



THE MEANING-MAKING OF GENDER IDENTITY TRANSITION IN INDIVIDUAL WITH HYPOSPADIAS

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Abstract

This study explores the gender identity transformation of Aprilio Manganang, a former national volleyball athlete who has hypospadias, a medical condition where the urethra does not extend to the tip of the penis. For 28 years, Aprilio lived as a female despite lacking female hormones or organs. The study utilizes Relational Dialectic Theory and Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach to understand Aprilio's interpersonal communication during his gender transition process. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations conducted over 2 days at Aprilio Manganang's residence. Interviews were conducted with Aprilio Manganang, family members, and colleagues. The results of the study indicate that Aprilio's gender transformation involves significant symbolism such as name changes, medical procedures, and institutional support, which strengthen his gender identity as male. Social interactions with family, friends, and colleagues also play a crucial role in the acceptance and affirmation of his new gender identity. This research fills a research gap by examining the social and communication aspects of individuals with hypospadias, providing a deep understanding of the challenges and strategies in facing social discrimination and stigma. These findings highlight how an individual with a gender identity transition faces the primary dialectic between the gender identity they internally perceive as male and the social expectations and perceptions that compel them to be female.

Keywords: Gender Identity, Meaning-Making, Relational Dialectic Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Aprilia Manganang is a former female volleyball athlete who underwent a gender transition. According to Kompas.com, during her 28 years living as a female, Aprilia lacked female hormones and organs such as the uterus and ovaries. Throughout her life, Aprilia had to present herself as female, despite facing difficulties in fulfilling this role, including using menstrual pads and tracking menstrual cycles to convince her surroundings. This experience reflects how modern and postmodern societies understand appearance, body, and sexual attractiveness as valued individual characteristics, as explained by Adelman & Ruggi (2008). Gender is an identity acquired through socialization processes, not determined biologically, as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Russel and Clarkson (1996).

Aprilio feels reborn and is living a new life as a male. This transformation involves significant changes in his interpersonal communication, as explained by Lakoff (in Hertly, 2001) and research by Von Hippel et al. (2011), which states that gender stereotypes influence how people communicate. Aprilio's interpersonal communication process will focus on how he interprets the transition of gender identity from female to male, based on gender stereotypes.

Sociologically, this transformation is not easy due to Indonesian culture, which adheres to gender stereotypes. Research by Nisa & Sayfiq (2015) and Padmi (2018) shows that men displaying feminine traits are often labeled as waria (transgender women) and face negative stigma. Research by Salazar (2019) also shows that femininity and masculinity are social constructs that can change over time.

Patients with hypospadias like Aprilio experience gender construction within society. Their gender identity transformation is often associated with transgender and faces discrimination, as noted by Adelman & Ruggi (2008) and Wilson, Malik, and Thompson (2021). The process of expressing gender identity requires significant mental effort due to social pressure. Gender identity does not originate from biological factors but from social factors. The book "The Psychology of Gender" (Eagly et al., 2004) states that gender differences are constructed based on social factors through socialization. Carlson (2016) asserts that gender is an unnatural social category.

Aprilio Manganang's gender transformation introduces new symbols in his life, such as name change, sex orientation in TNI, and changes in his social environment. This research fills a gap by studying Aprilio Manganang as an individual with hypospadias and gender identity transition using Relational Dialectic Theory and Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach. The researcher

assumes that Aprilio's gender identity transition is driven by social demands, not personal freedom. This research will use Relational Dialectic Theory to examine Aprilio's interpersonal communication process and the phenomenological approach to understand the meaning of actions taken in his social context.

Social construction and gender are concepts stating that gender is formed through social interaction, not merely determined by biological characteristics (Rossi, 2021). In the context of hypospadias patients, this condition is often linked to intersexuality, where their gender may not align with social expectations and existing gender norms (Rohtagi et al., 1987). Although there is no specific research linking hypospadias with gender construction, this condition can affect the individual's gender identity and expression. Individuals with hypospadias often face discrimination and stigma that can affect their self-esteem and identity (Mushtaq, 2017). Additionally, many of them feel part of gender minority groups, such as transgender, as their gender identity development occurs from childhood (Nordmarken, 2023). This aligns with Schutz and Berger's theory on how social meaning is formed through interaction and communication (Berger, 1990; Hamzah, 2020). In social construction, society plays a crucial role in determining what is considered male and female, ultimately influencing how individuals with hypospadias interpret their bodies and identities in a social context (Dalimoenthe, 2021; Laqueur in Davies, 2017).

