importantly I hear from more of you asking how I served my due diligence to arrive here. 	

DIGGING DEEPER

Qualitatively probing the metaphorical data is an important step in assessing nuanced details about the “*JOURNEY*” metaphor. For example, the corpus data doesn’t reveal much information about how fast or slow the transition journey is—searching the corpus for markers of speed such as the words *slow/slowly* or *fast/quickly* yields few results. However, fine-grained exploration into the narrative archive along with the IAT corpus data seems to suggest that when the journey is elaborated through explicit comparison to motion in space, the analogized domain is one that entails slow movement, i.e., climbing up a mountain, or wading into water as in (2). In (2), the speaker understands her own experience not as a direct flight from origin to destination, but rather as a journey with intermediate destinations along a path:

- (2) I have often likened my transition to slowly **wading** out into a cold lake. I take a **step or two**, shiver a bit at the coldness, and **hang out** for a bit as my body acclimates. Then I decide if I want to go deeper. **All along the transition** I have been open to the concept that I can **stay** where I am, **go back**, or **push deeper**. And though several times I have **pulled back**—too deep, too fast, too cold—I have always found myself **moving toward transition**.

On the other hand, there is at least one case in which transition is described as a journey with no layover:

- (3) This . . . **moving forward** with transition is **100% autopilot**. **I couldn’t stop** it if I wanted to . . . **I’m on a train heading down a path** I’m not sure I should be on and **no way to get off the train**. I feel a massive compelling to **continue on the train**, but afraid that I should try to **get off the tracks**.

Although the “*JOURNEY*” source domain is consistently evoked, it can clearly be elaborated in different ways to match the uniqueness of each speaker’s transition process. For the male-to-female transgender speaker in (2), transition milestones are intermediate locations. In her journey, physical changes are seen as temporary. In fact, she can decide to make a change, such as wear female clothing or put on makeup, and then *go back*, decide she is not yet comfortable with the physical changes and reverse them. In this narrative, the journey frame is elaborated as motion into a cold lake. The particular terrain chosen reveals nuanced detail about the speaker’s understanding of the transition process. Her familiarity with cold, deep, water and the entailments therein structure her lived experience. The shoreline of a lake is often shallow, but in many cases the footing drops off suddenly to a depth well below one’s ability to stand. Thus, entry into the lake must be cautious and thoughtful. Cold water makes the experience uncomfortable, but if the goal is to swim to the other side, that discomfort is necessary. Time is essential. The body takes time to acclimate to the cold. Depth awareness is always present. The deeper one goes, the wetter one gets. At a certain depth, the body is immersed in water and the bottom disappears. At this point, the traveler must swim. For this speaker, full immersion maps to the end of her journey, to what she calls “transition”—a state requiring full commitment—most likely mapping to sex reassignment surgery. An important entailment of this journey narrative is the fact that the traveler moves on her own accord. She chooses to take each individual step into deeper water. For the speaker in (2), transition is under her control. It is slow and methodical.

When the journey is elaborated as a train ride as in (3), the entailments differ. Trains are fast. Engineers control the train, choose the speed, and decide the future stops. Passengers are passive, trapped inside, not in control. Speed is scary.

One crucial difference between these two elaborations is the notion of agency. The first speaker is consciously making choices about her transition, consciously deciding if and when to move forward in her process. The second speaker feels compelled to transition. The desire to transition is so strong that she does not retain agency over the process. Likewise for her, the process seems to be all or nothing—on the train or off. There is no sense that she can decide to move forward with intermediate changes and not go “all the way.” In these two examples we see an inherent conceptual paradox that arguably arises from the unique characteristics of transition. The possibility of changing one’s gender is, in many cases, a discovery trans individuals make later in life—in adolescence or early adulthood. Although many trans individuals recognize early on that their gender identity doesn’t match the physical characteristics of their body, they don’t know in childhood that sex characteristics can be changed. Once this possibility is presented, trans people often express it as a revelation—an idea that is freeing in many ways, but scary in others.

