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Gesturing the source domain

The role of co-speech gesture in the metaphorical models of gender transition

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Gesture is aptly described as a “backdoor” to cognition (Sweetser, 2007, p. 203). Co-speech gesture has been shown to aid in the representation of abstract concepts (Parrill & Sweetser, 2004) and, specifically, encode metaphorical source domains (Cienki, 1998). This paper examines how co-speech gesture aligns with spoken and written narrative to support a spatially based representation of gender identity. Repeated gestural patterns include inward facing palms used to mime fictive category boundaries, gestural mapping of motion across metaphorical gender regions, manual deictic reference to interior and exterior self, and distancing from past gender assignment signaled through emblematic scare quotes. The data examined in this paper confirm the important role gesture plays in supplementing the instantiation of the metaphorical models that organize transgender speakers’ experience with and discussion of gender and transition.

Keywords: co-speech gesture, conceptual metaphor, gender transition

1. Introduction

Gender transition, like other cultural issues, is both conceptually and politically complicated. As illustrated in a wave of metaphor studies in and out of academia, the models used to inform personal experience have wide-ranging political effects (Lakoff, 2002, 2009; Lakoff & Wehling, 2012; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011, 2013). Because transgender individuals make up a frequently ostracized segment of the American population, experiencing disproportionate discrimination and violence (Kenagy, 2005; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002; Stotzer, 2009), attention toward the transgender conceptual experience is a first step in exploring where this marginalization originates at a societal level. With the rapid increase of computer-mediated discourse, personal descriptions of transition in the form of

online blogs constitute a growing portion of discourse on gender and transition, helping to shape the public’s perception of trans identity.

This study elaborates on work presented in Lederer (2015), in which the conceptual models of gender and transition are shown, in part, to derive from a set of repeated metaphors. The model includes several metaphors that share spatial features in their source domains: TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY; the body is a physical barrier between internal and external self (THE DIVIDED SELF METAPHOR); and a process of belabored decision-making (often communicated through the metaphor DECISION-MAKING IS WEIGHING). The JOURNEY domain is elaborated in a variety of ways, usually including various stops at intermediate points. This elaboration translates to the notion that gender transition is a slow and belabored process of mental and physical transference, often occurring over a timespan of years. The mappings of the metaphor are illustrated in Figure 1.

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

Figure 1. TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY (Lederer, 2015, p.103)

Since the inception of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, specific mappings between source and target domain have been considered to be systematic and part of a hierarchical ontology of metaphors (cf. Grady, 2005; Kövecses, 2010, 2015; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It is argued that metaphorical source domains range from general to specific, and at each level of subordination can inherit roles and features from a parent (Dodge, Hong, & Stickles, 2015). This hierarchy is germane to the analysis of gender and transition. At a superordinate level, gender transition is structured like other target domains involving sequential states of affiliation. Transitions of all kinds, such as physical development, emotional change, and career promotion are understood primarily through the same sets of metaphors, different instantiations and elaborations of the primary metaphors STATES ARE LOCATIONS (BOUNDED REGIONS IN SPACE) and CHANGE IS MOTION (Kövecses, 2010). The physical structures that serve as subcases of the source domain, however, vary, as locations in space can be elaborated in a variety of ways and metaphors can interact with one another, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The central research question for this study is not to discover which conceptual metaphors are involved in models of gender transition, but rather to gauge

Superordinate level:	STATES ARE LOCATIONS; MORE IS UP; STATUS IS UP; ETC.
Subordinate level:	GENDER TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY; CAREER AN UPWARD JOURNEY; ETC.
Linguistic examples:	<i>steps/paths in my transition, transition route, moving forward in transition, etc.</i>

Figure 2. The hierarchical nature of conceptual metaphors

how, as an integral part of meaning construction, gesture is used to evoke and elaborate existing metaphors.

The interaction between gesture, language, and metaphor takes on several forms. This study probes these interactional features by closely examining structural components of discrete gestural sequences to gauge gesture's role in meaning construction within the context of culturally shared and linguistically established cognitive models of gender and transition. In any domain, gesture can synchronously or asynchronously accompany linguistic metaphor; gesture can supplement linguistic metaphor by elaborating the source domain in specific ways; gesture can be used to 'activate' and shape metaphor absent linguistic reference (Cienki & Müller, 2008). In addition, co-speech gesture, as a visual mode of expression, can reveal inferential patterns not necessarily discernable in linguistic metaphor; this point is a central focus in the subsequent data presentation and analysis.

1.1 The coming-out story as a narrative genre

The gestures analyzed in this study are mostly from self-published video narratives in which speakers describe their gender transition process. Transgender coming-out narratives share many of the same characteristics with gay/lesbian coming-out stories, but not all; a primary difference stems from a variable temporal relationship between the act of coming out either before or after the change in gender roles (Zimman, 2009). Because transgender coming-out stories are understudied (Zimman, 2009, p. 54), there is not an extensive literature on the thematic arrangement of the genre. However, qualitative analysis of narrative data in Lederer (2015) and Zimman (2009) reveal a common set of themes. Often, speakers reveal a gender history that involves an episode in which the speakers realize that their external gender presentation conflicts with their internal identity (cf. Zimman, 2009, p. 59) and an extensive and stepwise process of deciding to disclose this divergence to friends and family ensues. In fact, many public transgender narratives include advice on 'how to know if you are transgender'. That is, the act of publicizing one's identity as transgender is often motivated by the confusing nature of gender affiliation. Given this focus, transgender postings often incorporate a section on decision-making surrounding issues of physical transition, from style decisions, such as hair and clothing choices, to medical interventions like

