

Trans Wretchedness Theory[®] and disrupting the focus on negative health outcomes

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1. Intro

- Trans Wretchedness Theory is new a model that shows how various cultural, media, and scientific conceptualisations of transgender and gender diverse experiences perpetuate a cycle of negativity.
- Portrayals of Trans Wretchedness impact our understandings of self, as well as the ways that cisgender scientists, writers, and creators view and portray us.
- The Trans Wretchedness Theory has been created by Cassie Withey-Rila as part of their research pursuing a Master's in Public Health.
- Cassie's research is exploring the positive experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse adults with their GPs in Aotearoa as part of the disruption of Trans Wretchedness portrayals.

2. Disruption

- While the Trans Wretchedness cycle is closed and self-perpetuating, there are many places where it can be disrupted.
- Each of the small dotted arrows indicate where the cycle could be altered or fed new concepts. Health science research that focusses on positive attributes, resilience, or positive experiences would disrupt this cycle. Explicitly naming the systemic mechanisms at fault could also contribute to a body of literature that builds a more fair, well rounded, and accurate portrayal of our existences.
- Our trans communities would benefit from media portrayals of gender diversity as an attribute that is a natural variation within human groups, and not a surprise reveal or a twist ending. Media representation matters, and the quality and variation in type of representation is also essential.

This model is housed within a larger system of heterosexism, transmisia / transphobia that makes up normative standards in western society

Everyone is impacted by these cultural conceptualisations of gender diversity, including people in positions of power, such as policymakers or medical professionals

Health science research focuses on the negative outcomes for trans people

Sensationalistic and inaccurate science writing that appeals to cisgender people who are looking to confirm their worldview (prejudices)

Places to disrupt the Trans Wretchedness cycle

Media representations of trans people are limited to a joke (e.g., man in a dress), victim blaming for violence, or tragic endings

3. Research

- Cassie's Master's research uses qualitative interviews to explore the experiences of transgender and gender diverse adults with their GPs in Aotearoa.
- This project uses the term transgender and gender diverse (TGD) to indicate anyone who has a gender identity that differs from the binary sex they were assigned at birth and includes people with non-binary gender identities.
- TGD includes trans people with binary gender (e.g., trans men), any non-binary gender (e.g., genderqueer), a lack of gender (e.g., agender), or any combination thereof.
- This project aims to explicitly include non-western concepts of gender, including Māori identities, such as whakawāhine and tangata ira tāne.
- This research is designed to not contribute to Trans Wretchedness, and to provide input into best practices based on what does work, rather than what does not.
- While it is important that we are able to do research on our own issues and communities, maintaining mental well-being and reducing harm to transgender researchers is vital for community longevity.

4. Conclusion

- In addition to an increase in gender diverse researchers exploring our own communities, there are many ways of reducing harm from the Trans Wretchedness cycle.
- Improvements in nation-wide best practice and policies informed by trans-affirming research, such as the Counting Ourselves survey, could disrupt the cycle. As would demanding adherence to ethical journalistic standards for media coverage of TGD individuals and issues.
- Investigating and naming the ways this theory may transfer to other marginalised groups could be beneficial to equity in many areas.
- While it takes more than 'positive thinking', incorporating realistic, capable, and positive conceptualisations of transgender and gender diverse communities into all levels of our reality may improve wellbeing on systemic and individual levels.
- Our TGD communities are vast and heterogeneous, and reflecting that in media and health science will help disrupt a cycle that perpetuates and maintains negative dominant discourses and contributes to cissexist society.

References (clockwise from top of graphic)

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