



# DRAMATURGICAL ACCOUNTS OF TRANS PERSONS: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN THE PRESENTATION OF SELF TO SPECIALIST GENDER SERVICES

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## BACKGROUND

Recent qualitative studies focus on the experience of accessing specialist gender services (Goldberg et al. 2019). Non-binary and gender queer participants reported feeling misunderstood by service providers and *borrowed* a binary identity in order to access treatments (Lykens et al. 2018).

## AIM

GIFTS (Gender Identity- Finding and Transforming Services) is a mixed methods study to understand the lived experiences of adolescents and adults with gender related distress in Northern Ireland.

## METHODS

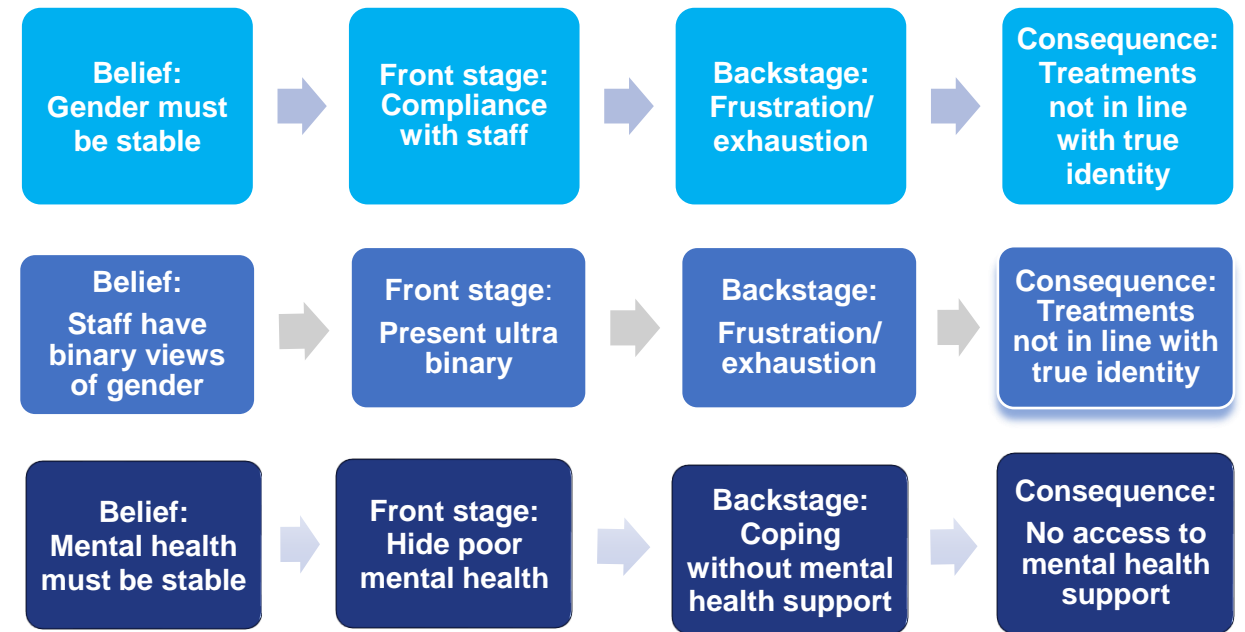
In-depth unstructured interviews with 26 people with a gender dysphoria diagnosis (service sample) and 14 gender diverse people (community sample).

## ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis of interviews is based on Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework to understand social interactions. Goffman's core concepts of *frontstage* (where the performance is taking place), and *backstage* (where the performer can be more themselves). In this study, *frontstage* refers to the impression management (performance) by individuals attending specialist services and staff as the audience, and *backstage* as the social spaces or environments where no performance is necessary.

## RESULTS

There is profound mistrust of transgender persons towards clinical services. Goffman's (1959) view of the social world may neglect the issue of power. Participants use impression management with *gatekeeper-staff* to gain access to scarce gender affirming treatments.



## CONCLUSIONS

Impression management and camouflaging strategies are only partially helpful for participants in accessing gender affirming services. The use of these strategies in presenting an idealised self, means that participants are unable to have their mental health needs met, while being at risk of accessing interventions which are not in keeping with their authentic selves.