hormone therapies and, in some cases, gender reassignment surgical procedures. As Zimman (2009, p.56) summarizes, "...the coming out narrative genre is characterized best as a venue in which stigmatized identities are enacted and negotiated ... functioning to forge solidarity between members". Presumably, the shared experience of watching and producing likeminded videos, in addition to private discussion of gender transition within the trans community, leads to a quasi co-constructed thematic arrangement involving similar language expression – a phenomenon akin to a virtual community of practice (Bucholtz, 1999) – and yields a shared cultural model not unlike what is present in other genres of story, including autobiographical narratives (Herman, 2009; Sternberg, 2003a, b).

1.2 Metaphorical gesture

Although gender identity cues may not be systematically reflected in patterns of co-speech gesture (as suggested in Skomroch et al., 2013), the *concept* of gender and transition is. In the process of meaning construction (Fauconnier, 1994), gesture, in the visual domain, provides supplementary cues to the auditory signal (Parrill & Sweetser, 2004). Gestures and signs can be iconic and, in some instances, metaphorical by visually referencing the source domain of conceptual metaphors (Cienki, 1998; Taub, 2001). In fact, in his gestural categorization schema, McNeill (2005, p.39) notes that the iconicity of "iconic" gestures, those that "present images of concrete entities and/or actions", can be a component of a "metaphorical" gesture, one in which the gesture "presents an image of the abstract". While a metaphorical gesture unit may be novel and unique to the speaker, the referenced source domains are not. Conceptual metaphors are established in verbal language, consistently evoked, and thus form a part of the semantic and cognitive grammar of the language (Dancygier & Sweetster, 2014). Just as established metaphors can be creatively elaborated in verbal language, so too can metaphorical gestures (Parrill & Sweetser, 2004). Gestural reference to the source domains of conceptual metaphors are, therefore, quite intriguing, in that the physical components of the gestural units can be variable while the evoked source domains are systematically connected to the target, making them readily interpretable by the interlocutor.

Metaphorical gestures, thus, are multifunctional. They seem to be induced by the speaker's need to organize the conceptual underpinnings of the message, a take on what McNeill (1992, p.11) calls "imagistic thinking". But, they also serve a communicative function by reinforcing, in a second modality, the metaphors encoded in verbal language and cultural knowledge. If gesture is truly "a window onto thinking" (McNeill & Duncan, 2000, p.143), one would be remiss to ignore the role gesture plays in constructing the transgender experience. Hence, the

examination of the gestural patterns of trans speakers plays an important role in broadening the scope of literature dedicated to the communicative patterns of transgender speakers and those who contest traditional gender identities (cf. Armitage, 2008; Barrett, 1998, 1999; Zimman, 2015, 2016).

2. Methodology

The data used in this study comes from a video corpus of self-published coming-out stories publically accessible on video sharing websites like YouTube™. All video bloggers and speakers narrate in English, and the sample is evenly divided between male-to-female and female-to-male trans-identifying individuals. No platform user data or gesturer identification has been included in the illustrations and description of the gesture sequences, and faces have been masked in the still frames. (URLs to original data are listed in the Appendix). The collection was constructed from 100 hours of video screening. Because most video blogging excludes the arms and hands from the video frame, the screening process is cumbersome. Tokens were only collected if the gesture sequence was visible in the video frame and temporally proximal to language themes related to gender and transition. This screening process yielded 40 tokens of visible co-speech gesture. These tokens of gestural sequences and accompanying discourse were then examined in relationship to the three important metaphorical themes identified through the examination of textual narrative in Lederer (2015): *TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY*; the division between exterior appearance and interior gender affiliation (*THE DIVIDED-SELF METAPHOR*); and a focus on the belabored decision-making involved in the transition process (*DECISION-MAKING IS WEIGHING*).

3. Results

Though regular video bloggers commonly watch other video blogs and are presumably acquainted with other members of the trans community, few emblematic (in the sense of Efron, 1972, p.96) gestures were found across speakers. Instead, a shared repertoire of identifiable metaphorical *gesture units* (Kendon, 2004, p.114) is apparent and aligns with predictable descriptions of transition.

3.1 Binary categories

Metaphor plays a role in both the expression and the contestation of traditional gender categories (Lederer, 2015). The interaction between gesture and speech indicates that gender, like other categories, is metaphorically understood as two bounded regions in space vis-à-vis the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the gestural representation of the metaphor, handshape and accompanying movement, which take on one consistent form, demarcate the category boundaries between male and female. In the dominant pattern, inward-facing palms delineate the gesture space to encircle two oppositional regions. The gesturing in Example 1 is characteristic of this pattern.

