Transgender Identities:

within and beyond the constraints of

heteronormativity

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<u>DECLARATION</u>

This thesis represents my own work and where the work of others has been used, it has been duly acknowledged.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how transgender identities are constructed and discursively produced in the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century. In so doing, it addresses the relationship between experience and discourse. I examine the ways in which identities are embodied and articulated through an analysis of interviews with self-identified transgendered people. Chapter one outlines the key aims of this thesis, including situating myself as a researcher and how I came to be doing this.

Chapter two explores the historical and cultural conditions within which sexed and gendered identities are constructed. Theoretical debates have mainly taken place on the essentialist/constructionist continuum which can usefully be understood as connoting a space between fixed identities and fluid social processes. Much has been written on what sex and gender are, and are not, and most of this work underplays the importance of the heterosexual matrix as the source of sex and gender categorisation. Chapter three describes how the phenomenological approach meets the challenges of engaging with the complexities of sexed and gendered identities in that it focuses on the lived experiences and voices of the eleven participants recruited for the study. I use a narrative approach which illustrates how stories are embedded in social and cultural discourses through which sexed and gendered identities are constructed. Chapter four outlines the personal dissonance experienced by transgendered people when their sexed and gendered identities are not congruent with the binary categories of the western heterosexual matrix. The participants' stories illustrate that gender is something that is an internal phenomenological "felt" experience in their lives and incongruent with the external identity that society has assigned them. Chapter five illustrates how stories are grounded in cultural and historical discourses. In particular, the participants demonstrate how self esteem and mental health are central to their developing identities and how important it is for them to be in contact with a larger collective identity category. Chapter six and seven explore the two mutually reinforcing processes involved in transitioning — passing and self-identification. Chapter six explores the processes of emotional and physical changes entailed by the various choices transgendered people make about their self-identity and the ensuing action required. Chapter seven examines the process of self-

identification, illustrating the hegemonic power of heteronormativity and its understanding of identity and desire.

Chapter eight discusses the research findings in relation to heteronormativity. It shows how peoples' understandings of their sexed and gendered identities challenge hegemonic binaries and their fixed assumptions about sexed, gendered and sexual identities. The participants' stories show the tension between the limitations of categories that have been available for transgendered people and the lived experience of transgendered subjectivity within which the historical legacy of particular hegemonic categories remain potent. I argue that it is not enough to research into sexed and gendered identities without critically questioning the dominant influence of hegemonic heterosexuality in producing normative accounts of sex, gender and sexuality. The chapter concludes by pointing to how the category of "transgender" has the potential to expose and begin to move beyond the limited conceptual space of heterosexual discourse which depends on binary sexed and gender categories for exploring and understanding erotic relationships.

The conclusions drawn from this research propose a commitment to engaging with queer theory as a way of blurring and expanding the definitions of sexed and gendered identities that are regulated by the heterosexual matrix.

"The metaphor of a matrix cannot help but impose the concept of an external, fixed construction. Consider the matrix imagery made famous in the film *The Matrix* (1999). The matrix in this film is a false consciousness quite literally constructed and maintained by an oppressive regime and imposed on a (mostly) helpless and unwitting society. The evil regime is maintained through the imposition of a collective fantasy, and *unbelieving* is the first step in breaking free of the imposed slavery of the matrix; the hero (Neo) is selected because of his *'unsettlement'* in understanding, a perception that things don't match or add up" (Cook-Slather 2003, 947-8, quoted by Atkinson & DePalma 2009, 18).

This thesis aims to explore how transgender identity is constructed and discursively produced in the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century. At the most narrow end of the spectrum, the term "transgender" comprises only of those who struggle with issues of potential gender transition and sex reassignment i.e. transsexuals, and at the broadest end, the term "transgender" includes a wide diversity of gender variant people (Lev 2004). I want to find out how people who self-define as "transgender" use this category to describe their identity and how it brings meaning to their experiences. Through an analysis of interviews with self-identified transgendered people, I examine the ways in which identities are embodied and articulated. What I want to suggest here, is that experiences do not happen to individuals but are constructed through political/social systems that then become subjective. In other words, experiences are discourses that need to be explained (Domosh 2003). My interest lies in examining the wider cultural conditions that shape and inform how people who identify as transgender, understand their biological body, gender identity and erotic relationships. This thesis focuses especially on one of those conditions; namely the limits on thinking about the complexities of sex, gender and desire outwith the constraints of the current dominant classification systems constituted by what I call the "heterosexual paradigm". This paradigm is created by the conflation of sex, gender and sexuality based on the principle that opposites attract and, in turn, it perpetuates the reproduction of a discourse of duality.

Frameworks for analysing and interpreting sex, gender and desire have undergone extensive changes in the last century and more, producing evolving historical and cultural conditions within which sexed and gendered identities are constructed. In the last fifty years, feminist and gay theoretical scholarship has produced a substantial body of work concerning the categories of "sex" and "gender" which informs this thesis and which I seek to extend. Traditionally sex has generally been seen as biological and natural, and gender as social and cultural. More recently, the idea that both sex and gender are embodied and constructed has become important. This thesis explores how transgenderism is a concept that has contributed

to ongoing challenging debates on issues of biology and social constructionism, and the extent to which, and the ways in which, sex and gender identities are fixed or fluid. In other words, this thesis explores how the binary structure of heterosexuality is questioned and problematised by transgendered identities, bodies, and desires.

Theoretical scholarship has emerged from a diverse range of disciplines resulting in significant social and political shifts in the way that sex and gender identities were discursively produced. Much has been written about what sex and gender are, and are not, and most of this work underplays the dominance of the heterosexual matrix as the source of sex and gender categorisation. I argue that it is not enough to continue research into sex and gender identities without critically questioning the dominant influence of hegemonic heterosexuality in producing normative accounts of sex, gender and sexuality. My thesis aims to move beyond the essentialist/constructionist debates, to focus, instead, on a critique of the heterosexual matrix.

My aim is not to find an objective truth about what a transgender identity is, but to understand the ways in which this is constructed and discursively produced in the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century. It is important to make clear that my work acknowledges the difficulty in separating experiences and desires from the discourses that produce sexed and gendered identities. Challenging ideas of universal truths and realities does not mean rejecting experience or materiality — it is more about specifically rejecting the idea of a pre-discourse materiality. My thesis aims to explore the lived experience of transgendered people, which is not to say that I accept the idea of an "essential" transgender identity or an "authentic" transgender experience. Rather, I am interested in exploring how transgender identities and experiences are constituted and regulated in the context of the heterosexual matrix, whilst at the same time, maintaining the subjectivity and agency of transgendered people. In fact, I consider the empirical reality of lived experience to be a key factor in legitimising subjectively informed transgender theory.

> […] the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination
> of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of
> representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/women, black/white as fixed

immutable identities), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, its notions of subjects, origin, and cause (Scott 1992, 25).

I bring three main areas of experience to my thesis which are all interconnected. I have worked as a psychotherapist for twenty years and, for ten of those, I have also taught Sexuality and Gender to postgraduate counselling and psychotherapy students. My psychotherapeutic background has equipped me with a grounded knowledge of reflexive skills that proved invaluable in undertaking my research. My teaching has provided me with a considerable knowledge of sexuality and gender which has substantially developed throughout my research. I now turn to the third area of my own lived experiences concerning sexuality and gender which brought me to choose this topic and which influenced subsequent choices in structuring the thesis.

My belief and experience concerning the nature of knowledge has focused on the importance of phenomenological learning in my personal and professional life. I have discovered knowledge in my life through my experiences, putting aside my need to understand. This has enabled me to experience and take seriously my desires, while at the same time, becoming aware of the lack of discourse that could provide me with a way of thinking about my desires and subsequently placing my experiences within a boundary, giving them validity and form. During the course of my research, I have become aware that the points in my life where I could be seen as "losing my way" were indeed points where I strayed off the well trodden official path of heteronormativity, creating my own "desire lines" (Ahmed 2006, 19). I refer here, not to sexual orientation, but to normative traditional identity models based on heterosexual hegemony.

My personal journey has been concerned with disturbing the order of sex and gender categories and trying to inhabit the available identities of the time. When I was 17 years old I fell in love with a 17 year old girl. She told me she was "queer" (her terms). This was 1974 and the concept of homosexual or gay was fairly unknown to me. One year after this, she told me that she felt like a man trapped in a woman's body. This was 1975 and the concept of transsexual was completely unknown to me. After one visit to the general practitioner, she was referred to a

psychiatrist whose speciality was sexual dysfunctions. After only one consultation, this was followed by fortnightly injections of testosterone hormones by the general practitioner every fortnight. She then changed *her* name to *his* name and lived life as a man and worked as a man. One of the mainstays that made this situation work was that I was "forced" to define myself as a heterosexual woman. His claim to manhood relied on my identification with femininity and heterosexuality. I spent the following 7 years living with and supporting someone who was undergoing a sex change, with surgical reassignment as the goal. I left the relationship before this happened.

When I left the relationship, I went through a period of not knowing whether I was heterosexual or gay. I had short affairs with men and women, experimenting with my sexual identity. In 1983, I started a relationship with a woman who identified as a lesbian feminist — and then I began to label myself a lesbian. I lived within a lesbian feminist community in London. I knew who I was then, and I began to feel stability in my position in society, albeit subversive. But then I knew all about subversive, in a subversive kind of way. I still carried the secret of my previous life, knowing that transsexualism was far from accepted in the political climate at that time. Amidst this, I was still trying to understand what my previous experience had been about for me — what did it say about me? I read Janice Raymond's (1979) "The Transsexual Empire" which deepened my sense of shame that I had done something wrong. This book remains a classic discourse on transsexualism, adamantly opposing the inclusion of transsexual women in the lesbian community. Lesbian feminism theorised transsexuality as driven by an essentialist concept of woman which reinforced feminine stereotypes. Raymond has all the marks of a gender essentialist in her biological determinant position as she constantly refers to "male-to-constructed-females" which serves to alienate transsexuals from biological women. I had no other framework or community available to me within which I could understand my experience without making it wrong or abnormal. I liked subversive — but not on my own. Neither the heterosexual discourse nor the lesbian and gay politics of the 1970s were able to provide a satisfactory framework for understanding my relationship with a self-defined transsexual person. The essentialist and binary discourse of sexuality and gender that continued into the

1980s supported my same-sex desire in lesbian relationships, yet became limiting when "orientation" was translated into "identity".

In the 1990s I fell in love with a self-defined lesbian woman with two young sons. I became a parent to two young boys with the main identity on offer being "lesbian mother". I had trouble inhabiting this space, instead taking on the gender neutral identity of "parent". As they moved into adolescence, it became obvious that I had to take up a position. I became what they needed me to be. Not a second mother, they already had one. Not a father, they had one, in name at least. My position was not gender specific. And this time I did not feel forced into a position. I felt more able to play with and be in various roles. These two experiences have helped to shape who I am today and why I am studying the topic of sexuality and gender.

My journey has continued throughout my thesis where I found a home in a queer space:

> This is how phenomenology offers a queer angle — by bringing objects to life in their "loss" of place, in the failure of gathering to keep things in their place (Ahmed 2006, 165).

Due to the traditional heterosexual paradigm that views sex and gender as opposites, there has been little understanding, outwith a medical pathological model, of people who are not easily classified into male and female binary categories. In the last thirty years, I have personally witnessed major shifts in the way that sex and gender are theorised and lived, with transgenderism becoming part of popular discourse and a political force. Writing this thesis provided me with a more contextual understanding of my personal experiences. In particular, it has brought into sharp focus the invisible power of heterosexual discourse as an organising principle for how people construct their identities.