Intrapersonal communication is communication conducted by individuals with themselves, playing an essential role in shaping self-concept (Effendi, 2003). This process involves perception, memory, and thoughts that help individuals understand and give meaning to their experiences. For hypospadias sufferers, intrapersonal communication helps them cope with social stigma and pressure related to their gender identity (Dinianti, 2018). The formation of self-concept is a continuously evolving process influenced by attitudes, beliefs, and past experiences (Demuth, 2012; Yanthi, Harnani, Amalia, 2020). For individuals with hypospadias, social pressure to fulfill assigned gender roles can lead to anxiety and low self-esteem (Jin et al., 2022). Studies show that despite facing barriers in social interactions, their academic achievements are not hindered, indicating their ability to overcome these challenges in other aspects of their lives (David et al., 2001).

For Aprilio Manganang, the transition from female to male due to hypospadias presents challenges in interpersonal communication. Physical appearance, evaluated based on gender stereotypes, can affect the quality of interpersonal communication (Lakoff in Hertly, 2001). Interaction Adaptation Theory and Message Production explain how individuals adapt and produce messages in social interactions (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Relational

Dialectical Theory (RDT) is used to understand the process of meaning-making in social interactions, especially in the context of gender transition (Smith & Wilson, 2009; Baxter, 2008). Phenomenology, emphasizing the interpretation of human experiences, is used to understand Aprilio Manganang's meaning-making in his gender identity transition (Hamzah, 2020; Poloma, 2013).

Overall, this research shows that social construction of gender, intrapersonal communication, and interpersonal communication play significant roles in understanding and interpreting the gender identity of hypospadias sufferers. A deep understanding of their experiences helps identify challenges and strategies that can be used to support them in facing existing social pressure and stigma (Littlejohn, 1999; Stolenberg, 2006; Butler, 1990).

METHOD

This study uses a constructivist paradigm to understand Aprilio Manganang's gender transition from female to male due to hypospadias. This paradigm highlights how individuals construct meaning within their social realities. The phenomenological method, specifically Alfred Schutz's typification model, is applied to explore the meaning of Aprilio's conscious actions in the context of his gender transition. Data were collected through a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews and observations.

Data collection for this research was conducted through in-depth interviews and observations carried out over two days at Aprilio Manganang's residence in Tahuna. Aprilio Manganang, his spouse, both parents, and three work colleagues served as informants in this study. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide with a duration of 10-30 minutes for each interview.

Data processing was performed through close reading, wherein the researcher read the interview transcripts and grasped the general content of the transcripts. Subsequently, the researcher identified implicit messages within the transcripts, interpreted them, and analyzed them regarding the meaning and effects conveyed through language and textual structure.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research on Aprilio Manganang's experience as a hypospadias sufferer and his gender identity transition from female to male is relevant to Relational Dialectical Theory (RDT). RDT highlights that a person's identity is formed through dialogues filled with contradictions and dialectical tensions, considering identity as dynamic and continuously negotiated through social interactions and interpersonal communication.

Baxter (2008) emphasizes that gender

identity is not something fixed and static but rather the result of a complex and changing process. This is relevant to the case of Aprilio Manganang, who undergoes a gender identity change due to hypospadias. In his transition, Manganang faces dialectics between internal gender identity and external social expectations. Specifically, he must adapt to social conformity that emphasizes his feminine identity even though he feels more comfortable with his masculine identity.

Interpersonal interactions of Aprilio Manganang are also reflected in forms of self-reflection occurring within him and the reinterpretation of his identity. In addition to internal dialogues with his spouse and family, external dialogues with Aprilio Manganang's work colleagues are also crucial in shaping and forming his identity. Moreover, RDT highlights the importance of change and adaptation in the process of identity formation. Through his transition process, Aprilio demonstrates the ability to adapt to changes in both physical and social conditions.

The symbolic representation of Aprilio Manganang's gender transition from female to male reveals its complexity. Utilizing theories such as Social Identity Theory, we understand that individuals form their identities through comparisons with other groups, including in terms of gender (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One striking aspect is how Aprilio expresses the change in gender identity through his attributes and physical appearance.