- (1) “I had this unique experience in transitioning halfway through college. I spent ... two years *as a girl* and then three *as a dude*.”



two years *as a girl*
Frame 1



and then three *as a dude*
Frame 2

In this case, the words *girl* and *dude* are used to linguistically encode the two genders. Two inward facing, loose open hands structure the female space to the left of the speaker's body (Frame 1) and the same basic gesture to the right of the body indexes the male space (Frame 2). In this instantiation of the binary category structure, the symmetrical open handshapes of right and left palm circle off the imaginary physical regions (of the source domain). The physical regions in the source domain map to a binary gender division with two bounded categories, 'male' and 'female'.

The same left- and right-facing open hands delineate the male and female categories in Example 2. In this case, the speaker indexes these categories through the words *feminine* and *masculinity*, and the female category is referenced first, to the right of the speaker's body (Frame 1), and the male category subtly to the left (Frame 2).

- (2) “And in finding my own womanhood I was told that if I was too *feminine* ... that I was a caricature or inauthentic as if *masculinity* is some sort of natural state of being.”



if I was too *feminine*
Frame 1



as if *masculinity*
Frame 2

In Example 3, the binary structure of gender categories is concurrently contested in the discourse while at the same time conceptually reinforced in the co-speech gesture. In Frames 1–3, the inward facing open palms reference the two regions in space corresponding to *male* (to the speaker’s right in Frame 1) and *female* (to the speaker’s left in Frame 3) categories. Once the gender regions are established, the speaker uses both index fingers to point to the space in between the two bounded gender regions in Frame 4. Subsequently, the boundaries are again indexed in Frame 6; however, this second indexing takes on a different form in which the speaker uses both left and right hand simultaneously to each encircle one of the two gender regions.

- (3) “And they have these cute little cookie cutter boxes where this is all *male*, and this is all *female*. You can’t change; there’s nothing in between; there is nothing besides these two categories.”



this is all *male*
Frame 1



and
Frame 2



this is all *female*
Frame 3



You can’t change...
Frame 4



there’s nothing in between
Frame 5

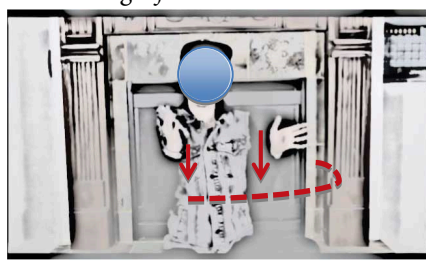


these two categories
Frame 6

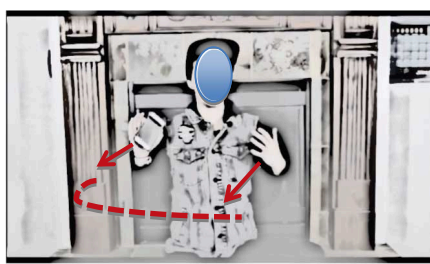
The speaker's verbal and gestural reference to metaphorical space between the two gender categories both reinforces the bounded nature of the two spaces, and, at the same time, raises important questions as to what might 'exist' in this vacant space. The gesture space allows for a physical separation between bounded gender regions. However, it is not clear what that physical space maps to regarding conceptions of gender; no alternative identification is ever discussed as a conceptual filler.

In a different strategy, male and female affiliation can be overtly contested through the notion of disclaiming gender entirely as is the case for the speaker in Example 4, who identifies as "agender" in the discourse. The speaker's verbal rebuke of the gender binary is immediately followed by a gestural reference to both categories using the same loose, inward-facing open palms exhibited in the previous Examples (1–3).

- (4) "So first question is how do I self identify? I identify as agender, which to me means basically genderless. I mean, that's a actual definition. I don't identify as being *a female* or *a male*."



a female
Frame 1



a male
Frame 2

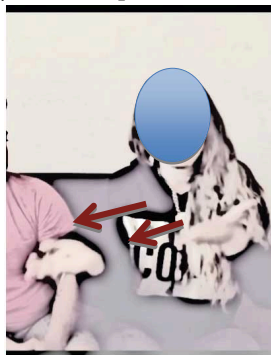
In this case, the speaker's discourse contests the gender binary while the gesture reinforces it. The inability to conceptually move away from a space-based understanding of category structure shows that contestations of gender affiliation are most often rejections of the notion of gender (and in some cases the idea that one can 'move' freely from one category to the other, e.g. *gender fluidity*) as opposed to identification with an entirely alternative model.

The trans experience entails crossing from one gender space to another. The speaker in Example 5 gestures a bridge between female and male spaces. This hand movement is an iconic representation of the notion of transition. The female space, to the left of the speaker, is delineated by the inward facing palms (Frame 1). Co-occurring with the utterance of the word "transitioning", the two open b-shaped hands are then co-opted into a gesture referencing movement out of the female space (Frame 2). The movement ends with similar deictic reference to the bounded male region, to the right of the speaker's body (Frame 3).

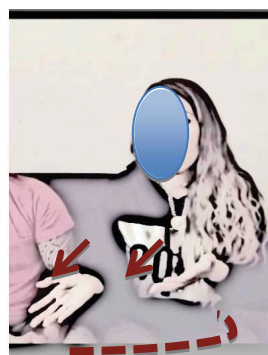
- (5) “If fundamentally they’re still the same person that they were when you first fell in love with them whether it was *female* ... and then they’re *transitioning into being male* they stay the same person that they are.”



it was *female*
Frame 1



and then they’re *transitioning*
Frame 2



into being male
Frame 3

3.2 TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY

In the next example, a trans activist explains the metaphorical origin of the terms *trans-* and *cis-gender*. This explanation elucidates the conceptual underpinning of gender as a bounded region in space and a change in gender identity as a movement from one space to the other:

“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**. ... For cis people, they often times, 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.