My experience of the psychotherapy world is one where sexuality is organised around the homosexual/heterosexual binary, with heterosexuality maintaining its privileged status. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender is still thought of as a "minority". This process of "othering" continues to create individuals

and groups that are deemed less important, based on historically situated markers of social formation such as race, class, gender and sexuality (Yep 2003). As such, heterosexuality is produced and reproduced and normalised as a standard against which people are measured. In this way, heterosexuality remains unquestioned. I find it interesting that it is the world of academia that has provided me with a space to question within and beyond the constraints of heteronormativity — using the conceptual tool of *queer* to question and challenge and deconstruct the historical invention that is heterosexuality (Katz 1995).

This thesis aims to contribute to a steadily growing body of work that is committed to challenging traditional discourses that were established when the world had very different ideas about sex, gender, and sexuality (Moon 2008).

Outline of Thesis

In order to contextualise a study of transgender discourses and experiences, Chapter two begins with an overview of underlying and conceptual frameworks ranging from medical constructions of transsexuality to the emergence of transgender as a contemporary and un-medicalised version of gender diversity. These frameworks reflect different theoretical positions that engage with debates of feminism and queer theory. Chapter three describes the research design and how I used qualitative methodology to facilitate a phenomenological approach which emphasises that knowledge and understanding are embedded in people's life experiences. I conducted semi-structured interviews where I draw specifically on the notion of reflexivity and psychotherapeutic tools as ways of thinking about the construction of knowledge within the context of interviews. Chapters four, five, six and seven tell the participants' stories which are organised chronologically and describe their journey pre and post transition. Their stories reflect the process of self-identification and how the discourses and available categories influence their individual transition decisions.

Chapter eight discusses the data in light of the interpretations already made in the data chapters, pointing to the dominant influence of hegemonic heterosexuality in producing normative accounts of sex, gender and sexuality. The data show how the complexities of transgendered identifications and desires call into question the

usefulness of compulsory heterosexuality in understanding the participants' experiences. At the same time, the data show how transgendered identifications and desires problematise the relationship between sex and gender categories by crossing existing categories. Transgendered identities undermine the dualistic argument of fluidity or stability, and tell a story of hegemony and subversion. In this way, I suggest that transgendered desire "queers" heteronormative discourse.

Chapter nine concludes with proposing a commitment to engaging with queer theory as a way of continuously questioning the ideology of heteronormative thinking and practice that is embedded and reproduced in the everyday social fabric of people's sexed and gendered lives.

Chapter 2 The Category of Transgender in a Historical Context

This chapter explores the various bodies of literature that are relevant to my research in this thesis and, at the same time, it sets this research in context. I have divided the chapter into three main sections. Section 2.1 places the category of "transgender" in a historical context in order to clarify the conditions within which transsexualism and sex reassignment became possible in the twentieth century. To historicise the category of "transgender", I chart the processes through which the ideas of sexed and gendered identities were developed in western discourse from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first century. This is key to my contention that discourses change over time and it illustrates the increasing dominance of the medical profession in defining those discourses. As the thesis shows, this has repercussions for how transgender is experienced. Section 2.2 builds on this discussion by exploring debates in a variety of fields, illustrating the hegemony of the medical discourse by showing how the binary organisation of sex and gender are a distinct product of western civilisations. Section 2.3 reports on recent empirical research that gives examples of the current debates taking place on an essentialist/constructionist continuum in the form of locating gender as a stable identity category and, as a fluid process, with the notion of "embodied gender" becoming a key aspect in the development of transgender theory.

2.1 Emergence of transsexual identities

2.1.1 Introduction

This section explores the historical and cultural conditions from which transsexual and transgender identities have developed in the last hundred years. Section 2.1.2 begins with describing the essentialist/constructionist continuum which frames the main debates in the literature. Section 2.1.3 explores how the early sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century studied sexuality as an aspect of a natural phenomenon and clearly believed in the essentialist and naturalised model of sex and gender. This provides the backdrop for promoting a dualistically opposed sex/gender

system based on a heterosexual paradigm and established normative opposing sex and gender distinctions by emphasising the physical differences between men and women. This then laid the groundwork for how transsexual discourse came to be situated within the medical/psychological field. Section 2.1.4 examines the shifts in ways of thinking about and interpreting emerging ideas about sex, gender, and desire from the 1950s to the 1970s; in particular the phenomenon of transsexualism and the emergence of a medical approach to treating transsexualism based on hormones and surgical treatment. Section 2.1.5 continues to trace the development of transsexual theorising, mainly through changes in the differentiation between the categories of sex and gender. From this, develops the medicalisation of gender that was to become the dominant discourse in transsexual and transgender theory; this includes the diagnosis of transsexualism as a psychological disorder that requires medical and surgical treatment. Section 2.1.6 explores changes in terminology and language, reflecting the development of transgender theory in the 1970s and 1980s. It also introduces the category of "gender dysphoria" that encompasses all forms of discomfort with gender, alongside the new psychiatric diagnosis of "gender identity disorder". This leads onto looking at the development of transgender as a concept in the 1990s. Section 2.1.7 is concerned with attempting to describe the multiple and contested term of transgender in the early twenty-first century. I describe how, in the 21st century, the category of "gender disorders" is being contested by many diverse individuals who do not fit into diagnostic criteria, and by researchers and clinicians who recognise the diversity that is commonly subsumed into the category "transgender". There is also increasing recognition of how the medical/psychological discourse acts as a gatekeeper in maintaining cultural norms, denying the multiple contradictions of individual lived experiences (Stone 1991).

2.1.2 Essentialist/constructionist continuum

Contemporary debates concerning the categories of "sex" and "gender" take place within poles of a continuum from essentialism to constructionism. Delamater & Hyde (1998) cite Mayr (1982) who describes the basic features of essentialism and social constructionism beginning with the concept of essentialism originating in the

work of Plato (428-348BC). Plato argued that the phenomena of the natural world were a reflection of a finite number of fixed forms and this became the philosophical foundation of scientific thought in the western world. Today, the word "essentialist" is used to presume an unproblematic biological basis of gender and sexuality in theoretical debates within the social sciences. The essentialist approach to sex and gender assumes that there is an underlying true fixed essence which remains unchanged across time and cultures.

In contrast, social constructionism is used to describe social influences on individual experience, arguing that there is no fixed essence and that reality is socially constructed; experience is a product of human ideas, cultures and institutions. Foucault (1978) was a key theorist in applying social constructionism to sexuality, arguing that there was no such thing as a biological inner drive and that sexuality was a cultural construct that was only meaningful within a particular society's discourse. Essentialism and social constructionism are often set up as binary opposites, each relying on the other to define itself. In my view, however, essentialism and social constructionism are better understood as poles of a continuum that provides a space between fixed identities and allows for fluid social processes.

The medical, sociological and cultural, feminist, trans and queer approaches reveal the disjuncture between academic debates of the theoretical impossibility of essentialist identities and the phenomenological lived experiences of those who identify with essentialised identities. The essentialist/constructionist continuum can be seen to reflect the sex/gender distinction that has developed in the last 50 years where sex and gender have been positioned as opposites, with sex seen as biological and natural, and gender as social and cultural.

The essentialist/constructionist continuum is epitomized and contextualised in the literature by two main strands: the classic transsexual narrative and the contemporary transperson narrative. These two strands are manifest in a chronology of debates about the relationship between the body and the mind. These debates are illustrated in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underlying the literature, ranging from the medical constructionism of transsexualism to the emerging transgender paradigm of multiple social gender identities. I hope to avoid giving any impression that these frameworks are neatly separated. I map the early sexologists'

research into sex and gender diversity which lays the groundwork for the traditional transsexual discourse based on a dualistically opposed sex/gender system.

2.1.3 Early sexologists

> A transsexual is an individual who experiences "a persistent sense of discomfort and inappropriateness about one's anatomical sex and a persistent wish to be rid of one's genitals and to live as a member of the opposite sex" (American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic Statistical Manua1 1987, 75).

Transsexual discourse has been mainly situated within the medical/psychological field, resulting in it being viewed as "something that is wrong", with an emphasis on diagnosis, classification and treatment. This discourse adheres to sex and gender having binary values which dictates that there are only two true sexes and genders, both of which are seen as supportive of stable and fixed identities. Thomas Lacqueur (1990), a historian, explores how this dimorphism is an invention of modernism as he charts how bodies and sex have changed over the centuries. He argues that until the late eighteenth century, medical theory and scientific thought suggested there was only one sex in which male and female bodies were not thought of in terms of difference. A woman's body was an "incomplete" version of the man's body, and "complete" and "incomplete" described the difference between the two genders. Messerschmidt (2007) explains how this inequality was imposed on bodies from the outside, not from the inside, and to be a man or a woman was to have a specific place in society as determined and designed by God. As different sex roles developed for males and females, awareness of biological differences grew which is how "natural" inequalities were constructed. Messerschmidt (2007, 4) cites Lacqueur (1990, 10-11) when he points out that the two-sex model developed only "until such differences became politically important" and "sex" therefore became "explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power". In other words, Messerschmidt (2007) seems to suggest that Lacqueur was making the point that a two-sex model was not the result of scientific advances, but rather a product of a re-evaluation of the body according to a particular social and cultural context.

The eighteenth century laid the groundwork for the naturalisation of gender categories, specifically, that there were two opposing sexes and that gendered behaviour was a matter of biology. Medical science established a binary system of gender by emphasising the physical differences between men and women. Herdt (1994) notes how, by the nineteenth century, normative sex and gender distinctions were well in place and it is within this context that the multidisciplinary field of sexology developed. These dualistic definitions influenced sexological writing which was making a distinction between nature and nurture, and biology and culture. The contemporary paradigm of sexed and gendered differences was firmly established as a western ideology by the late nineteenth century (Herdt 1994a).

In the late nineteenth century, sexology was developing as a sub-discipline of psychology and medicine, and homosexuality became the main topic of study. There was no distinction between gender and sexual identities, and homosexuality was conflated with gender-variant behaviour (Lev 2004). In the late nineteenth century, early transsexual research was closely connected with homosexuality. Krafft-Ebbing (1840-1902), Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), and Hirschfeld (1868-1935) were physicians who investigated different areas of sexual deviation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Katz (1995) considers Krafft-Ebbing's major work, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, first published in 1886, as a founding text of heterosexuality in which the superiority of different-sex eroticism was established. The new category of "hetero-sexual" appeared in *Psychopathia Sexualis* illustrating Krafft-Ebbing's belief that any deviation from procreative heterosexual intercourse was a form of emotional or physical disease.

Katz's (1995) study of the evolution of the term "heterosexual" traces it back to this time when the term "sexual instinct" was concerned with reproduction and "pathological sexual instinct" was used to describe non-procreative desire. Katz (1995) notes that the term "heterosexuality" made its first appearance in 1901 in *Dorland's Medical Dictionary* where it is defined as "abnormal and perverted appetite towards the opposite sex". In 1923, "heterosexuality" entered Merriam Webster's *New International Dictionary* defined as "morbid passion for one of the opposite sex". Heterosexuality was not equated here with normal sex but with perversion and this definition lasted until the 1930s: it was linked with "abnormal

sexual appetite" and called "psychical hermaphroditism" and assumed that feelings have a biological sex. This led to the development of the idea of an innate sexual orientation which has contributed to proclaiming heterosexuality as a natural and fixed state. Katz (1995, 29) explores non-procreative pathology and distinguishes between "congenital sexual perversion" which is caused by an inborn biological anomaly and "acquired sexual perversity" which is a voluntary act. In Ellis' (1927) *Sexual Inversion*, the second of six volumes of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, he continues to develop the theory that heterosexuality and homosexuality are inborn and biologically determined and, in doing so, challenges the hegemonic idea of sexual deviance as criminal. Krafft-Ebbing's (1886) and Ellis' (1927) work illustrate western sexologists' attempts to decriminalise and medicalise sexual behaviours. This was a move away from the church's view that sexual perversion was an issue of morality and instead it was reframed as "a disease" for which people were not responsible. Sex became a category that connoted the biological aspects of sexual identity, specifically the genitals.