But physical transition can only be made over time. It takes time to implement hormone therapies. It takes time to schedule surgeries. It takes time for the body to react and to heal. Thus, in the metaphorical language we see this dynamic play out. The desire to rectify a mismatched gender presentation is the compelling, driving force—the train that guides the motion. But transition in reality is a process of many small changes sometimes spread across years, not days or months. Thus the two types of journeys—fast and out of control and slow and methodical—are both apt models to describe transition, nevertheless each leads to seemingly conflicting inferences.

Commentary from the following trans writer reinforces a main take-away—although most trans individuals seem to evoke “*TRANSITION AS A JOURNEY*,” the experience of transition and thus the elaboration of the metaphor is clearly not a universal:

- (4) Let’s take a moment away from these antics, sit down and have a serious heart to heart about the true nature of transition. The truth about transition is that it varies for everyone. There is no **universal roadmap**. There is **no first step for everyone** (beyond maybe the recognition that one is trans). These **journeys** are so unique, they **don’t even go in a straight line!** Many of us, myself included, have **zigzagging routes**. If you drew them in illustrated form they would stretch all over the page! . . . **Transition doesn’t come with a fucking GPS.**⁴

Not only does this speaker articulate the idea that transition is an unguided journey, but she also suggests that forward motion is slow. A “zigzagging” trajectory maps to indecision in the target domain. That is, for many, one transition milestone experienced does not necessarily lead to a direct and reasonable next step. For example, some female-to-male transgender men begin testosterone therapies and start to build muscle mass and grow facial hair but don’t feel comfortable surgically removing breast tissue as a next logical step in the transition process. In fact, some who have committed to the transition process decide later to de-transition.

⁴Callahan (2014).

TABLE 4
The “*DIVIDED SELF*” in Combination With “*KNOWING IS SEEING*”

<i>Pre-transition</i>		<i>Post-transition</i>	
Body →	Opaque container	Body →	Opaque container
Inside body →	Internal self, identified gender	Inside body →	Sex assigned at birth, past public gender
Outside body →	External self, gender appearance	Outside body →	Identified gender, present public gender

The true identity and gender history of the speaker in (6) is hidden from the public. Character and essence must be consciously accessed and presented. The transgender individual, unlike the cisgender person, has to reconcile a past public gender identity that doesn’t match the current public gender presentation. It is the revelation of this gender history that comprises a significant part of the coming-out narrative, and both reinforces and contributes to an understanding of the self divided. Table 4 illustrates the mappings involved in this metaphor: Pre-transition, the body is a container for the internal self. Post-transition, the body, as a container, hides one’s original sex assignment and gender history. Post-transition, the body exterior matches the identified gender.

The metaphor gives rise to common expressions like *trapped in the wrong body*, revealing one’s *true self*, and *coming out*. All these phrases are seen repeatedly in the narrative archive and the IAT corpus. As with the “*JOURNEY*” model, the IAT corpus data confirms the robust use of the metaphor. Table 5 includes a set of lexical items that evoke the “*DIVIDED SELF*” understanding. The data is organized by source domain element and corresponding trigger lexemes. The number attached to each lexeme indicates the number of tokens directly evoking the metaphor. This number is a subset of the total token frequency⁷.

When applied to the transgender individual, the divided self mirrors a gender division. Consistent reference to a metaphorical understanding of the body as a container reinforces this idea of gender mismatch.

EVALUATING MODEL SALIENCE AND/OR DOMINANCE

Qualitative metaphor research forces researchers to assert rather than show the conceptual dominance of particular metaphorical models. A repeated lack of quantitative data suggests a quantitative approach to establishing dominance can be challenging. Although conclusions about conceptual dominance may be tenuous, lexical information is nonetheless valuable.

Simple frequency statistics can, in fact, serve as indicators of model salience. The “over-use” of model-evoking lexical units points to conceptual reliance on a holistic domain. Therefore, one way to argue a given model is dominant among a particular group of speakers is to compare the frequency of lexical triggers in and out of the speech community. If a particular model is

⁷The corpus was searched for “*DIVIDED SELF*”-related lexemes and then manually filtered to pull out only metaphorical data. Any literal use of the lexeme or metaphorical use in an unrelated metaphorical context was excluded from the overall count.