This speaker illustrates a robust gestural pattern used by trans video bloggers to accompany their description of the transition process. The dominant hand traces the metaphorical journey from former gender affiliation to chosen gender identity along the (usually) left to right timeline. She first employs the gesture in Frames 1–3, when she describes gender transition as a metaphorical crossing. The gesture iconically mirrors the discourse. In this first instance the gesture starts to the right of her body and moves toward the left.

- (6) “‘Trans’ means, um, **to cross** ...”



An identical gesture, in the reverse, and more typical direction, is repeated twice during her explanation of the metaphor, once presented here in Frames 4–6:

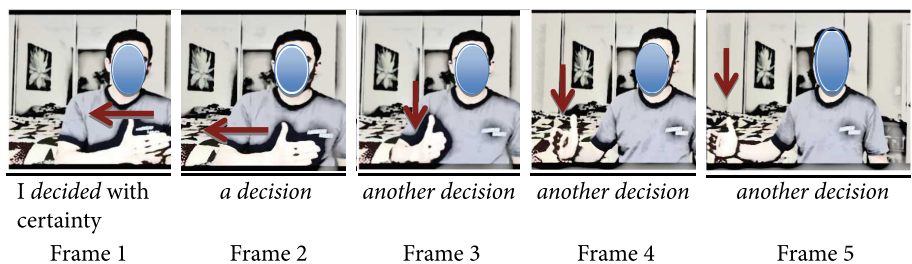
“Whereas trans people, they cross that, or perceive to cross some kind of invisible barrier”



One function of co-speech gesture is to make a message more “precise or complete” (Kendon, 2000, p. 51). The specific translational motion used in Example 6 illustrates the idea that transition is not movement on a flat path from one region to another, but rather the gesture encodes effort to cross an elevated boundary between the two categories.

In Example 7, the same open handshape indexes movement along the timeline, from past (left of body, Frame 1) toward future (right, Frame 5). In this case, the speaker mentions his transition prior to the gesture. The gesture, however, co-occurs with verbal repetition of the word “decision” (Frames 2–5). With each utterance, the hand stops momentarily in space to mark a discrete point on the timeline, indicating the decisions made in the transition process are brief pauses in the transition journey from origin gender to destination identity.

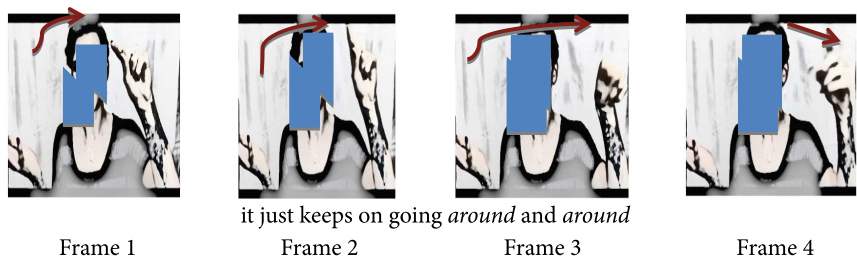
- (7) “So it’s been a process. It’s not like ... I *decided* with certainty ... that I would transition and I knew ... that it was the perfect thing for me because I was a man blah blah blah. It was really just a process of ... *a decision, another decision, another decision, another decision.*”



The broken, incremental movement of the gesture in Example 7 mimics intermediate locations between the two gender identities signaling a very important and robust elaboration of the journey metaphor. In most narratives of transition, speakers describe a transition that is slow and belabored, often carried out over several years. The notion of a methodical transition that involves intermediate stops is contrary to popular notions that the mismatch discovery process and subsequent transition is clear, quick, and expedient (cf. Lederer, 2015, p. 114).

In some cases, the transition movement is not linear, but rather described as cyclical. In Example 8, the speaker uses her non-dominant hand, in a pointing gesture, to trace circles to the left of her body. The gesture is performed simultaneously with her verbal description of a transition that “keeps on going around and around”.

- (8) “I’m stuck in a loop. I’m in a *habitual cycle* where I just keep *going around and around*. ... And then I kind of *cycle back around*. And then I create this new persona. And then I’m like – you know what-this-this will make me happy. And then I start living that and I start trying to make it work and then I start getting very depressed about things. And *it just keeps on going around and around*.”



The cyclical manifestation of the journey metaphor, signaled in both gesture and speech, reinforces the ambiguity of gender identity and signals that the journey toward comfort in one’s transition is quite complex.

Extensive, belabored decision-making is a common theme of coming-out narratives – a surprise to many, including those undergoing transition. In Example 9, the co-speech gesture corroborates the metaphor (DECISION MAKING

IS WEIGHING). Two upward facing palms in alternate motion mime the action of weighing one object against the other on a balance. This iconic gesture, which mimics the balance mechanism, suggests the coming-out process is understood as a choice with two alternatives (Frames 1–3). The two palms are subsequently co-opted into deictic reference points on the left to right timeline in Frames 4–6. The right palm in Frame 3 indexes the speaker's current trans identity – he holds the right palm on the upbeat during his mention of “happier”. The left palm in Frame 5 is then raised and held up, in contrast, to index the past unhappy self, co-occurring with the phrase “who I was before”.