Prior to the 1950s, the categories of "homosexuality", "transvestism" and "transsexualism" were all grouped together as sexual deviations. From the outset there was disagreement among sexologists as to the classification of these categories. Hirschfeld (1910) argued against Krafft-Ebbing's (1886) idea that all transvestites are homosexuals, seeing transvestism as an independent phenomenon. He opened the world's first institute of sexology in 1919 and was one of the earliest advocates of gay rights. Hirschfeld's (1910) text *The Transvestites*, argues for homosexuality and transvestism to be thought of as a spectrum of "sexual intermediaries" ranging between purely manly or womanly characteristics. The term "antipathic sexuality" was used to describe anyone who went against the "natural" characteristics that were allocated to the two sexes. Hirschfeld believed that homosexuals were true "antipathics", whereas the transvestite's sexual impulse remained "normal" — implying heterosexual.

Instead of using the term transvestite, Ellis (1927) preferred the descriptive word "eonism", named after Chevalier d'Eon, who, in the eighteenth century adopted feminine dress and was seen as a woman privately and publicly. The term "eonism" is useful in that it locates the tension between the two main types of cross-sex

behaviour which was split into two categories – "transvestism" (cross-dressing for one's pleasure), and "transsexualism" (cross-dressing as an expression of a profound identification with the other sex). Clearly there was a need for classification and definition in order to distinguish between the two concepts. This also illustrates the way that the sexologists were thinking about them: namely as distinct and static categories with no movement across the boundaries.

My aim in this thesis is to underline how heteronormative discourse remains dominant in shaping what bodies are permitted to do, maintaining the social ordering of sexed and gendered identities by keeping them in a "straight line". I have briefly described Katz's (1995) historical research on the category of heterosexuality that evolved around this time and how the changing meanings of heterosexuality influenced the subsequent classifications of categories that developed throughout the 1950s to the present day. The next subsection illustrates how this legacy continues into the sexology of the twentieth century, with a specific focus on how gender became medicalised with the help of hormone and surgical treatment.

2.1.4 Transsexual

> *All* modern expressions of sex and gender identity depend on the current
> 2-sex system for their expression (Hird 2000, 359).

It has to be noted that the early sexologists' classification of sex and gender diversity is embedded within a cultural matrix that both reflects the social context of sex and gender and the sexologists' personal belief systems. Indeed, Lev (2004) warns against comparing sex and gender variant behaviour from one period to another as language and meanings vary and change cross culturally and historically. In researching the literature, this creates contradictions and confusions around conceptualisations and use of terminology that resist any attempt to delineate boundaries. However, in mapping the early sexologists' research into sex and gender diversity, a significant boundary that can be defined is the shift of paradigms from physiology to psychology and back to physiology.

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, deviant sexual and gender behaviour had been seen as a lapse of morality caused by a biological defect. By the 1890s, psychiatry was gaining ground and used the idea of the "sexual instinct" and its natural function of reproduction to classify perversions — all perversions were mapped against this "natural function" and seen as psychic diseases of the sexual instinct which were involuntary symptoms of a deeper personality structure (Waters 2006). By the early twentieth century, sexologists sought to classify gender deviance as a psychological perversion demarcating the normal from the abnormal.

In 1946, sexologist David Cauldwell became involved with the publication *Sexology: Sex Science,* and became well known for his numerous articles providing sex education for laymen. Cauldwell (1949a) was credited with introducing the term "transsexual" into the sexological literature in the article entitled *Psychopathia transexualis* in 1949. Ekins & King (2001) note that Bullough & Bullough (1993, 257) cite Hirschfield in 1910 as coining the category "transsexualism" when he introduced the term "seelischer Transsexualismus" (psychic transsexualism — though no such reference is locatable). Cauldwell (1949b, 275) used the term "psychopathic transsexual" stating that such a person is mentally unhealthy because they want to live as the opposite sex, which contrasted with transvestism which he was inclined to see as a "quirk". This was basically another version of the nineteenth century pathological view of aberrant sexualities. Cauldwell (1949c, 6) went on to argue that transsexualists are always transvestites as a change of sex is impossible: he stated that "to attempt to medically treat transvestism would be as foolish as to try to treat some star to make it behave differently in its relation to the solar system". It was not until 1952, after the hormonal and surgical treatment of George/Christine Jorgenson, that transsexualism and transvestism were more clearly differentiated, and transsexualism was recognised as a medical syndrome.

Before the twentieth century, there was no notion of the influence of hormones on the body's biochemistry. Rubin's (2003) exploration of the nature and history of transgender identities illustrates the crucial role that endocrinology had in organising understanding of bodies, sexualities and gender in the early twentieth century. Rubin describes how in the 1920s and 1930s, early genetic theory posited the gene as the determining factor of sex, but biochemical endocrinology defined sex

hormones as refining the process of becoming a "sexed" body. The dualistic model of sexed bodies (where bodies were either male or female) believed that androgen was exclusively found in men and oestrogen was exclusively found in women. Rubin (2003) reports that in 1931, two of the key findings in endocrinology were the discovery of "male" hormones (androgen) in normal "females" and, in 1934, the discovery of "female" hormones (oestrogen) in normal males (Oudshoorn 1994, 25-26). These findings were instrumental in creating the possibility of later sex change treatments for transsexuals involving the use of hormones to change their bodies. Rubin's (2003) historical account of the use of endocrinology in transsexualism also touches on the treatment of homosexuals with hormones. This is a more controversial area as the homosexual trajectory consists of a history of compulsory treatment to get rid of homosexual behaviour, whereas for transsexuals the hormone treatment was needed as part of the sex reassignment surgery (changing sex) in the 1950s. It is interesting to note that in the 1940s, even though sexual and gender "deviance" was seen as a result of hormone deficiency, endocrinologists discovered that hormones did not cure deviants' desires — in this case male homosexuals. In other words, "testosterone could affect the power but not the direction of the sex drive" (Rubin, 2003, 47).

As much as cross-gender and cross-dressing have been historical features of human experience, changing one's biological sex has only been possible in the last fifty years. Harry Benjamin, M.D. (1885-1986) popularised the term "transsexual", disagreeing with Caldwell's assertion that transsexuals were mentally unhealthy. Benjamin's 1954 article, *Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic Syndromes* attempted to create a systematic way of thinking about the various interrelationships between sexed body, gender identity, and sexual desire that can be observed in transgender phenomena. Benjamin (1954) was one of the first doctors to argue that disturbed gender identities could not be cured by psychoanalysis, pointing out that psychotherapy is ineffective if it seeks to cure transsexualism:

If it is evident that the psyche cannot be brought into sufficient harmony with the soma, then and only then is it essential to consider the reverse procedure,

that is, to attempt fitting the soma into the realm of the psyche (Benjamin cited by Meyorwitz 2004, 113).

Benjamin (1954) placed transsexualism firmly back into the medical model, affirming that sex reassignment was the only treatment, with the demand for surgery being a central symptom. This expressed a shift from psychology to physiology and it was around this notion that the transsexual subject was, and is, consolidated. Benjamin (1954, 220) continued the work in differentiating between transvestism and transsexualism by stating that "the transsexualist always seeks medical aid while the transvestite as a rule merely asks to be left alone. To put it differently: in transvestism the sex organs are sources of pleasure: in transsexualism they are sources of disgust". Benjamin developed his thinking from his 1954 paper in his subsequent 1966 book, *The Transsexual Phenomena,* which attributes transsexuality to hormonal imbalances or genetic difficulties. Benjamin (1966) developed a medical model of gender variance represented on a transvestism/transsexualism continuum which helped to diagnose those transsexuals who were acceptable for hormonal and surgical treatment. Standards of Care (SOC) were created by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) in 1979 as a way of setting ethical boundaries in assessing who qualified for hormonal and surgical treatment. There has been much controversy regarding hormonal and surgical treatments and who decides the eligibility for treatment, but Benjamin's contribution at least initiated developing some standards of care where previously there had been no clinical guidelines.

I have examined the main shift in transsexual theorising from a psychological way of thinking about sexualities and genders in the 1950s to the physiological way of thinking in the 1960s. This shift placed transsexualism firmly into the medical model which subsequently influenced how gender is organised and experienced, affirming and stabilising the binary heterosexualisation of sex and gender categories. Paradoxically, the essentialised transsexual experiences can be seen to be medically constructed into an acceptable and "felt" identity. The following subsection continues to trace the development of transsexual theorising, mainly through changes in differentiating between the categories of "sex" and "gender".

2.1.5 Differentiating between sex and gender

Virginia Prince (1912-2009) played a key role in the development of the transgender community in the 1950s and in shaping contemporary debates about the category of "transgender". Among her major accomplishments was the establishment of an organisational structure whereby people in the transgender community could contact each other, and she published the first transvestite magazine in 1960. Prince (1978/2005b) made important distinctions between transvestites, transsexuals and homosexuals, mainly arguing that the "discovery" of transsexualism further complicated her belief that it was possible for a man to live as a woman without having to remove his male organs. She pointed out that sex is anatomical and gender is psycho-social. Transvestism, for Prince — notably referring to male transvestites — is the expression of suppressed femininity. Prince (1967/2005a, 24) argued that the one thing that transsexuals and transvestites do have in common is the desire to "remove the incongruity between their exterior appearance and their inner feeling, but one does so on the physical-anatomical level and the other on the psycho-social level". Despite the differences between the "transsexual" and "transvestite" categories, transgender has come to be known as an all inclusive term for identities that disrupt and subvert the normative linkages assumed to exist between sex, gender, and desire.

John Money (1921-2006) was a psychologist and sexologist known for his research into sexuality and gender. Money developed the sex/gender distinction in his research on intersex people, suggesting that hormonal, chromosomal and gonadal sex or genitals did not determine gender orientation which could be learned (Hausman 1995). In 1952 in his research with intersex people, Money adopted the term "gender" as a term distinguishing between masculinity and femininity. By using the term "gender" he could differentiate between the physical and biological aspects of an individual and their socialised behaviour. Money developed this idea further by introducing the term "gender identity", meaning an individual's basic identity as a man *or* woman, including the level of conformity to society's definition of masculine and feminine. The individual's "gender role" was symbolised in dress and behaviour and this was expected to be "gender congruent" with "gender identity". Money was a

firm believer in gender dimorphism and the duality of masculinity and femininity and this reflected society's prevailing belief in sexual essentialism. Ironically, his sex/gender distinction became a way to think about and develop what was to become transsexual and transgender theory.

In 1966 a gender programme was established at the John Hopkins University that helped transsexuals to go through "sex reassignment". This transsexual model provided a medical framework and treatment that enabled transsexuals to live as the opposite sex. In the 1960s and 70s, the John Hopkins University's programme continued to provoke professional opposition from psychoanalysts who argued that surgeons were colluding with the patients' psychotic demands, labelled all transsexuals as " border-line psychotics" (Merloo 1967, 263) and surgery as non-therapeutic. As sociologists Kessler and McKenna (1978, 120) noted at that time:

> genitals have turned out to be easier to change than gender identity […] what we have witnessed in the last 10 years is the triumph of the surgeons over psychotherapists in the race to restore gender to an unambiguous reality.

As the idea gained ground that sex change surgery seemed to be more effective than psychotherapy, the medical perspective became the cultural lens through which gender was viewed. This supported the argument that transsexualism is a "given" disorder and in 1969, American psychiatrist Richard Green published *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*, the first interdisciplinary professional text.

Transsexualism became the contested ground of different therapies from surgery to psychoanalysis where the focus on psychological factors became more accepted. Robert Stoller (1925-1991), a psychoanalytic psychologist, built on the work of Money and developed a theory about transsexualism in the 1960s.