TABLE 5
 “DIVIDED SELF” Metaphor Data From IAT Corpus

<i>Conceptual Elements</i>	<i>English Lexemes</i>
DIVIDED SELF	<i>self</i> (27), <i>true</i> (12)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of my true self had allowed me to be able to share who I am (and how I feel) with those closest to me. • I guess, really though, when you’ve kept a secret as long as I have, when you’ve had to hide your inner self, even from yourself as long as I have when you’re finally able to live as the person you’ve always known yourself to be, it’s hard to control your emotions . . . • Years ago I also started to feel my inner transgender self went very deep and I was subconsciously presenting a feminine aura other people were sensing. • Totally stoked to finally be able to be myself and get the ball rolling on making my outer self match my inner self. • Every now and then though I still have to “butch” it up and utilize my disappearing male self. 	
BODY IS CONTAINER	<i>body</i> (16), <i>trap</i> (6), <i>inside</i> (10), <i>inner</i> (9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was born in a male body and lived the first 21 years of my life but a few months back I came to the realization that I am female . . . • As I grew older so did this urge in fact it started to become an on going battle where there were times I felt I may have been born with the wrong body . . . • I am 17 years old, I am a beautiful young woman trapped in a hideous gentleman’s body. • name is Selina, I am 17 years old, I am a beautiful young woman trapped in a hideous gentleman’s body. I love makeup and I love wearing dresses. • To do that I had to look inside of my own self and discover who I am. • I hate looking in the mirror because the person I see isn’t the person I feel like on the inside • I guess, really though, when you’ve kept a secret as long as I have, when you’ve had to hide your inner self, even from yourself as long as I have when you’re finally able to live as the person you’ve always known yourself to be it’s hard to control your emotions . . . • If indeed you have an inner girl and you let her out of your physical closet amazing things can happen. 	
UNKNOWN IS HIDDEN	<i>coming out</i> (41), <i>hide/hidden</i> (6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today is the ninth anniversary of my coming out. It was such a relief when I first came out. • The first stage of coming my coming out was acknowledging to myself how I feel . . . • I just continued living with these feelings deeply hidden within me in the closet. • I got sick sick [sic] of having to hide. Finally came out as a transgender person. 	

consistently evoked to address a metaphorical concept, then some of the lexemes associated with that model should appear in topic specific data more frequently than in basic discourse.

In order to test this proposition, I compared the frequency of use of the noun *journey* within the IAT corpus to the frequency of occurrence in a sample of American English between the years 2010 and 2012 taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies, 2008). There are 1,976 tokens of the noun *journey* between the years 2010–2012 in COCA, which is comprised of 10,382,537 words amounting to a 0.0190% chance of occurrence.

There are 34 tokens of the noun *journey* (used to address the transition process) in the IAT corpus, which is comprised of 73,839 words amounting to a 0.0460% chance of occurrence. In other words, the lexical item *journey* is more than twice as likely to show up in the IAT corpus than it is in basic American English discourse of the same time frame. Of course, this result is expected if in fact transition is understood as a journey through space. A similar comparison can be made with the lexical item *self*. There are 27 tokens of the noun *self* (used to address the transition process) in the IAT corpus, resulting in a 0.0365% chance of occurrence. This is almost 3 times the likelihood of occurrence in non-topic-specified discourse, where it has a 0.0137 % chance of occurrence. (And this differential is based on only the uses of *self* that evoke the metaphorical model, not other unrelated uses of the word.)

It becomes more difficult to numerically evaluate a constellation of source domain triggers. Trigger lexemes used to mine the corpus data are not necessarily lexical items unique to the source domain. For example, the word *step* has a high frequency of occurrence in language used to describe transition, but it also has a very high frequency in typical English discourse and is employed by many other target domains that rely on the same source domain. Thus direct frequency count comparisons of individual words may not yield useful information.

One way to evaluate a set of lexical triggers together is to examine cross-corpus frequency rankings. To do this, I compared the frequency ranking of model-evoking lexical items in the IAT corpus to their ranking in COCA's 5,000 most frequent word list (<http://www.wordfrequency.info/top5000.asp>).⁸ The results differ for the two metaphors. As shown in Table 6, the words *journey*, *step*, *forward*, *path*, and *direction* all occur more frequently in the IAT corpus than they do in COCA. This finding supports the idea that certain aspects of the concept of a journey are being addressed more frequently when speakers are discussing gender transition than in basic discourse. And we know from the qualitative evaluation of the data that the journeys discussed in the IAT corpus are indicative of metaphorical, not literal, travel.