- (9) “If it was between me ... looking and sounding different and hopefully being a lot happier ... between that ... and me being who I was before, which was absolutely awful ... um ... very self-destructive. I think I was drinking too much and not eating enough and just wasn't looking after myself – I was just so unhappy ... and I mean isn't it – wouldn't you feel better that I'm happier?”



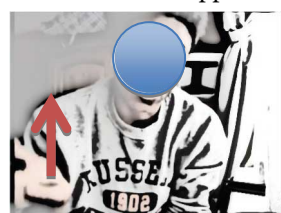
If it was between me *looking*

Frame 1



and *sounding different*

Frame 2



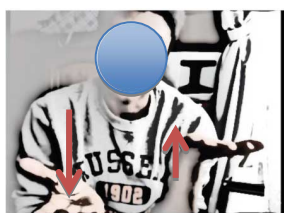
and hopefully *being a lot happier*

Frame 3



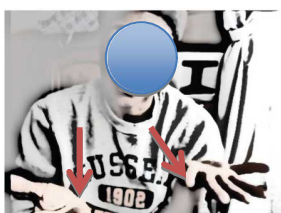
Between *that*

Frame 4



and *me being*

Frame 5



who I was before

Frame 6

The speaker's message in Example 9 exemplifies the complex integration of speech, gesture, and metaphor. It is the gesture alone which evokes the metaphor (DECISION MAKING IS WEIGHING); never once is the concept of a decision verbally introduced, yet, because of the gestural reference to the metaphor, the listener understands transition as a decision. In addition, the hands, co-opted into deictic reference points on the left-to-right timeline, reinforce the division between past and present self. Example 9 reveals how specific gestures are both multifunctional (Kok, Bergmann, Cienki, & Kopp, 2016), combining multiple representational functions

at the same time, and multidimensional, in the sense of McNeill (2005, pp. 40–41), one holistic gesture is iconic, metaphoric, deictic and temporal simultaneously. The theme presented in this example, indicative of a divided identity, is a common topic explored through speech and gesture in coming-out narratives of transition.

3.3 The self divided

Trans individuals necessarily feel mismatched between two genders. This experience leads to unique understandings of a self divided between two discrete categories (Lakoff, 1996; Lederer, 2015; Talmy, 2000). Those undergoing transition understand their ‘real’ inner self to be hidden: a masked gender identity which conflicts with the exterior self, one’s public gender presentation. Part of transition is a practice of harmonizing the two. Because external and internal selves are separable, and it is the exterior that should be manipulated to match the interior, transition narratives focus heavily on how one can hide this divergence.

In Example 10, self-referential gesturing signals that the speaker understands himself to be comprised of multiple identities. In the gesture space, the speaker’s body stands in for one self (Frame 1) while the location in front of the speaker’s body is used as a metaphorically motivated gesture location to indicate reference the external self (Frame 2).

- (10) “It wasn’t just about appearance or looking good. It was about ... like a mismatch between *how I felt* and *how I appeared* in terms of gender.”



It was about like a mismatch between
how I felt

Frame 1



And *how I appeared* in terms
of gender

Frame 2

One self is internal, the ‘subject’ (Lakoff, 1996) – this is the self that is linked to one’s personality, as Lakoff explains, “the locus of subjective experience: consciousness, perception, judgment, will, and capacity to feel (p. 93)”. The external self, on the other hand, is indexed by an individual’s physical appearance. Public disclosure of transgender identity forces friends and family to interact with a new external self that obscures the internal self which, for most speakers, has not changed in significant ways.

The transgender individual, unlike the cisgender person, has to reconcile a past public gender identity that does not 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 (Lederer, 2015). Pre-transition, the body is a container for the internal self. Post-transition, the changed body, as a container, hides one’s original sex assignment and gender history. The former mismatch is no longer apparent from the outside. These metaphorical mappings are illustrated in Figure 3.


Pre-transition		Post-transition	
Body → ¹	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

1 → references source to target mapping.

Figure 3. The divided self metaphor as applied to gender transition


The struggle to explain the paradox is evident in Example 11. The two selves, past and present, are verbally and visually indexed.

(11) “And that brings me to my friend Liam who made a video a couple of months ago. He’s a trans guy but he made a video about his past and he didn’t know how to think about it because he felt very ... disconnected from ... you know *little girls* that he saw in the photos that were him. But they didn’t feel like him. So Liam in his video said, “I’m *the same* but I’m *different* ... I’m *different* but I’m *the same* ... and that’s a really confusing thing. It’s complicated.”




he felt very ... disconnected from ... you know *little girls* that he saw in the photos that were him.

Frame 1




So Liam in his video said, “I’m *the same*

Frame 2




but I’m *different* ...

Frame 3



I’m *different*

Frame 4



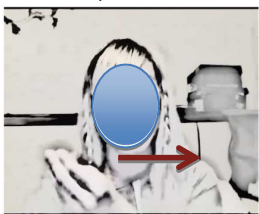
but I’m *the same* ... and that’s a really confusing thing.