Stoller (1968, 46) suggested that we all have a core gender identity, which is one's overall sense of identity, that stays the same and is either male or female. This core gender identity is produced by three components: the infant-parent relationship, the child's perception of its external genitalia and by a biological force. This develops the idea that core gender identity is central to the stability of personhood. Stoller (1968) realised that sex and gender were mismatched in transsexuals, and this

led him to develop Money's theory of "gender identity". Stoller (1968) distinguished between the psychological and biological dimensions of sex. He described "gender identity" as referring to someone's psychological experience, with "sex" describing the biological traits of maleness and femaleness. Stoller (1968) proposed that transsexualism was the product of unconscious rearing of the child in the opposite sex. He asserted the importance of being ascribed a definite sex assignment at birth, particularly in the case of ambiguous-appearing gentilia, in the belief that this would avoid future emotional problems. His aim was to delineate what was normal and abnormal, diagnosing transsexualism as a psychological disorder and identity issue produced by post-natal psychodynamic factors. Stoller introduced the term "gender identity" into psychoanalytic literature in 1968 and his development of the sex/gender distinction was later taken up by feminist theory and queer theory, albeit in contrasting ways.

I have drawn attention to the different ways of thinking about the concept of gender, reflecting the essentialist/constructionist continuum whereby sex and gender have been positioned as opposites, with sex seen as biological and natural, and gender as social and cultural. The next subsection explores changes in terminology and language, reflecting the changes in transgender discourse from the 1970s to the early twenty-first century.

2.1.6 New category of gender dysphoria

In the 1970s, Fisk (1973) introduced the term "gender dysphoria" which was used instead of "transsexualism" and seen as a more general and widespread phenomenon. This terminology reflected a phenomenological approach which emphasised behavioural criteria, instead of Stoller's (1968) strict aetiological and historical approach. Fisk's (1973) conception drew on the term "dysphoria" which is defined as "a state of unease or general dissatisfaction*" (Oxford Dictionary Online)*. Lev (2004, 10) notes that Fisk (1973) was the first to use the word dysphoria with the word gender, and "gender dysphoria" has since been used throughout the clinical literature to describe "the psychological discomfort experienced with the physiological body

and associated gender expectations, as well as a presence of clinical symptomology associated with emotional difficulties".

The concept of the clearly differentiated transsexual as a distinctive kind of person was losing ground and Fisk's (1973) innovation marked the beginning of attempts to develop and expand criteria which did not fit the classic Benjamin transsexual diagnosis. The HBIGDA's standards of care still provided guidelines for both adult and child specialists who worked with clients with gender disorders, with updates being added as knowledge developed. As part of this process, the term "gender identity disorder" first appeared in the *American Psychiatric Association*: *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (APA: DSM)* in 1980 where transsexualism was organised under this category. In order to receive hormonal and surgical treatment, clients must fit the diagnostic criteria for "gender identity disorder" in *APA*: *DSM-1V-TR* (2000), or the diagnosis of transsexualism in World Health Organisation's (1992) *International Classification of Diseases,* Tenth Revision (1CD-10, Appendix A), cited by Lev (2004). Notably, the guidelines as defined by the SOC are based on the understanding of gender variance as a disorder, thus seen as a mental illness. This formulation began the legitimizing and normalising of transsexualism as a psychiatric disorder.

The diagnosis of "gender identity disorder" is the "ticket" to hormonal and surgical treatment. This means that one is accepted as a transsexual and meets the criteria described in the *APA: DSM*, including, "a stated desire to be the other sex, frequently passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or [have] the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex" (2000, 581).

There is much controversy among activists and clinicians who argue against this psychiatric classification, saying that this diagnosis is based on a rigid binary view of gender. While many oppose its status as a disorder, others believe that this assists transsexuals in gaining access to hormones and surgery. This is important to my argument because it parallels the "divide" between producing strategic essentialism which reproduces fixed categories as a means to an end, and wanting to change the categories which, in the longer term, could achieve the similar goal of acceptance and no dissonance.

In the 1987 *Diagnostic Statistical Manual 3ʳᵈ edition*, transsexualism moved from sexual deviation to a "gender identity disorder" which comes under the more general term of "gender dysphoria". It seems debatable whether the change in categories makes any empirical or practical difference as the end result is that gender variation remains medicalised. Yet what cannot be overlooked here is how transsexuals have been actively engaged in defining their position within the medical discourse, and how they relied on the medicalisation of transsexuality as a psychiatric disorder in order to get surgery. This also enabled transsexualism to claim an identity that undermined the priority of the body as well as the traditional idea of "natural sex". This tactic constituted a shift back to psychology from physiology. Nevertheless, members of the medical profession such as Benjamin (1883-1986), Money (1921-2006), Stoller (1925-1991), and Green (1936-) have helped to create a discourse which allows gender variations to be thought about and studied further. Whittle & Turner (2007) note how Stoller's (1968) argument that the biological sex of someone need not necessarily determine their gender identity paved the way for understanding transsexualism as a disruption of the immutability of the body.

I have explored changes in terminology and language, reflecting the ongoing development of transsexual theory in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the key points illustrated was the introduction of the more inclusive category of "gender dysphoria" that encompasses all forms of discomfort with gender. The next subsection begins to explore the notion that perhaps gender dysphoria is a natural outcome of living within a culture that has a rigid binary system, and in which any deviations have been labelled as "pathological" by the mental health system. This has led to the development of the multiple and contested term of "transgender", moving people away from the psychiatric diagnosis of being mentally disordered to becoming "gender outlaws" (Bornstein 1994).

2.1.7 Transgender

It's not so much that there have always been transgendered people; it's that there have always been cultures which imposed regimes of gender (Wilchins 1997, 67).

Most western European sex and gender discourses have relied on psychology and sexology to create some understanding of gender and sexual deviance from the norm. This has resulted in pathologising discourses in which people are marginalised and seen as perverse. Main challenges to the medical/psychological discourse have come from sociologists (Kessler & McKenna 1978, 2000; Ekins & King 1998, 1999, 2001; Lewins 1995), feminist theorists and activists (Raymond 1979; Jeffreys 1991; Millot 1990; Greer 1999), cultural/gender theorists (Halberstam 1998,1999, 2005; Garber 1992; Butler 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b) and more recently from transgender theorists (Whittle 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2006a, 2006b; Stryker 1994, 2004, 2006; Feinberg 1993, 1996; Bornstein 1994, 1997; Wilchins 1997; Devor 1989, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002; Devor & Matte 2004).

In the last 40 years, one strand of political action has been aimed at trying to achieve social acceptance for post-operative transsexuals. These efforts have focused on the judicial system and medical profession: the transsexual experience has been an illegal one since the law in western society forbids an unclear sex (Lenning 2004, 36). While the Gender Recognition Act in 2004 changed the legal definition of what constitutes male and female, the notion that there are legally only two sexes remains unchanged (Sandland 2005; Cowan 2005). However, the transgender political agenda also has another line of argument and action by asserting that it is the binary gender system that is wrong, rather than transsexualism or transgenderism.

Transgender is a concept of the 1990s and is an inclusive term for people who have broken away from society's expectation that sex and gender are essential, binary congruent categories. Whereas one model of transsexualism viewed transsexuals as "trapped in the wrong body", the model of transgenderism views gender as a continuum and calls for gender trajectories to suit the individual (Denny 1998, 2004a). Transgenderists do not necessarily see themselves as transsexuals or transvestites or indeed have any claim to any clear cut identities. The category of "transgender" is itself multiple and contested and incorporates a principle of diversity rather than uniformity, moving from dichotomy to continuity where it is not so easy to categorise people into male-female dualities. The term "transgender" moves away from a physically based definition (sex of the body) and encompasses a more social definition whereby a transgendered identification may refer to people living as *social*

men or *social* women who may, or may not, seek sex reassignment surgery (Cromwell 1999). They live their lives in a gender that opposes — according to dominant discourse — their biological sex.

The division of human beings into two mutually exclusive gender categories has been receiving increasing attention from transgender authors (Devor 1989, 1997, 1998. 1999, 2002; Stone 1991; Stryker 1994, 2004. 2006; Bornstein 1994, 1997; Wilchins 1997; Feinberg 1993, 1996). As the transgender political and social activist movement has developed, the diversity and variance of gender identities has become more visible. The category of "transgender" is expanding to include a wider variety of behaviour that can be grouped together and, in the process, it undermines the established notion of gender categories. Gender is undergoing a "category crisis" — old ways of categorising do not work because transpersons cross boundaries from one category to another (Mackenzie 1999). It is worth noting however, that using the category of "transgender" as an umbrella for a variety of identities is problematic and its many meanings currently remain in dispute. I adopt a simple definition used by Gilbert (2000, 2) as it refers to a mind/body dissonance of some kind without being specific:

> "Transgendered" applied to an individual signifies some degree of discomfort, all or some of the time with one's birth-assigned gender designation.

"Transgender" is not so much an externally assigned category as it is a self-defined one that moves away from medical definitions and describes a range of deviations from gender norms. This situation means that there is a need to challenge the linguistic barriers and develop language and terminology that describe this new self-definition in ways that do not rely on existing categories.

Though the transgender model initially appeared to be potentially liberating, Denny (2004a) outlines some disadvantages. First, if transsexuals and transgendered people are not mentally ill, there is no psychiatric justification for hormone or surgical treatment, and also legal protection is threatened if transsexualism is not seen as a "perceived disability" (Denny 2004a, 32). Second, transsexuals by

definition (the desire to change sex) want to belong to one gender and are not interested in any ambiguous genders. At the same time, Denny (2004a) notes, the transgender model has opened up middle ground that is so much more inclusive for gender-variant people's lived experiences that do not fit into the traditional transsexual model, in which transsexuals were required to manipulate these experiences in order to be taken seriously. The main discourse of the heteronormative binary model of sex and gender has resulted in the regulation of generations of transgendered people's sexed and gendered identities. Of course, it is impossible to know whether these same people would have made different decisions if they had been born in a different socio-historical context. What current research does show however, is that the contemporary transgender model has allowed a wider range of lived experiences to be taken seriously, and that this has opened the door to the development of a variety of transgender theoretical discourses. The importance of the category of "transgender" is that it enables individuals and groups to develop a political and social discourse that reflects the significance of one's identity and one's place within a wider community.

Section 2.1 has explored how trajectories have moved from a psychological approach (early twentieth century) to the emergence of a more medical approach based on hormone and surgical treatment (1950s). The phrase, "man trapped in a woman's body" became the transsexual's self-description, confirming the essentialised transsexual identity. This marked a shift in discourse from psychology to biology whereby changing the transsexual's body was seen as more effective that changing his/her mind through psychotherapy. The category of "gender identity disorder" firmly remained in the *DSM* (1987) as a psychological gender disorder treated by hormones and surgery. In short, this section has begun to highlight how the meaning of bodies and sex has changed over time with the medical/psychological discourse remaining dominant in people's understanding and experiencing of sexed and gendered identities. The next section explores how the binary organisation of sexed and gender identities is a distinct product of western civilisations.