Overall, Relational Dialectical Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Social Constructionist Theory are indeed relevant to Aprilio Manganang's experience in his gender transition process. These theories emphasize the importance of dialogue, dialectical tensions, and change in the formation of gender identity. The findings of this research indicate that gender identity is the result of a complex and dynamic process involving interactions between individuals and their social environments, followed by social support related to gender understanding. Symbolization, including physical, attributive, and psychological aspects, social construction, changes in typifications, and both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication play significant roles in helping individuals with hypospadias navigate their gender identity and achieve authentic self-acceptance.

Aprilio Interpersonal Communication

The communication between Aprilio and his wife, Claudya Clara, reflects a strong and open relationship. Claudya recounts how Aprilio talks about his feelings and life journey.

"He even told me to touch his chest to prove that he's not a woman," Claudya said.

This open communication allows them to understand and support each other. Claudya also describes how they ignore negative societal views about Aprilio as transgender. The differences in

behavior and characteristics between Aprilio and gender stereotypes are also discussed in their communication. Claudya notes that although Aprilio exhibits traits associated with female stereotypes, such as being talkative when emotional and expressing anger more expressively with words, he remains a responsible man.

Furthermore, their communication also encompasses discussions about future plans. They choose to focus on their commitment and loyalty to each other rather than being influenced by negative external views. Overall, Aprilio's communication with Claudya demonstrates a strong foundation in their relationship, characterized by openness, honesty, and understanding.

Aprilio's communication with his parents also reflects a close and honest relationship. Since childhood, Aprilio has exhibited characteristics more in line with those of a boy. His mother, Mrs.

Surayti, reminisces *"Aprilio never played with dolls like Barbie dolls, but with boy's toys, Even though his parents treated Aprilio as a girl, they eventually accepted his true identity.*

"I am happy because deep down I have always had a feeling that this child is indeed a boy," said Mrs. Surayti.

Aprilio's communication with his colleagues reflects seamless integration in the workplace environment. Captain Inf. Meinhard L (DANRAMIL) stated,

"Oh no, there's no difference between me and the members or colleagues. If he's late, I'll reprimand him so he knows it's wrong."

This indicates that Aprilio is able to communicate effectively and professionally without discrimination.

In the context of communication, Aprilio is able to adapt well in his new environment as a male military member. Captain Meinhard noted that Aprilio not only communicates well but also quickly adapts to his new duties.

"Mr. Manganang is very kind and quickly adapts to the community," said Captain Meinhard.

Furthermore, Aprilio is also receptive to feedback and criticism. Private Muhammad Sofi Amsis stated,

"If he's talkative, it's actually because he's outgoing and likes to socialize, so it's just normal for us." This indicates that Aprilio is capable of maintaining good relationships with his colleagues. Aprilio's communication with coworkers also reflects acceptance and inclusion in the workplace environment. Through a positive attitude and inclusive relationships, Aprilio's coworkers help create a supportive environment that enables him to feel accepted and valued.

Meaning-making of Gender Identity Transition by Hipospadia

The gender transition experienced by Aprilio Manganang is caused by a rare medical condition known as Hypospadias. Hypospadias is a condition where the urethral opening is not located at the tip of the penis as usual but rather lower down or at the bottom of the penis. In the context of Aprilio Manganang, this condition adds additional complexity to the gender identity process he faces. Since childhood, Aprilio has felt more comfortable with a more masculine identity and behavior, but his social environment and family perceived him as female. This creates a mismatch between internal identity and the identity perceived by the surrounding society.

With Hypospadias as his background, Aprilio Manganang's gender transition becomes more complicated. The process of gender identification is not only based on personal preferences but also on his medical and social experiences. Based on Social Constructionist Gender Theory, gender is not inherent but shaped through social interaction and cultural construction (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In Aprilio's case, the interpretation of gender transition can be influenced by how society and the surrounding environment understand the condition of Hypospadias and how it affects gender identity. A social environment that accepts and supports his gender identity change could be crucial in shaping Aprilio Manganang's interpretation of the gender transition.