Frame 5

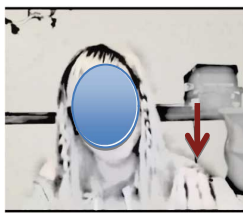
In Frame 1, the speaker’s early female identity is established in the reference to “little girls ... in the photos” and, in the gesture space, the left fist indexes this past identity. In Frame 2, the speaker’s left fist continues to index the reference to past self, which is presented throughout the discourse as being “the same”. However, present self, indexed with the right fist in Frame 3, is physically “different” from past self. In Frame 4, present, physically different self is emphasized with a small right fist downbeat and the speaker’s emphatic gaze toward that fist. In Frame 5, reference to the past self returns with the raising of the left fist and lowering of the right. Thus, the use of two fists in the gesture space reinforces a notion that two selves of one person are separable while still indicative of the same essence.

An almost identical pattern is illustrated in Example 12. The cupped left hand in Frames 1–3 indexes a reference to past self; whereas the cupped right hand in Frames 3–4 indexes the present self.

- (12) “Except for your family, your family may be different. And of course it’s going to be really difficult for your family to understand right away *who you are as a person*, you know ... as *the same person* but they’re *different*, but they’re *the same*, so you know what I mean ...”



who you are as a person ...
Frame 1



as the same person
Frame 2



but they're
Frame 3



different
Frame 4

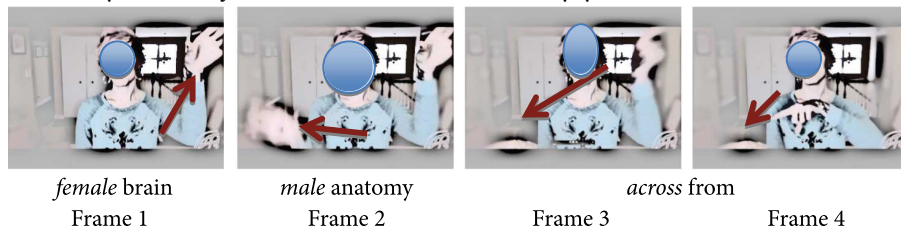


but they're the same
Frame 5

The physical distance between the two hands in Frame 4 conveys a conceptual separation between the two identities. The speaker uses the gesture to reinforce the physical disassociation between pre- and post-transition identities, while the discourse and gestural return to attention on the left hand in Frame 5 underscores the notion that pre- and post-transition, a person’s essence remains unchanged.

An alternative instantiation of this metaphor is realized in Example 13, in which the two selves are indexed as a division between brain and body.

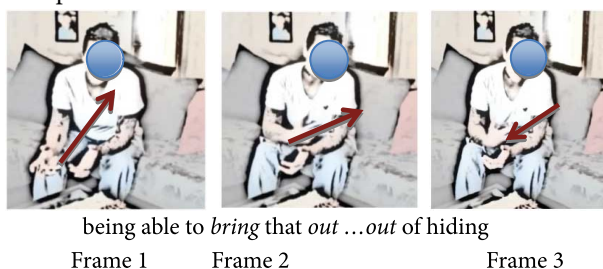
- (13) “If you have a *female* brain and a *male* anatomy, you are *across* from.”



In Frame 1, the “female” interior self is visually encoded in the upper left gesture space with a c-shape and then contrasted in Frame 2 by using the same handshape with the right hand. At the bottom right of the gesture space, the right hand indexes the “male” exterior self. In Frames 3–4, the division between two gendered selves is emphasized by visually tracing the physical separation with the left index finger, thus conceptually reinforcing the metaphorical distance between the two identities.

For trans speakers who have not (fully) transitioned physically, interior gender identity is obscured by exterior appearance. This aspect of the model is evident in Example 14, illustrating a common gestural pattern in the discussion of the divided self. In Frames 1–4, the right, dominant, C-shaped hand moves toward the speaker’s body in the lower gestural space. This gesture indexes the internal self, which is then removed from the body, metaphorically, through the outward moving gesture in Frames 5–6.

- (14) “Being able to *bring* that out ... *out... out* of hiding is like ... being a whole new person.”





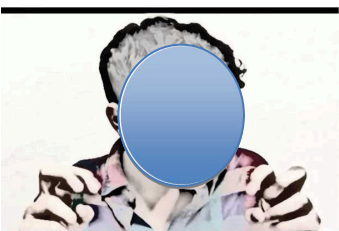
The gesture, again, mirrors the discourse by reinforcing the idea that the internal self is hidden behind the external self.

3.4 Gender as a contested category – the use of scare quotes

A final repeated pattern worth noting is the use of co-speech scare quotes in the contestation of gendered labels directed at those in the trans community. Though this pattern is not indicative of a conceptual metaphor per se, the gesture brings into focus how the English language reinforces a conceptual gender binary. English gendered pronouns force speakers to grapple with the assignment and identification of gender on a constant basis. The use of co-speech scare quotes functions to contest dispreferred pronoun labels in order to convey a disassociation with a past gender affiliation (or assigned label).

In Example 15, the speaker repeatedly signals a disassociation from the female gender by visually presenting emblematic scare quotes first when he references his “birth name” (Frame 1) and then each time he repeats the pronoun “she”.