2.2 Conceptualisations of sex/gender binary distinction

2.2.1 Introduction

This section begins to explore some of the key debates that have taken place within anthropological, feminist and queer studies. All three fields share a common interest in expanding the context for examining the social and political construction of gender and sexuality throughout history and cross-culturally. These disciplines provide a context for research and exploration into a wide range of cultures and historical periods which make it clear that gender variant people have existed across time and space. Section 2.2.2 examines some anthropological contributions to alternatives to the traditional western binary conceptualisation of gender, highlighting how the concept of "transsexual" is a western one, based on oppositional sexed and gendered identity categories. Section 2.2.3 describes the woman-centred model of second wave feminism with the focus on identity politics and it allows me to demonstrate how sociological studies provided one of the earliest critiques of the medical discourse, rejecting the notion of essentialised and fixed identities and categories. Section 2.2.4 explores the subsequent challenge of transsexualism to the essentialism of binary identity politics and the double-edged sword of transsexualism as a diagnosis. Section 2.2.5 considers the influence of postmodernism on feminist thinking in the 1980s and 1990s, with its challenge to essentialist identity politics and the destabilisation of sexual and gender categories. Here begins a more critical examination of the hegemonic power of heteronormative discourse that informs sex and gender identity categories which is key to this thesis. Section 2.6 continues to explore the "queering" of identity categories, drawing specifically on "queer theory" as a way of extending the thinking and theorising around transgenderism. Finally, Section 2.7 describes the uneasy relationship between transgender studies and queer theory which remains fraught with disagreements and tensions concerning the deconstruction of binary identity.

2.2.2 Cross-cultural aspects of gender

Gilbert Herdt, an American cultural anthropologist, challenges the prominence of sexual dimorphism in western sex and gender discourses. His book *Third Sex, Third Gender* (1994b) is a collection of essays that analyses the social and cultural context of gender identities, drawing on studies of the American Indian Berdache, Indian Hijras caste, Hermaphrodites in Melanesia and Third Gender in Indonesia. Herdt (1994c, 422) questions why, during the past century, sexologists, social historians and later, anthropologists who discovered "numerous instances of fuzzy sex and gender categories of individuals who seemed to be neither female nor male", still insisted on reducing these variations to one of two sexes. He draws attention to the changes that have occurred in the late twentieth century post-industrial society whereby the classification systems of sexual and gendered things are deconstructed in the process of thinking about sexual nature and sexual culture.

Postmodern anthropology is exploring the historical and cultural context in which sex and gender categories are constructed, exposing the ideology of sexual dimorphism that permeates western ideas of sexuality and gender. Researchers in the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology, have made society aware of the variety of "genderscapes" around the world (Helliwell 2007, 99). Their crosscultural analysis of gender supports the social constructionist argument that "gender is a situated, negotiated, contested, and changing set of practices and understandings" (Helliwell 2007, 100). In Lev's (2004) overview of gender variance in history, she describes how many cultures have documented the existence of more than two genders among the Maori of New Zealand, Shamans of Vietnam and Korea, Xanith of Islamic Oman and the Acult of Myanmar. Towle and Morgan's (2002) essay *Rethinking the Use of the 'Third Gender' Concept* examines the concept of "third gender" in U.S. scholarship over the last twenty five years and how it is been increasingly used to provide legitimacy for transgender identities. As anthropologists, their concern with taking cultural features out of context is not without acknowledgement of the emancipatory possibilities that the concept of "third gender" provides in destabilising the western gender binary. The next section draws

on the berdache as an example of how non-western cultural terms are used in an attempt to transcend the gender binary.

2.2.2a Berdache

Hines (2007b) reports how, in their search for a visible history, lesbian and gay studies in the 1960s and 1970s focused their gaze on non-western gendering practices adopting the Native American category "berdache" as a positive model for gay men specifically. Roscoe (1994) reports how a wide variety of terms have been used by Europeans and Americans to name the status of berdache, resulting in confusing terminology and descriptions. There seems to be no neat description of the term "berdache", and the most common categories appear to be "cross-gender", "third gender", and "two spirit". The transvestite berdache, or "two-spirit people", is a role documented among more than 130 aboriginal tribes of North America (Roscoe 1991; Lang 1998), and is applied to males and females (Hughes & Dvorsky 2008).

Roscoe (1987, 1991, 1994, 1997, 1998) completed extensive research and numerous publications on the berdache, a term generally adopted since the nineteenth century by American anthropologists. Roscoe (1991) describes the berdache as constituting a distinct gender status among North American Indians; one which is defined as a person, usually a male who was anatomically normal but who assumed alternative/opposite dress and behaviour to effect a change in gender status. Male-bodied berdaches in particular often fulfilled a variety of spiritual, medical and social roles. Unlike Europeans and Americans, gender or sexual divergence did not threaten the Indians. Generosity, spirituality, and gender, more than homosexuality, characterised berdachism. In the traditional tribal sense, these roles have often been ones associated with great respect and spiritual power. Rather than being viewed as an aberration, the role was seen as bridging the gap between the temporal and spirit worlds. Although there remains much confusion and uncertainty regarding the term "berdache", for the purpose of my thesis, employing the term illustrates an attempt to move beyond the limitations of western binary thinking, in that it provides a "middle" way or a "bridge".

2.2.2b Transferable categories?

While Roscoe's (1998) research clearly illustrates how gender variant people can be embraced and accepted, it is worthwhile drawing attention to the manipulation of western systems of classification when comparing the western concept of "transsexual" with "berdache". Hines (2007b) concurs with Califia (1997) when she suggests that perhaps cultures such as the berdache represented neither same-sex nor transgender practices, but demonstrated alternative sexual and gender groupings non-comparable with western classification. It is interesting to note that the concept of a "transsexual" is a western one based on the notion that there are two opposite sexes with distinct, culturally approved gender characteristics. Western philosophy seems much narrower in this respect than Eastern philosophies as it allows only for internally consistent stereotypes. The east/west division reflects the rigid dichotomy of paired opposites that allows little tolerance for cultural and social variances of what is perceived to be masculine or feminine. With little room to express the total spectrum of human emotion from nurturing to assertive behaviour, people have to hide or ignore some of the basic emotional outlets ascribed to one gender or the other. In the main, western society consistently masculinises assertiveness and feminises emotionality. It is, therefore, worth asking how much these polarising stereotypes influence the decision of people who are uncomfortable with their gender role and who come to feel that they have only one option: to anatomically become the other sex through surgery. Perhaps Native American Indians allowed for more gender role flexibility without the social stigma of western modern culture and the availability of surgical techniques and synthesised hormones of the 21st century.

In comparison with Native American Indian berdache, it is arguable that many present-day transsexuals become "post-operative" only because of the pressure of a polarised western society to conform to forced extremes. From a Native American's perspective, like Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies, one is encouraged to seek the "middle path". In western society, however, one is forced to choose only one role or the other with no allowances for variations along what is actually an infinitely divisible gender spectrum. As such, the modern post-operative

transsexual could be seen as perpetuating gender role stereotypes, rather than challenging them.

2.2.2c Invisibility of female gender variance

Lang (1999) draws attention to the fact that most anthropological work on cross gender has focused on the male berdache, with some exceptions (Blackwood 1984; Callender & Kochems 1983; Roscoe 1994). Contrary to the belief that the cross-gender role was not feasible for women, Blackwood & Wieringa (1999) suggest that anthropologists have overlooked the available data, some considering Plains Indian women too insignificant to merit special treatment. Certain social conditions may be also responsible for this including the fact that the ethnographers were white men and men were generally excluded from knowledge of women's behaviour. Blackwood (1984) reports that by the late nineteenth century the female cross gender role, sometimes referred to as "fourth gender", had disappeared among Native Americans with its final demise caused by the dominant ideology of western culture beginning to replace traditional Native American gender systems. Roscoe (1994) cites how there are different opinions among researchers on whether and how female berdache existed, but concludes that the lack of historical literature and ethnographies make it impossible to make any definitive statement concerning the existence and distribution of female berdache.

Cromwell (1999) argues that very few female-to-male (FTM) and transmen identify with the concept of the "berdache" as it renders female gender diversity invisible. Cromwell's (1999) research on contemporary transmen highlights the lack of data on FTM, claiming that this has been erased by androcentrism and biological determinism and subsumed under lesbianism. In my view, a key factor in the lack of recognition of female gender diversity in western societies is the conflation of homosexuality and transgenderism, with stereotypes associating lesbianism with masculinity. As long as the heteronormative framework of sex and gender binaries dominates western culture, there are limitations on how many sexed and gendered identities are possible.

2.2.2d Western trans drawing on non-western cultural discourse

Trans writers Bornstein (1994, 1997), Feinberg (1993, 1996) and Garber (1992) examine gender variance in history, drawing attention to the influence that culture has in the construction of gender ideologies and identities. This social mapping of transgender has helped to provide a wider and more validating context for gender variance that has brought meaning and cause for celebration into transgendered lives. Whilst not being part of the academic establishment, Bornstein's work is a thought-provoking contribution to theorising on transgender politics and experience. She is an advocate of gender fluidity and as a writer, actor and performer challenges society's deeply entrenched assumptions about having to be one sex or the other. At the risk of both universalising and minimising the concept of transgender, it appears that dichotomous gender categories mask the diversity of actual human identities and bodies and that there are many transgender issues and behaviours that occur within both heterosexual and gay relationships. The majority of people have not found the language to conceptualise themselves in this way yet. As Bornstein (1994, 66) expresses it, "I think that everyone has to work at being a man or a woman. Transgender people are probably more aware of doing the work, that's all".

Bornstein's (1994) pioneering text *Gender Outlaw* is concerned with being outside the "laws of gender" that inevitably perpetuate male privilege. Like Stone (1991), she argues that the medical and psychological discourse for transsexualism prevents the possibility of transgressing the boundaries of gender by emphasising "passing" as important criteria for surgery. Stone (1991) is concerned that, instead of constructing a plausible history that fits in with their gender of choice, transsexuals need to speak their own personal history of "bodily inscription". The oppressiveness of the binary gender system forecloses any debate or exploration into the rich and complex structuration of identity and desire. The limitation of the binary gender system's configuration of sexed and gendered identities presents a theoretical gap in exploring the range of bodily inscriptions that are possible.

Bornstein (1994) capitalises on the term "trans" to illustrate gender ambiguity as a way of potentially transcending gender —"trans" prefix is defined as "across; beyond" (*Oxford Dictionary Online).* Drawing on her own post-operative experience

she uses the shamanic phenomena as a way of reframing the gender enlightenment that she experienced. Bornstein (1994) provides the idea of the shaman as the gender transcender. The shaman is (cross culturally) someone who dies (literally or symbolically), meets the spirit world and comes back to the world. In the instant between death and rebirth the spirits give the shaman a portion of the truth to take back. The catch is that if the shaman fails to reveal that truth to others, the shaman is driven mad by the spirits. As much as this may sound esoteric, it is my view that the framework of shamanism could be seen as an additional alternative framework for thinking about the trans state and see it as a potential source of healing and meaning. This reflects my own background of trans-personal psychology which says we are more than our pathology and personality. So could it be that the concept of "trans" may lead the way to a place that exists outside the borders of what is culturally acceptable?

It is easy to see how Bornstein's (1994) work could be criticised for offering a kind of magical and idealised narrative which also reduces "third gender" people into one category, ignoring diversity and complexity of experiences. But she does offer hope, and what is wrong with magic anyway? She describes the concept of the "outlaw" as that of a third space that exists outside the dichotomy and sees transgendered people as gatekeepers into another world. In this instance, the transgender and transsexual dilemma is reframed within a spiritual context. This is a brave step which includes an aspect of people's lives not mentioned much in feminist gender theory.

Towle & Morgan (2002) critique how western writers and theorists such as Bornstein (1994) use the term "third gender" in an attempt to provide alternative constructions of binary gender ideologies and identities. They explore the implications of using the term "transgender" or "third gender", arguing against using caricatures of other cultures to advance the west's understanding of gender relations because it risks reducing all non-normative gender variations into one category. Indeed, Towle & Morgan (2002, 485) draw on Epple's (1998, 273) claim that the third gender concept "sets gender incongruence apart, keeps the meanings of 'man' and 'woman' safe from its disruptive influences". Towle & Morgan (2002) argue for more examination and research into each specific culture, with particular attention

given to the historical and social contexts in which sexed and gendered bodies and desires are produced, reproduced and transformed. They make critical points regarding the pitfalls of essentialising other non-western cultures by seeing them as liberating and having greater gender freedom than the west which is oppressive and binary driven in comparison.