The significance of Aprilio Manganang's gender transition is also reflected in his adaptation and performance in his new environment as a male military member. Captain Meinhard emphasizes that Aprilio Manganang's medical condition does not affect his performance,

"Oh no, because thankfully he already knows his true self and he was indeed born a man, even though there are shortcomings, but it's okay," said Captain Inf. Meinhard L (DANRAMIL) during the interview session.

This demonstrates that Aprilio Manganang has successfully embraced his gender identity despite any physical constraints he may have and has been able to adapt to his role and duties as a military member with confidence. Manganang's interpretation of gender transition also reflects the importance of social support in his identity process. Captain Meinhard confirms that Aprilio Manganang has been well accepted by the local community and fellow military members.

"If until now, Mr. Manganang has been just like any other member, in fact, they are very enthusiastic about meeting Mr. Manganang in person, especially since he is a prominent figure," said Captain Inf. Meinhard L (DANRAMIL) during the interview session.

This indicates that support from his surrounding environment has helped Aprilio Manganang find peace and acceptance of his gender identity. In an interview session with Private Muhammad Sofi Amsis who stated,

"Oh, yes, I knew about the gender, right?" The response of Private Muhammad Sofi Amsis, a coworker, when asked if he knew about the condition experienced by Aprilio Manganang.

The response indicates that other military members are aware of or suspect that Aprilio Manganang's gender transition is related to a medical condition like hypospadias. This suggests that the interpretation of Aprilio Manganang's gender transition in the context of his underlying medical condition is part of the social interaction and perception built by the surrounding environment.

The interpretation of gender transition also involves the personal experiences and perceptions of individuals regarding gender identity. In an interview, Sergeant Major Budi Eko (Pak Onek) stated,

"I don't think so about his gender status, because from what I see, his level of confidence is very high," said Sergeant Major Budi Eko (Pak Onek) during the interview session.

This statement indicates that for Aprilio Manganang, the new gender identity has been strongly accepted, and that the change does not alter his beliefs or self-esteem.

From the perspective of parents, Aprilio also feels proud and relieved to know their child's true identity. Mr. Akib expressed his pride by saying,

"I am very proud of Aprilio yes, of course, I am happy and delighted because even Mr. KASAD made efforts for the happiness of my child, because only Aprilio and Amasya are known to have Hypospadias disorder,"

The gender transition, initially colored by strict social norms and a lack of medical understanding, is eventually embraced as a reality that brings happiness and clarity to the family. The joy of Aprilio Manganang's parents signifies that their acceptance of Aprilio's identity brings profound relief and pride. Thus, the interpretation of Aprilio Manganang's gender transition from the perspective of his parents is a journey from confusion and adherence to traditional norms towards full acceptance and support, triggered by the revelation of a clear and undeniable medical condition.

Hypospadias also introduces new elements in the construction of gender identity. How Aprilio Manganang interprets and interacts with his medical condition influences how he feels as a man. Additionally, Hypospadias can reinforce Aprilio Manganang's conviction towards his decision to transition genders, as this medical condition makes him feel that his body is not entirely consistent with the gender identity perceived by society before.

Understanding and support from family and social environment also play a crucial role in Aprilio Manganang's interpretation of gender transition. Whether they accept and support him, or reject and oppose him, can affect how Aprilio Manganang feels about himself and the gender

identity he embraces. Thus, Hypospadias not only affects the physical aspects of his body but also can influence how Aprilio Manganang understands and feels about himself as a man in a broader social context.

Aprilio's gender transition becomes clearer after undergoing medical procedures that reveal the truth about his hypospadias condition. The moment of spontaneous and honest disclosure at home becomes a turning point for the family. Ultimately, despite having to go through challenging adjustment phases, Aprilio's parents feel proud and relieved to know their child's true identity.

CONCLUSION

The interpretation of gender transition can be influenced by the medical condition of Hypospadias, which introduces new elements in gender identity construction. Support from family and social environment plays a crucial role in reinforcing Aprilio's new gender identity.

Relational Dialectical Theory (RDT) indicates that Manganang's gender identity is formed through internal and external dialogues fraught with dialectical tensions between self-expression and social conformity. Social support from family, friends, and coworkers plays a significant role in helping Manganang navigate his gender identity and achieve authentic self-acceptance. Interpersonal interactions with his social environment strengthen his gender identity as a man, demonstrating that changes in social typifications and support from the environment are crucial in the gender transition process.

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