- (15) “Transition for me though sometimes feels ... like throwing ... my past self out the window. I’ve lived as a girl for twenty-one years. *Birth name* me accomplished a lot of great things. You know, *she* was a great student. *She* was a good person. *She* was a good musician. And *she* built this whole identity in this world as being ... this girl. In the end ... *she* wasn’t real. She was all this façade ... that was made up to paint the picture the world wanted to see of me.”

		
<i>Birth name</i> me accomplished a lot of great things.	You know, <i>she</i> was a great student.	<i>She</i> was a good person.
Frame 1	Frame 2	Frame 3

The same use of scare quotes is employed by the same speaker in Example 16. Here, however, the speaker, in his narration of a friend’s comment, uses scare quotes to contest the assignment of the female gender pronoun to a pre-transition identity and then, in the discourse, follows by referencing the chosen, present identity. Past female gender assignment is questioned through the gesture, and quite interestingly, put forth as an alternate persona that is missed and longed for by the present self.

- (16) “So today I got an email from one of my trans friends saying that he loves or misses *her* ... meaning ... himself before he knew he was a transgender boy.”



he loves or misses *her*

Frame 1

Example 17 is taken from a clip of a well-known trans activist discussing her encounters with new trans communities. Formerly known by a male name, the speaker finds ways to disclaim her well-known past exterior, male identity. In one such instance, the speaker employs the use of scare quotes to accomplish this disassociation. The gestural scare quotes are performed concurrently with her verbal reference to “old Bruce”.

- (17) “I found trans pilots. I found this. I had- uh- a month ago I had a- had a race. I raced cars for years *as old Bruce*.”



as old Bruce

Frame 1

The gesture occurs to the speaker’s left, and her gaze turns away from the gesture. The positioning of the scare quotes and the head-turn reinforce the speaker’s distance and disassociation from her past male assignment and moniker, a pattern consistent with the idea that trans identity has, perhaps, more to do with the ‘disidentification’ from one’s assigned sex at birth than an affiliation with a chosen gender (Zimman, 2019).

4. Discussion

In the description of metaphorically based concepts, gesture not only plays a communicative function by helping to structure concrete aspects of the source domain, but it also plays an important role in revealing a speaker's unconscious representation of a target domain. In descriptions of gender transition, these metaphors are of particular interest because of a conceptual clash between speakers' rejection of the rigidity of gender binary in their discourse and the cognitive reinforcement of said binary in their co-speech gesturing. Gestures define and delineate physical regions in the gesture space, which map over to discrete boundaries between male and female categories in the cultural construction of gender. Ironically, it is exactly this rigidity that the trans community wants to refute.

4.1 Multifunctionality

In the elaboration of the source domains, metaphorical gesturing in the coming-out narratives of transgender speakers exhibits a variety of expected features. Gesture is widely assumed and demonstrated to be multifunctional – each gestural unit can combine more than one representational function at the same time (Kok, Bergmann, Cienki, & Kopp, 2016). Kok et al.'s (2016) taxonomy includes representational functions (referring to concrete entities, locations, and physical properties, describing movements and amounts, and locating events in real or fictive spaces) and meta-communicative, or pragmatic, functions (hedging, emphasizing, and language processing). Both groups are highlighted in the data for this paper, especially the representational functions of gesture. Because the metaphors of transition rely on source domains based on common schematic properties of spatial relations, speakers use gesture to map out the fictive spaces and corresponding movements across spaces, mostly falling within Kok et al.'s (2016) 'spatial' dimension (p. 50). Gender categories are metaphorically indexed as regions in space in front of the speaker with location boundaries sequentially mimed by two inward facing palms, or in some cases, two concurrent cupped, outward-facing hands signaling discrete, co-existing locations. Use of the emblematic scare quotes gesture is pragmatic in nature. The pragmatic functions of gestures include marking the speaker's attitude toward what he or she is saying (Kendon, 2000, p. 56). These gestured scare quotes in Examples 15–17 allow the speaker to overtly distance and disclaim past associations and labels – a feature especially important to English coming-out narratives, given the gendered paradigm of English pronouns.

Gesture is rich in meaning. The complexity of verbal content calls for reinforcement in the gestural space, perhaps suggesting a correlation between conceptual complexity and gesture use (Parrill & Sweetser, 2004). The trans speaker

must commonly refer to past and present self in the discussion of transition. Using the two hands as deictic markers for the two identities allows the speaker a visual reinforcement of the verbal description of a divided self, divided both in gender assignment/affiliation and divided in time. Consequently, the use of gesture helps the speaker conceptually process his or her transition, while at the same time it serves a communicative function: to further reinforce the particular instantiation of the metaphor's source domain. The multifunctional nature of gestures – fulfilling more than one goal at the same time – and the polysemy of a single gesture – having several different associated meanings based on context – are what make attention to gesture so important when evaluating speakers' communication of abstract concepts.

4.2 Category order

The gestural patterns in trans coming-out stories raise other important questions having to do with the linguistic and mental representations of category alignment, specifically regarding the ordering of named and gestured categories. The conventional ordering of gender reference in verbal binomial expressions is to first reference the male category – *men and women* is much more frequent than *women and men* (14318 tokens of the former, compared with 1681 tokens of the latter in the “Corpus of Contemporary American English” (Davies, 2008-)). However, the customary nature of this ordering is called into question when trans speakers reference gender categories. Transition is indexed through the metaphorical timeline, in which past is typically placed to the speaker's left and the future on the speaker's right (cf. Casasanto & Jasmin, 2012; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). One question that emerges in the examination of gesture is, therefore, how one's personal experience with gender affects discussion of gender. Do trans speakers tend to order the two gender categories in reference to their own transition process? If so, following the timeline, we would expect male-to-female speakers to signal male to the left of the body and female to the right. The opposite ordering would be expected for female-to-male speakers.