While transgender theorising offers important ways of understanding gender, the literature draws attention to the tendency for romanticising the transgendered person as an idealised, exalted figure often seen as a hero or healer. The danger of portraying transgender in this way is that it sustains stereotypes about non-western cultures as exotic and assumes that this "third" gender category allows differences and fosters acceptance. The "third gender" concept is as likely to constrain and subsume all western nonbinary identities and practices, as much as expand them (Towle & Morgan 2002). If gender expression is constructed by culture, it is worth considering the theoretical, social and political consequences of non-binary gender in western society and important to remain aware of the implications of resisting the gender binary in western society. In other words it is important to remain aware of ethnocentric theorising, whilst acknowledging that different cultural discourses, at least, open up the category of gender, creating possibilities for re-examining what "natural" identity and desire are.

Herdt (1994) observes how anthropology's contribution to understanding western sexed and gendered identities has been slow. He puts this down to the dominance of psychological and biological discourse in Euro-American societies and how it took the emergence of feminist theory in the 1970s, and the development of the sex/gender distinction to make it possible to question biological determinism and the social construction of gender roles. In other words, feminist theory was key in recognising the importance of society and culture in constructing desire, identities and practices. The next section traces 1970s second wave feminist thinking on the concept of identity as representing a unified essential subject, through to the deconstruction of identity by postmodern (third wave) feminism and queer theory.

2.2.3 Feminism

Second wave and third wave feminism are characterised by differences in perspective which remain contentious in feminist politics today. For the purpose of this thesis I will give a brief overview of the differences between second wave and third wave feminism in relation to different understandings of gender. In doing so, I risk overlooking a multifaceted and contested field which is by no means unproblematically divided into two strands. For instance, within second wave there are further distinctions — radical feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism — but, generally speaking, they are all built on foundations of universality and sameness and adopt dualistic categories of man/woman and sex/gender. Third wave feminism is concerned with deconstructing the dualistic theoretical frameworks, celebrating differences and diversity (Arneil 1999). The terms "second wave" and "third wave" suggest a linear progression when, in fact, they co-exist with points of convergence and divergence. With these complexities in mind, I explore the challenges that transsexualism has posed to theorising around the notion of essentialised /constructed identities. I describe how sociological studies have been influential in second wave feminist theorising, and more recently within postmodern understandings of gender as a performance (Butler 1999). In this way, the following section builds on previous historical constructions and understandings of sexed and gendered identity, with essentialist/constructionist theoretical debates coming more into the foreground.

Sociological studies provided one of the earliest critiques of the medical discourse, rejecting the notion of essentialised and fixed identities and categories; situating gender at a social level instead. The social constructionist approach has been widely developed since Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological study of "Agnes" where the issue of a male wanting to "pass" as a woman was particularly highlighted. Garfinkel studied the methods Agnes employed to "pass" as a female by using "female" bodily skills, behaviours, appearances. The "naturalness" of gender was exposed here as being achieved only though practised modes of interaction via bodily gestures and learned behaviours. In the 1970s, feminist sociologists Kessler & McKenna (1978) built on Garfinkel's proposal that gender is socially constructed,

hence changeable, while assuming sex is biological and fixed. Yet, while Kessler and McKenna recognised that sex is biological, they suggested that viewing sex as essentially male or female was a socially constructed process. Kessler & McKenna's work examined how gender identity is created and recreated through a construction of binaries unconnected to biology.

In the early 1970s, second wave feminist sociologists adopted Money's (1952) and Stoller's (1968) conceptualisation of the sex/gender distinction as a way of separating the biological and the social. Ann Oakley's (1972) book, *Sex, Gender and Society,* was a significant contribution to the idea that gender is socially constructed, challenging the belief that differences between men and women were "natural". The sex/gender distinction was initially adopted and employed by feminists as a way of highlighting gender inequality in that it conceptualised sex as a biological category and gender as a social category.

The separation of gender and sex came to dominate much of feminist theory in the 1970s and 1980s, setting up a nature/culture distinction in western society with sex seen as nature and gender seen as culture. Underlying the sex/gender distinction is the idea that sex is immutable and fixed and gender is changeable, reproducing the Cartesian dualism of body and mind. For many, sex is seen as one of the most profound truths about an individual's identity and provides a true picture of a concrete and unproblematic reality. This maps the sexed body as "the truth" and therefore not subject to change. Feminist politics organised itself around this singular category of gender, based on the difference between men and women. The woman-centred strand of second wave feminism is concerned with the commonality of women as a group and is often known as "category" or "identity politics" feminism because it claims to speak from and about the category of women (Beasley 2005, 48). Woman-centred feminism, based on gender difference, remains broadly accepted in contemporary western societies and is reflected in sayings such as "opposites attract" and the "battle of the sexes".

Transsexualism posed a significant challenge to the woman-centred strand of second wave feminism that presumed gender was the essential core to power, proposing a "fixed feminine way of being" with a definite list of characteristics attached to the category of "woman" (Ferguson 1994). Kessler & McKenna (2000)

explored how transsexuals exemplified the social construction of gender but instead of seeing its revolutionary potential, there was a high degree of conformity and conservatism within the main transsexual population, where dominant views on masculine and feminine were subscribed to by many. Gender identity clinics reinforce this binary, as does the task of "passing", whereby transsexuals were and are still, forced to adopt stereotypical identities in order to gain access to medical support. In this way, traditional transsexual theorising and woman-centred feminism's claim to a "true core self" could be seen to share a commitment to essentialist binary identity politics. The paradox within this apparent similarity has become part of the ongoing debate that exists between identity politics and contemporary third wave feminism/queer theory, representing a contested site on which questions relating to the body and gender are played out.

2.2.4 Anti-transsexual scholarship

Transsexualism radically questioned the ontology of femininity and the material reality of sexed differences. Feminist scholarship in the 1970s refused to accept transsexualism as a legitimate identity accusing the medical profession of "crafting" a transsexual identity. Raymond (1979), Jeffreys (1991) and Millot (1990) all argue that transsexualism is a creation of the sexist medical establishment. Greer (1999) is well known for her anti-transsexualism in the 1980s and 1990s, and is notorious for her "outing" trans women. Jeffreys (1991) argues that transsexualism served patriarchy and homophobia while Mary Daly (1928-), a notable feminist philosopher and theologian, links the transsexual body to Frankenstein's monster in her publication *Gyn/ecology* in 1978. Daly was dissertation adviser to Raymond's dissertation which was later published as *The Transsexual Empire* in 1979. Raymond's (1979) publication vilifies male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals for upholding stereotypes of women which encouraged institutionalised discrimination in the 1980s. Raymond (1979, 119) suggests that "the transsexual empire is ultimately a medical empire […] it has medicalised moral and social questions of sex-role oppression". Raymond in particular, refuses to consider any alternative explanation. Her argument relies on the notion that sex/gender identity is fixed

within the genitals at birth. Whittle (1996b, 207) reports that lesbian feminists of the time saw transsexuals as "misguided and mistaken men seeking surgery to fulfil some imaginary notion of femininity, and furthermore, upholding the gendered sex-role structure inherent in the patriarchal hegemony which sought to discredit feminist work". As a consequence, transsexuals were alienated further.

Raymond (1979) gives transsexuals no validity as human beings with minds of their own and her book lacks any accounts of transsexuals' lives or experiences: something which, paradoxically, creates both an objective and soul-less theory written from a subjective fearful place. At this point it is necessary to point out that in my reading of trans writers' criticism of Raymond's work, it is apparent how demonised she is. This seems to be a reflection of how she demonised transsexualism in her phobic and unsympathetic attack on transsexuals in *The Transsexual Empire* (1979). Yet, there is no denying that she drew attention to the political significance of the medicalisation of transsexualism. Epstein & Straub's (1991) edited collection on the cultural politics of gender ambiguity generated concern primarily from lesbian feminists who argue that transsexuality is deeply reactionary and a violation of human rights (Jeffreys 1991; Raymond 1979). Jeffreys (1991) maintains that what transsexual women consider feminine behaviour is a signifier of women's oppression and colludes with patriarchy. Such feminist approaches to transsexualism reproduce an understanding of sex as biological and fixed, promoting a heteronormative ideology. They are also an example of how strategic essentialism can be used to advance the political goals of another, also marginalised group.

Billings & Urbans' (1982) critical history of transsexualism describes it as a socio-medical construction which serves the interest of the medical profession. Since transsexualism was initially self-diagnosed, all that patients had to do was read the literature and give the surgeons the aetiology that the latter wanted. With the demand for surgery being the main signifier for diagnosing transsexualism, it became apparent that the definition relied on subjective feelings with the defining trait being an obsession with body modification. Billings & Urban (1982, 275) report from their own participant observation in a gender clinic that diagnosis "remains a subtle negotiation process between patients and physicians, in which the patient's troubles are defined, legitimised and regulated as illness". Within this medicalised form of

identity there is little emphasis on self-understanding and sexual politics. Billings and Urban's exploration of the politics of sex-reassignment confirms the priority of medical terminology over political discourse when faced with the challenge of reorganising and rethinking gender.

Hausman's (1995) inquiry into how medical technology has been central to establishing a transsexual subjectivity argues that the inclusion of transsexualism in *Diagnostic Statistical Manual 3rd edition* has, in fact, reinforced gender identity as a normative and heterosexual account of sexual development. She details the elaboration of gender narratives and the concept of "passing" which both collude with regulating the western binary framework. While the medical model of transsexualism has validated people's experience of gender dysphoria, it has also regulated the parameters of transsexual experience. The category change from "transsexual" to "gender dysphoria" has gone some way to remedy this, in that the classification has become more general and rests less on the specific diagnostic differentiation set out by Benjamin (1966) and Stoller (1968).

Califia (1997) discusses the "gender scientists" in his analysis of the history of transsexuality. He argues that help from doctors is a double-edged sword as instead of accepting gender variation and seeing its worth, they try to discover a physiological or pathological explanation of it. In Monro's (2000) research on theorising transgender diversity, evidence points to the fact that treatment was only accessible if the individual became part of psychiatry's pathologising diagnostic system. Both medical and psychological methods are seeking the congruence of sex, gender and sexual orientation identity whereby the individual must belong to one of two gender categories, with preferably a heterosexual orientation. It is becoming more apparent that there is a wide range of people who do not fit into the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* categories or identify as transsexual, yet are seeking some type of body modification to redefine their gender presentation, either through hormones or surgery or both (Feinberg 1996; Nestle et al. 2002; Bornstein 1994; Sanger 2008a; Volcano 2009). Accordingly, there has been a move to revise and expand the medical model's understanding of transsexualism. New discourses are being created by those who articulate their transsubjectivity differently to medical/psychological discourses and it is a key aim of this thesis to begin to give voice to these alternatives.

In sum, the sex/gender distinction has been a significant paradigm in how sex and gendered identities are organised and this has reflected the social and cultural shifts in society. Within the historical context of the 1960s, feminist scholarship was central in making the conceptual distinction between sex as fixed and natural, and gender as a cultural and social practice. This was a move away from viewing gender roles being rooted in biology and was a way of arguing for social and political empowerment for women. Hence, feminism — at least in the early phases — generally accepted the sex and gender dichotomy, often defending the biological essentialism of the identity of "woman". Feminist discourse embraced the ideas of socialisation which called into question the patriarchal division of men and women; second wave feminism was a struggle of equality, not the deconstruction of gender. Second wave feminism, which is based on a distinction between men and women, is seen as colluding with the gender system that is grounded in male/female categorisation.

Butler (2004a) suggests that this is only one version of feminism, one that is contested by views that take gender as a historical category. The next section differentiates between second wave feminism, which focuses on the differences between men and women, and third wave or postmodern feminism which emphasises differences between and within everyone, with a focus on destabilising binary identities such as men and women.