Additionally, this frequency ranking comparison also hints at the strength by which an individual lexical item is tied to particular metaphorical language. We can hypothesize that the words *journey* and *path*, for example, are strong indicators of the metaphorical model since their frequency is significantly higher in the IAT than in COCA, certainly more so than the words *road* or *place*.

Demonstrating a more robust pattern, the set of model-referencing words used to evoke the "DIVIDED SELF" metaphor are *all* more frequent in the IAT than in COCA.

Each trigger word in Table 7: *body*, *self*, *true*, *coming* (as in *coming out*), *inside*, *inner*, *hide*, *hidden*, and *trapped*, occurs more frequently in the IAT than in COCA. However, again we do see disparities in how strong a trigger word is associated with the model. For example, *self*, *inner*, and *hidden* (ranking differentials of 1,992, 2,024, and 3,045 respectively) are much more frequently used in the IAT than in COCA, whereas, *true* and *inside* (differentials of 275, 572) are more frequent in the IAT, but not by such a large margin.

The fact that only some journey language is more frequent in the IAT while divided-self language is consistently present suggests that the lexical items tied to the "DIVIDED SELF" metaphor function as a tighter constellation of lexemes. That is, the lexical set is comprised of specific expressions that patterns more closely and frequently together. To show this, we can

⁸The IAT contains of 6,087 unique lexical items.

TABLE 6
Comparative Ranking of “JOURNEY”-associated Lexical Items in the IAT and COCA

	IAT	COCA
Here	102	96
Back	133	108
Place	257	181
Far	267	253
Journey	299	2431
Step	360	588
Forward	379	818
Path	664	1343
Road	713	490
Direction	796	931
Stage	1181	832
Arrive	1410	813
Arrival	3241	3222

Note. Boldface indicates that lexical trigger is more frequent in the IAT corpus than in COCA.

TABLE 7
Comparative Ranking of “DIVIDED SELF”-associated Lexical Items in the IAT and COCA

	IAT	COCA
Body	181	314
Self	189	2181
True	218	493
Coming	311	4772
Inside	395	967
Inner	448	2472
Hide	616	1261
Hidden	989	4034
Trapped	1049	> 5000

Note. All lexical triggers shown are more frequent in the IAT corpus than in COCA.

search for N-grams within COCA and the IAT (e.g., Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 832). For example, *true self* functions as a formulaic expression. In COCA, *true* is the third most frequent collocate (1L) of *self*, with an MI score of 6.09. When the collocation range is broadened to 5L, 5R, *true* is still very common—the fourth most frequent collocate in this range (MI 3.28). *Inner* patterns the same way. It is the fourth most frequent collocate of *self* in COCA (1L, MI 8.52). When the IAT corpus is probed for N-gram clusters *wrong body* is found 10 times, and there are four instances of *trapped in a * body*.

Journey language, on the other hand, is more diffuse. The lexical set used to activate the source domain is larger, co-occurrence patterns are weaker, and the constellation of model-evoking terms is less directly tied to the metaphor itself. For example, when searching for collocates of the noun *journey* in COCA (5L, 5R), none of the trigger lexemes above appears in the top 100 collocates. The same is true of the word *path*. Clearly these words (*journey, path, step, etc.*) form part of

the lexical set that evokes a journey frame, but they don't appear next to one another in running discourse.

When two models are in conceptual competition, so to speak, the technique used here should be helpful in establishing conceptual dominance. However, in the case of gender transition, the difference between the robustness of frequency differentials in Tables 6 and 7 should not be taken as a sign that one model is more dominant than the other. In fact, many of the examples listed in Tables 3 and 5 exemplify how both models can be active simultaneously. The following quote taken from the narrative archive nicely illustrates how intertwined they can be in an extensive elaboration:

- (7) I am a woman **in progress**. I am **not a finished product** by any stretch of the imagination. I have **so far that I have to travel**, but I am grateful [sic] to be on the **road of discovery** than on **the road of denial and fear**. I am a woman in progress. Sometimes I think about **how far I have to go . . . The trek** is discovering how to map the **discontinuity between my body and my mind**. I'm not complaining—the **body I have is part of me, as is the essence of my personality**. They may **not be in sync**, but that is my special challenge in life. And to let the people who love me know that the essence of who I am is still me—the biggest change is **that I understand myself** a little better . . . I don't know if I'll ever be **a finished product**, but I **cannot stop this trip**. Better to **enjoy the journey, even if the destination is not clear . . .**⁹

The division between subject and self allows the speaker to understand her role as both sculptor and sculpture, as possessor and inhabitant of her own body, and as a traveler along a journey with no clear destination. The gender journey is one of finding ways to match the mind's gender with the body's gender.

DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS OF TWO MODELS

When transition is understood as a journey, questions arise as to how the process should proceed. Is it possible to be located in a space between a male and a female? Can a journey begin but not end? Upon arrival at the destination, is it possible to go back? Not only do these reasoning patterns structure the transition experience, their attached inferences often conflict with one another. If gender is understood as a bounded category, as a fixed location in space with defined, rigid borders, then how does one get out? A slow journey implies intermediate stopovers; what do these locations map to in the transition process?

In some cases, the implications of a space-based understanding of gender are quite transparent in the data. For example, because gender is understood as a bounded region in space, transgender individuals express discomfort with the rigid boundaries that circumscribe male and female categories, leading to a contestation of the binary itself. We see this in both linguistic metaphor and co-speech gesture through the use of iconic symmetrical C-handshakes. In (8) and (9), both speakers discuss *fitting in*:

- (8) 1 I think that's one thing that's—that's difficult
 2 about sort of . . . not really **fitting into** a gender
 [C-handshakes joined to make iconic circle]

⁹<http://comingouttrans.wordpress.com/page/2>

3 –the, uh, the gender binary

[C-handshapes joined again to make iconic circle]

(9) In the last few years I tried my best to **fit in** the GIRL . . . uh, like . . . appearance . . .

[C-handshapes joined to make iconic circle]

The use of iconic gesture to represent category boundary reinforces conceptual rigidity. So, although these transgender speakers bemoan a prescribed gender assignment, the available conceptual model actually reinforces the boundaries. Rather than seeing themselves on the margins of a category with fuzzy boundaries, speakers see themselves as outsiders looking in.

Younger transgender individuals contest the binary model in other ways too, not just by calling it out, but by trying to move away from it. In one example of a common expression, the speaker in (10) introduces the term *gender fluidity*.

(10) We are **gender fluid**. Sometimes we feel male, and sometimes female. Often, we're **someplace in between** . . . or else we're both or neither . . .

In a related example, the speaker in (11) presents the idea of being *bigendered* and moving *back and forth* between genders.

(11) However, that is not to say I dislike being a boy. I believe I am starting to come to terms that I am probably **bigendered**. I don't feel trapped in the wrong body. I feel I could be happy as either, but want more than anything to be able to change **back and forth** at will. I love what I am, but I love what girls have to offer as well.

Both expressions, *fluidity* and *back and forth*, constitute a linguistic strategy to rebut strict gender assignment. Nevertheless, each expression has its roots in a “*JOURNEY*” model. In actuality, this elaboration is simply one in which the traveler can freely move between male and female destinations. Thus, a fascinating aspect of the “*JOURNEY*” model is its conceptual dominance. Even in overt contestation of its inferential structure, speakers have to engage it. They cannot conceive of a non-spatial construct when talking and thinking about gender.

The consistent and elaborated “*JOURNEY*” model thus raises the question: If there is space between the bounded regions of male and female, then what is in that space? In the real world of transition, in the actual experience of gender reassignment, the space in between is not an intermediate gender, but rather a mix of the two. The mix of two physical gender manifestations is potentially a masculine body wearing a dress, a low voice from a mouth painted in lipstick, a woman's figure with bounded breasts. These are the physical realities of those undergoing the transition process. Because there is no conceptual space between male and female gender identity, between the binary, discrete categories, society can only understand transition as a mingling of gendered characteristics. Thus the metaphorical understanding of gender traps speakers conceptually and forbids an alternative conceptualization of a non-gendered person, or a person that is truly androgynous, someone neither male nor female¹⁰. The rigid category boundaries override any consistent and cultural understanding of what could exist in the space between the two bounded regions.