The sample used in this study is too small to definitively test this hypothesis; nevertheless, Examples 1, 2, and 4 are consistent with the concept. The female-identifying speaker in Example 2 indexes the female space to the right of her body, whereas the more male-identifying speakers in Examples 1 and 4 index the male space to the right. Thus, the common verbal ordering, male and then female, is not necessarily mimicked in the gestural representation of gender categories.

In addition, handedness may also play a role in the gestural reference to fictive gender regions. In several studies, speakers have been shown to associate positive messages more strongly with dominant hand gestures and negative messages with

non-dominant hand gestures (Casasanto, 2009; Casasanto & Jasmin, 2012). Thus, there are also questions to be probed about how handedness might affect gestural indexing of gender categories. For example, we might predict the identified ‘destination’ gender to be indexed with the dominant hand and disclaimed ‘origin’ gender with the non-dominant.

4.3 Gesture and gender identity

Beyond the conceptual construction of gender as an abstract concept, a role exists for co-speech gesture in the individual’s identity construction process. Although not systematically probed in this study, the data referenced here yield important research questions on this topic. Co-speech gesture, like voice quality, pitch, and intonation, is undeniably part of gender identity construction and the developmental gender identity process that occurs in adolescence. Little research, however, has been dedicated to gesture patterns unique to the construction of a transgender identity. Research that does exist mostly comes from the clinical domain and is focused on the process of explicitly training trans men and women how to conform to preferred gender speech norms (cf. *Hancock & Garabedian, 2013*) (although there is a small literature on voice quality changes in female-to-male trans speakers (cf. *Zimman, 2015, 2016*)). These interventions, termed ‘feminization’ and ‘masculinization’ techniques (*Davies & Goldberg, 2006, p.170*), are designed to help trans clients shift their voices, vocabulary, and mannerisms to meet prototypical gender standards. Clinicians acknowledge gendered differences in “facial expression, posture, and movement” and, thus, to some extent, transition therapists are aware of differences in nonverbal communication across the genders (*Davies & Goldberg, 2006, p.181*).

Although non-verbal behaviors, including hand gestures, are perceived to be different between men and women (*Briton & Hall, 1995, p.87*), this difference is only weakly supported in the literature. In research on actual differences between the nonverbal communication of male and female speakers, little divergence across cisgender participants is found. In a meta study on the topic, *Skomroch et. al. (2013)* discovered no significant difference between ‘in space’ movements and ‘on body movements’ across men and women participants, finding only that women use pantomime gestures more frequently than men, and men more frequently use gestures in which the hands touch one another. They describe these findings as not “global” (meaning presumably large-scale and noticeable) but rather “subtle” differences. In an earlier quantitative analysis of nonverbal behaviors during conversation, no difference was found between male and female speakers in the time spent gesturing or in the number of gestures. Only duration of hand gestures was shown to significantly differ across male and female subjects (*Frances, 1979, p.532*).

The wealth of existing public data in the video blogging world offers unique opportunities to probe questions concerning the roles that co-speech gesture and facial expression play in not only the construction of a transgender identity, but also the rejection of a disclaimed gender affiliation. Even if male and female gesturers do not significantly diverge in their gesture use, the *stereotypes* of men and women's gestural patterns may be different. Are trans individuals aware of the stereotypes and what role might they play in the gender construction process for trans speakers? Similar online video data might also prove fruitful in returning to an examination of the function gesture plays regarding cisgender identity construction as well.

5. Conclusion

The variety of metaphorical gestural patterns in coming-out narratives is to be expected given previous findings on the spontaneity and heterogeneity of co-speech gesture (Kendon, 2004). Nonetheless, identifiable sub-patterns of metaphorical gesturing exist in the genre of trans coming-out stories. The data presented here illustrate several of these: inward facing palms are used to mime fictive category boundaries in the gesture space, motion across gender regions is mapped through translational hand motion, the hands are used to deictically reference interior and exterior self, and distancing from past gender assignment is signaled through emblematic scare quotes. The study of co-speech gesture in the narrative of transition proves to be a fruitful source of data in further dissecting the conceptual models trans-identifying English speakers use to address gender in general. Gesture not only reinforces the linguistic metaphors, but also enhances and elaborates unique features of these abstract ideas. Cultural notions of gender are shifting and there is a new research focus on the discursive practice of 'non-conforming' identities (cf. Zimman, 2019). In an era of a more broadly based awareness that gender norms and behaviors are not biological, but rather socially constructed (Bucholtz & Hall, 1995; Ochs, 1992) in addition to an increase in public (and private) discussion of trans identity, the discursive practice of trans speakers merits research attention. The combination of growing quantities of publicly accessible gesture data, plus the acknowledgement of the role gesture plays in how we construct and understand our own identities, yields a bounty of fascinating research questions concerning the way visual cues combine with language to produce complex descriptions and performance of gender.

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Appendix

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZNO63x4eAY>
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