2.2.5 Third wave

> Heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without coherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable intrinsic comedy…a constant parody of itself (Butler 1999, 155).

In the 1980s and 1990s there was a crucial shift in feminist thinking with the sex/gender distinction contested by third wave feminists who questioned the whole notion of identity politics. Richardson (1996) draws attention to this emergence of a

new politics of identity which contested the essentialism of the 1970s. Richardson (1996, 5) describes the postmodern shift in the politics of identity as "queer"; a term which is used to emphasise the deconstruction and fluidity of sex and gender categories and the consequent displacement of the identity categories "lesbian", "gay" and "heterosexual". Corber & Valocchi (2003, 4) describe how, in shifting the focus from identities to practices, "queer" scholars introduced a new concept "heteronormativity" (Warner 1991) — meaning a set of norms that make heterosexuality correct and that organise homosexuality as its opposite, thus maintaining the dominance of heterosexuality as something that remains unmarked and taken for granted. It is important to state that heterosexuality is not a monolithic and unitary concept (Crawford 1993; Eliason 1995; Jackson 1996, 1999; Smart 1996; Yep 2003), but comprises a complex institution, identity and practice that all interconnect. Heteronormativity is used to illustrate how the normalisation of heterosexuality is "encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life" (Epstein & Johnson 1994, 198). This begins a critical examination and theorisation of the way that heterosexuality encodes and structures everyday life and how it produces sexual and gender norms.

Postmodern feminists such as Butler (1999) and Garber (1992) challenge the hegemonic heterosexual norms that conceptualise desire in terms of attraction to difference, with gender being the marker of difference. They challenge this position and see the sexed body and gender as multiple and fluid, with the body constructed by ideas and meanings with no essential reality. Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999) causes trouble by challenging any notion of an inner truth or fixed gender identity and proposes that gender is performative as a socially compulsory act. Butler (1999, xxix) plays down the idea of gender having an origin, suggesting that "identity categories are the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses, with multiple and diffused points of origin". In short, Butler's (1999) theory on performative identity focuses on *being* a gender is always a *doing,* and that gender does not have some locatable starting point but is more an activity or performance in constant movement.

Butler's (1956-) questioning of identity politics and her analysis of sexuality and gender as performative continues the groundbreaking work that first began in the

attempt of feminist theorists Rich (1929-) and Wittig (1935-2003) to denaturalise heterosexuality and, in the process, to deconstruct the categories of men and women. Rich (1980) questions the assumption that women are naturally heterosexual and explores the links between heterosexuality and procreational economics. Her essay on compulsory heterosexuality was pioneering in her depiction of heterosexuality as yet another socially produced fiction that constructed and maintained a binary heterosexual order on which the foundation of gender was built. She emphasises how heterosexuality, as an institution, maintains the oppression of women, keeping them psychologically trapped in mind body and spirit. The French feminist theorist, Wittig (1992/1998), continues with this debate, arguing that the categories of men and women, indeed all sexual categories, are the products of a gender hierarchy which is institutionalised as heterosexuality. Rich (1980) and Wittig (1992/1998) challenge the idea of heterosexuality as normal, and instead of being seen as natural, view it as a social construct. Whether it is seen as a something that is psychologically achieved or socially constructed, Freud (albeit perhaps unwittingly) and the feminist theorists, draw attention to the notion that heterosexuality is not a "natural" state.

Rich (1980) goes further, suggesting that instead of sexologists and psychiatrists looking for explanations of homosexuality, they should be looking to explain heterosexuality. Wittig (1992/1998) is equally controversial in her proposal that lesbians are not women, because "woman" only has meaning in heterosexual systems of thought. Wittig (1992/1998) describes the "straight mind" as using political categories without any questioning or examination, and a tendency to universalise concepts into general laws, employing the word *the —* "*the* difference between the sexes, *the* symbolic order, *the* Unconscious […] giving an absolute meaning to these concepts when they are only categories founded upon heterosexuality […]" (Wittig 1992/1998, 146). Both Wittig (1992/1998) and Rich (1980) preceded Butler's (1990) more recent postmodern critique of heterosexuality as an unexamined discourse.

Butler's (1999, 42) translation of the unrelenting tyranny of heterosexuality is described as the "heterosexual matrix" which designates that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised. Butler (1999, 23) argues that this results in the heterosexualisation of desire which "requires

and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine', where these are understood as expressive attributes of 'male' and 'female' " . The normalisation of heterosexuality is a social phenomenon and promotes a sexuality that is based on the principle that opposites attract and, in turn, it perpetuates the reproduction of a binary gender system. In this way, the heterosexual identity is affirmed and stabilised through sexual and gendered categories that become norms. Butler (1999) argues that this exclusive binary framework of sexual duality has key consequences in how desire is constructed. Sex, gender and sexuality are thought of as distinct variables described as having binary characteristics: bodies are either female or male; gender presentation, behavioural dispositions, and social roles are either masculine or feminine; and sexuality is either heterosexual or homosexual (Lorber 1996). The gendered idea of biological sex produces the binary notion of "opposite sexes" that maintain the workings of the heterosexual matrix. These then become the basis of social identities that often remain unquestioned.

Butler's (1999) critique of the heterosexual matrix exposes the unquestioned intelligibility of individuals who conform and define within a binary oppositional relation. The heterosexual matrix describes the boundaries of expression and social acceptance by defining what is natural and unnatural within the governing law and this matrix is reinforced by those that fall outside it. Butler (1996, 119) is alert to the possible reification of the heterosexual matrix, whereby it becomes a "kind of totalising symbolic". Butler (1993) uses the term "heterosexual hegemony" in her subsequent publication, *Bodies that Matter,* as a way of opening up the possibility that this matrix is open for rearticulation. In this way, Butler draws attention to how any discourse can become hegemonic and produce identities that then become normative, through repeating and producing specific modes of expression and behaviour.

The influence of postmodernism on feminist thinking during the 1990s led to the idea of "third wave" feminism as a way of emphasising the shift from essentialist identities to the fluidity and deconstruction of identities. This includes engaging explicitly with transgender and queer studies which, interestingly, remains a

contentious issue for both second wave feminists and traditional transsexuals. The following section explores some of these historical tensions.

2.2.6 Queer theory

As previously acknowledged, Rich (1980), Wittig (1992/1998) and Butler (1999) can be seen as anticipating the development of queer theory in their emphasis on discourse as a tool of power and their focus on resistance. Wilton (1996, 139) suggests that speaking from a queer position is to speak from "a location eccentric to (cast out from) the heterosexual centre of gravity". Feminists and lesbians were already familiar with this position and, for this reason, it is feminists and lesbians who can be seen as forerunners of queer theory. While it could be argued that the essentialist assumptions of 1970s second wave feminism contributed to the singular, fixed notion of unified identity, Gearhart (2003, xxvii) makes the important point that the Women's Liberation Movement and the feminist theory of the 1970s constituted the first political resistance to what is now called "heteronormativity". Richardson (1996, 5) credits concepts such as political lesbianism (Leeds Revolutionary Group 1981), the woman-identified woman (Radicalesbians 1970) and the lesbian continuum (Rich 1980), all of which initiated feminist critiques of institutionalised heterosexuality by challenging the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

Corber & Valocchi (2003) describe how in the 1970s and 80s, the quasi-ethnic or minoritarian model dominated the lesbian and gay movements in which gay people were viewed as similar to Jews or African Americans with their own distinct history. The formation of a collective lesbian and gay identity was key in the struggle to gain social and legal legitimacy, but this came at the cost of the binary categories of sexuality and gender remaining unchallenged. Queer studies emerged partly against this approach, rejecting an idea of a unified, coherent and self-understanding subject and generated a series of debates mainly questioning the limitations of identity-based knowledge. Queer scholars claimed that the minoritarian model of collective identity marginalised those lesbian and gays who were unwilling to conform to it and the 1980s saw conflicts and tensions emerging that began to question identity-based scholarship and activism (Corber & Valocchi 2003).

Whittle (2006b) uses his own experiences in exploring the historical tensions between feminist theory and trans theory, citing Raymond's (1979) thesis *The Transsexual Empire* as a key text in maintaining, amongst other things, the notion that biology is destiny. Whittle (2006b, 194) charts his own journey from identifying as a lesbian separatist in the 1970s to his work as a transgender theorist in the twenty-first century, naming the 1980s the "dark decade" when transgendered people were pathologised and criticised by feminists. As discussed previously, Raymond's vitriolic attack on the transsexual community had long lasting influences on how transgendered writers and speakers presented themselves as "primarily apologists" (Whittle 2006b, 198). Whittle's (2006b) own experiences, from the 1970s to the present day, place him in the unique position of examining the various discources that informed who he was becoming. Central to this has been his involvement in feminist and transgender debate regarding the notion of gender. Drawing on this, Whittle (2006b) observes that both feminist and trans theory challenge the dualism in the essentialist/constructionist debate and draw attention to the notion that gender is a political issue which influences social and legal practice.

The idea that sexual difference is a primary difference is a point contested by both feminist and transgender theory. Yet within these two disciplines, second wave feminism and traditional transsexual theorising reflect the ongoing tensions between essentialist identity politics focus on constructing collective categories and postmodern deconstruction of collective categories. Pidaparti et al. (2007) describe the debate that emerged out of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement as collectivism versus individualism, resulting in two distinct groups forming with conflicting ideals: societal conformists who focused on acceptance and equality of the LGBT community; and queer theorists emphasising the differences between the LBGT community and the "heterosexual" society. Pidaparti et al. (2007) acknowledge that these groups have subdivided further over time, yet there remains an ability to unite as an LGBT whole in the common cause of achieving common goals.

Petersen (1998) notes that Teresa de Lauretis is credited with coining the phrase "queer theory" at a conference in 1990 on theorizing in lesbian and gay studies. In seeking alternative models and discourses for exposing the ideology of the

heterosexual matrix, queer theory is aligned with anti-essentialism and is proving to be a challenging and controversial development emerging from gay and lesbian politics and feminist politics. Though pre-dating the more contemporary use of "queer", Sedgwick (1985, x) describes the "explicit basis" of queer thinking as "criss-crossing" the lines of identification and desire among genders, sexualities and other social categories. In this way, traditional demarcations are problematised and and queer theory offers a cultural resource for rethinking the notions of sexual and gender identity, subverting traditional identity categories. This is a significant reversal of established identity politics where there is a strong emphasis on fixed categories.

In the 1990s, postmodern approaches were influenced by Foucault's (1978) work, resisting set identity categorisations and favouring a plurality of sexualities and genders. Foucault (1926-1984) used historical processes to argue that sexuality is not a natural fact of human life but a constructed cultural category. Foucault questioned the entrenched and institutionalised models of theoretical and political discourses inherent in the practice of sexuality. Foucault's three main systems of analysing power and knowledge are archaeology, genealogy and ethics. For my present purposes, archaeology and genealogy are especially important because they locate the struggle of power in discourses. I look at these in turn below.

Foucault (1978) emphasises sexuality as having complex roots in western culture and history. The first volume of his History of Sexuality is a powerful account of different views of sex and sexuality across various cultures and periods of time. His 'archaeology of sex' illustrates how our sexual beliefs and values are influenced by social institutions and discourses of the time in which people lived. He challenges the idea that sexuality is a natural 'truth', arguing that it is a constructed category of experience which has historical and cultural origins. Foucault (1985) examines discourses from the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment with a view to examining how discourses on sex and sexuality produce categories of sexual practices and sexual identities by which people are marked as particular kinds of people. For instance, the Greeks did not have the same social organisation of sexed difference and eroticism as that which prevails in contemporary western society and they did not have a heterosexual/homosexual dualism. Foucault (1978) notes how the

Greeks saw sex as one of many social activities compared to the dominant attitude in the Enlightenment where a truth about our identity came out of our sexual activity. Individuals, and not just their acts, came to be labelled as normal and abnormal. This continues in modern discourses where there is a desire to classify and categorise particular sexualities, such that new ways of viewing people are produced. A key point in the history of sexuality occurred when people's sexuality was no longer used simply to classify them, but also to ascribe values and rights/privileges to these categories. This interest in sex in western societies is an example of what Foucault (1984) calls 'power-knowledge' which limits the possibilities of subjectivity – both of who we can be and the kind of relationships that are possible. Thus we can begin to understand why he views sex and sexuality as phenomena that have much to do with social discourse and laws and less to do with bodies and desires.

