

Name: Alexandra Woollacott

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Institutional affiliation: Seattle University

Contact: [alexandra.woollacott@gmail.com](mailto:alexandra.woollacott@gmail.com); 206 355 9055

Transgender and gender non-conforming communities experience high rates of physical and sexual abuse, harassment, suicide and murder, rendering them at risk in terms of mental health and wellbeing. Their vulnerability in part stems from societal and institutional erasure and rejection; within our society we tend to perceive a person's gender as biologically determined which can be reductive. In the context of therapy, there is a risk of totalizing clients by configuring the desire for gender transition in pathological or diagnostic terms. It is essential that therapists respond ethically and sensitively to experiences that are unique to these communities, which demands an understanding that the face and body of the Other is not always representative of their gender identity.

In this paper I contend that we are thrown into our body, and explore a link between the concept of thrown-ness (Heidegger, 1996) and the idea that we are encumbered by our body but the body is also capable of feats of transcendence (Levinas, 1969). I argue that if the body is a structure that one is thrown into, then transcending gender as defined by one's flesh, and moving beyond the narrow and traditional gender binary may be required for a person to embrace their authentic being. In challenging us to accept the Other in radical openness, Levinas (1969) may enable us to see that one's identity is deeper and more complex than what we initially perceive. Finally, I discuss Levinasian principles that ought to guide therapists into ethical practice with clients, and argue that laying the foundations for love and respect in therapy is fundamental in working with populations who are perpetually totalized by others.