¹⁰There is a small movement in American English to add a non-gendered pronoun, *ze/zir*, to the English lexicon, but this gender-neutral pronoun is not used in the vast majority of speech communities in the US.

This hidden structure, which guides personal description of gender transition, has implications at a societal level. For example, the “*DIVIDED SELF*” metaphor, which is elaborated in the trans community as a division between internal, hidden identity and external, visible appearance, suggests transition is a matter of matching the two identities by moving from one category to another vis-à-vis forward motion on a path. The idea of *passing* as the gender with which one identifies is an apt description since the goal of the transgender individual is to align the two selves. However, ironically, in-group language from the trans community like the term *stealth*, which references the trans individual’s ability to hide the mismatch between assigned and experienced gender, comes with a slew of implications for those who hear the term outside the LGBT community. *Stealth* originates from the “*KNOWING IS SEEING*” metaphor in combination with the “*DIVIDED SELF*” model—the post-transition individual has transformed his appearance, his exterior, to match his identified gender so much so that his gender history is hidden and not apparent to others. The word, however, in its literal use implies purposeful disguise. The concept that a transgender person is purposefully disguising him or herself is at odds with cultural values centering on transparency, honesty, and the morality therein. Thus, certain examples of metaphorical language make sense given the dominant conceptual models used within the community but their entailment structures and connotation profiles can lead to unintended consequences for a public understanding of gender transition. Gender transition is purposeful, but it is not experienced as a choice in the truest sense of the word. The intention of the transgender person is not to deceive others, but a word like *stealth* reinforces inaccurate, established cultural models.

In a similar vein, there are inherent contradictions in the combination of inferences emerging from the two main models. For example *trapped in the wrong body* implies urgency to get out. However, when the “*JOURNEY*” model is elaborated, the transition journey is often described as slow, belabored, and methodical. For the transgender individual these two concepts can be held at the same time. Urgency coexists with extreme consequence. Altering one’s body is no easy decision. Thus, the path forward, so to speak, can be highly desired while at the same time approached with caution. However, to outsiders, urgency and deliberation clash at an inferential level. If change is imperative, it should move quickly.

Given the inherent paradox of inferential structure within the metaphorical models of transition, it should come as no surprise that gender transition is a poorly understood and not well-accepted idea outside the LGBTQ community (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Continued investigation of in-group language will inevitably shed light on the incompatibility between the reasoning patterns of transgender people and those who have little familiarity with the topic.

CONCLUSION

Through the thematic investigation of narratives of transition, it has been shown that the most robust metaphorical models used by trans individuals are accompanied by specific sets of entailments, whose inference patterns are sometimes at odds with one another. Ironically, the contestation of the gender binary itself leads, in some cases, to a reinforcement of the boundaries surrounding the two categories. When self-perception is misaligned with public perception, speakers rely on language to remedy the incompatibility. In the case of those undergoing gender

transition, this process can be hard to understand and discuss simply because speakers are beholden to their conceptual system and cultural understanding of gender. The metaphorical models used to understand gender don't allow for space in between the binary.

In this article, I have shown how target domains, structured by an experiential understanding of space and movement, merge to yield a complex integration of two salient models that align with one another in specific ways. The “*JOURNEY*” model and “*DIVIDED SELF*” metaphor combine to reveal a complex understanding of gender transition as a movement to match internal and external self. Through the exploration of transition-specific discourse, I have advocated for the inclusion of corpus-based techniques in the analysis of metaphorical models. I suggest that research attempts aimed at arguing for the conceptual dominance of a particular model will benefit from the use of frequency rankings as a quantitative tool in analytic assessment.

The concept of gender transition merits further study. Without data from cisgender individuals, no detailed conceptual comparison can be made. Although I reach suggestive conclusions, it is an open research question as to whether or not cisgender individuals rely on the same metaphorical models in their comprehension of gender transition. If the study of conceptual metaphor is essential to solving societal problems (e.g., Lakoff, 2002, 2009), continued investigation of this issue area is imperative to reduce the marginalization of and discrimination toward the transgender community. Conflicting reasoning patterns are clearly at the heart of social problems. As a consequence, the study of the metaphorical structure of personal discourse is a fundamental step in the process of understanding social reasoning and public attitude.

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