Foucault's (1984) work on understanding how western society organises and regulates people's thoughts and behaviours was developed through a method called genealogy. Genealogy investigates the historical 'emergences' of discursive practices and how they inform the way power and knowledge are formed. Foucault (1984) believed that like everything else, power and knowledge have a history and the goal of genealogy is to chart the discursive limitations on human knowledge and action. Genealogy foregrounds the dominant social categories of the time, illustrating how individuals make sense of their lives within the available categories of a particular historical period. Foucault (1984) describes the defining event of the eighteenth century as the heterosexualisation of modern society where forms of knowledge established norms which were linked to the social order of the time. At this point, the binary opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality began to be formulated. Foucault (1978) argues that the normalisation of these ideas came about by repeating cultural practices and techniques which continue to infiltrate minds and bodies which in turn cultivate beliefs and behaviours as seemingly natural qualities embedded in the individual psyche. Foucault's (1984) answer to this tendency is to demand an analysis of the historical, cultural and social politics of the time. He is less concerned with the truth and essence of sexuality than with how it functions as a power in society.

In particular, Foucault (1978) drew attention to the normalisation of heterosexuality as a category, and to how it remains a central and dominant influence in how sexed and gendered bodies and identities are understood today. Foucault's (1978) study of the emergence of sexual categories illustrated that sexual identities are not merely victims of power but produced by power. Queer theory is linked in particular to Foucault (1978) and Butler (1999) who adopts Foucault's (1978) argument that sexuality is discursively produced and who extends it to include gender. The work of queer theorists such as Sedgwick (1985, 1990), Warner (1991, 1993, 1999), Halperin (1990, 1995), Seidman (1993, 1996), Butler (1999), and Garber (1992) significantly build on Foucault's (1978) work, specifically taking up the critique of gender categories. According to Butler (1999), identity categories are instruments of regulatory systems which, if allowed to stabilise, limit experiences and choices available to the individual. One of Butler's (1999) main challenges to heterosexuality is to expose how it maintains normative binary divisions as the norm of human relationships, thereby restricting a host of sexual and gender possibilities and only promoting desire based on difference instead. Butler's (1999) *Gender Trouble* (influenced by de Beauvoir's challenge that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (1949/1987, 267), and Rubin's (1984) *Thinking Sex,* are groundbreaking texts that enabled queer theory to develop new ways of thinking about sex and gender.

Butler's critique of naturalised binary gender classification is a key strand of queer theory and subsequently a major contribution to contemporary transgender discourses. Queer theory provides a significant threat to the binary thinking that has created sexual and gender duality and is concerned with the depathologising of sexual and gender variation. Queer theorists argue that it is possible to have a society that is not organised by a heterosexual norm and that sex, gender and desire need not be reducible to each other. In other words "queer" is concerned with challenging basic hegemonic assumptions about the social and political world by subverting the normative rules of the heterosexual matrix and opening up spaces between the sexual and gender binaries. As Warner (1993) emphasises, "queer" does not define itself against the heterosexual but against the very notion of the normal.

Questions of bisexuality and transgender have been difficult to theorise and give meaning to outwith theories of difference and sameness. Since the emergence of queer theory and other alternative sociological models, the notion of bisexuality can be seen as a potential challenge to the binary understandings of sexuality. In discussions over bisexuality and nonconventional sexualities, the privileging of the dichotomous understandings of sexuality and the heteronormative assumption that gender preference defines sexual orientation are questioned. In this way, the bisexual critique potentially undermines traditional binaries, suggesting the possibility of legitimating desires outwith a heteronormative discourse and challenges the notion of unitary sexual identity (Warner 1993). At the most, queer theory can give social and cultural meaning to bisexuality, yet the continuing terminology of bisexuality also reinforces the binary construction of sexuality.

Debates have persisted over whether bisexuality is a temporary stage of denial or transition, a stable '3rd category' of sexual orientation or a capacity for sexual fluidity (Diamond 2008). As a result, bisexuality has been greatly underinvestigated for the sake of conceptual and methodological clarity (Rust 2000). Critiques of the rigid categorisation of individuals as either homosexual or heterosexual have been articulated by researchers emphasising the flexible, socially constructed nature of human sexuality (Blumenstein & Schwartz 1990; Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995; Rust 1992, 1993; Warner 1993; Baumeister 2000). Barker et al. (2008) provide an overview of the United Kingdom Bisexual Conference (2004) and the qualitative and qualitative research studies conducted on the active bisexual community and how they identify themselves. Results of research indicate that the main challenge bisexual people face is to articulate and perform a bisexual identity that resists dominant binary constructions of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless the research shows a collective refusal from the bi participants and bi academics and activists to submit to traditional dichotomous categories of sexuality and gender.

Queer scholars have used the transgender phenomenon to open up new ways of thinking about identities and practices outwith the heterosexual discourse of "oppositional" categories such as "man" and "woman". The history of the emergence of transgender identities is also "the age of multiplication: a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions' "

(Foucault 1978, 37), which emerged in the twentieth century through and against medicalised discourses. Queer theory focuses on those "perversions" that fall outside the mutually reinforcing identity binaries. Transgendered people potentially challenge society's perceptions of a sex and gender ideology that dictates that body equals gender, with some people advocating gender diversity as a part of human social life, instead of being seen as pathology. It is necessary to emphasise that many transsexuals choose sex and gender identification by default simply because the medical discourses force individuals to identify themselves as one of two genders (Hird 2002a).

One of the key arguments of this thesis is that the majority of the population takes the binary gender system as a given, but that this is only because they have not been offered any other way to think about it. As such, heterosexual identities remain unremarkable, escaping critical scrutiny (Yep 2003). Recently transgender activists have begun to focus on eliminating the concept of "man" and "woman" and are asserting the right to live outwith gender categories. One question being asked is, "is surgery necessary?" This has provoked discussion and introduced alternatives such as trans-women and trans-men who may choose not to have sex reassignment surgery (Gilbert 2000). Even here though, the power of heteronormativity is apparent in the continued use of the terms "man" and "woman". The next section points to the area of "trans studies" which is a growing academic field of study that is often subsumed under feminist and queer theory.

2.2.7 Trans studies

Stryker (2006) describes transgender studies, with its focus on questions of embodiment and positionality, as emerging at the intersection of feminist and queer studies. Transgender studies broadly describe anything that disrupts, denaturalizes and rearticulates the normative linkages between sex, gender and sexuality (Stryker 2006). It is worth clarifying that the term "transgender" can be used as a generic term to denote the whole field of gender identity transgressions known as "trans theorising", and it can also be associated specifically with a postmodern queer

position that is opposed to stable identities (Beasley 2005). Transgender studies and queer theory do not automatically go hand in hand.

A trans discourse is being developed by those who are able to articulate their "transsubjectivity" differently from the medical/psychological discourses (Cromwell 1999). Recent trans writing brings new insights and challenges to the issue of essentialism and the binary gender system (More 1995; Whittle 1999, 2006b; Prosser 1995, 1998; Halberstam 1998, 1999, 2005; Feinberg 1993, 1996; Bornstein 1994; Stryker 2006). The work of trans academics and activists is moving from the discredited status of viewing trans as being mentally disordered, to becoming "gender outlaws" (Whittle 2006a). From the perspective of these transgendered people, society needs to change, not them.

While transgender studies strongly invest in the "transgressive" potential of transsexualism, this investment is by no means agreed upon by the transgender community. Hird's (2002a, 577) exploration of the development of theories on transsexualism exposes a shift from the transsexual as "authentic" (a "real" man/woman) to issues of "performativity" (the transsexual as hyperbolic enactment of gender), to the notion of "transgressive" that can potentially collapse the sex/gender binary altogether. Yet as Hird (2002a) points out, the notion of transgression is a complex one as not all transsexuals want to be seen as subversive or queer.

Stryker (2006) points out how the emergence of transgender studies parallels the rise of queer studies and, despite similarities, their relationship with each other is often problematic and contested, with transgender studies sometimes considered to be queer theory's "evil twin" (Stryker 2004). This can be seen to be illustrated by writers King (1993), Prosser (1995, 1998), Rubin (1999, 2003), Felski (1996), Ekins (1997) and Namaste (1996, 2000) who argue that queer studies neglects the lived experiences of transgendered people (Hines 2006).There are ongoing tensions within the transgender movement with one of the main arguments being that some transsexuals still rely on traditional conceptions of binary gender as a social and psychological fact, unlike transgender activists who are working towards depathologising trans and moving to a position outside gender — in other words, queering gender. Bornstein (1994) is one of the critics of binary gender, drawing on

Butler's emphasis on gender as fictional and as something that is performatively reiterated. In fact Bornstein (1994, 95) goes further by suggesting that "culture itself is an acceptable performance of the truth ". Bornstein (1994) is a strong advocate for gender flexibility, rendering femininity and masculinity as malleable and constructible.

Stone (1991, 296) steps out of the two potentially contrasting positions of the traditional transsexual and the more contemporary transgender when she draws attention to the potential that transsexuals have to be seen as a genre: "a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra has yet to be explored". According to Stone (1991), the transgressive potential of transsexuality lies in its being outside the gender binary. She draws on an "inscriptive" approach to theorising the body which conceives of the body as a surface upon which society and values are "inscribed". This model is concerned with the processes that mark and transform the subject. Stone (1991) claims that "passing" is the essence of transsexualism, which is a "denial of mixture" and falls short of exploring the potential that Stone (1991) discusses. It is through the act of "passing" that culture uses transsexualism to reinforce the gender binary, whereby "passing" equals membership of a gender.

As much as transsexualism begins to raise questions about the dichotomous gender regime that we are born into, Bornstein (1994) criticises how transsexuals do not question the gender system which their very existence could topple. This view is echoed in transgender writer Nataf's (1996) belief that genders are not essential realities in themselves but could function more like language and act as signs remaining only for manipulation. The body is seen as a blank page to be written on or, in the case of transgressive genders, to be re-written on. It is worth noting that in using the term "re-written", there is a danger of privileging the "norm" of the initial imprint. Butler's claim to performativity and Halberstam's (1999) discussion of "reading gender" contribute to the view that gender is a fiction that demands that we learn how to read it:

> In order to find our way into a posttranssexual era, we must educate ourselves
> as readers of gender fiction, we must learn how to take pleasure in gender and

how to become an audience for the multiple performances of gender we witness everyday (Halberstam 1999, 132).

As much as it is not without its critics, queer theory has extended the thinking around transgenderism and is reclaiming the lack of clear cut categories that existed before the 1960s where there was little differentiation between transsexualism and transvestism. In fact, transgender is now being used to describe both a place in-between transvestite and transsexual *and* a place for those who do not fit into either category (Cromwell 1999). Love (2004) reports that it is becoming increasingly common within trans communities to define transsexual as cross-living, as opposed to cross-dressing, which creates an opportunity for self-definition outside the medical definition. Transgenderism also unsettles sexual orientation as individuals find themselves identifying as several orientations at different times, resulting in a destabilising of society's established categories of "heterosexual" and "homosexual". The literature shows that the essentialist/constructionist straitjacket keeps the binary thinking going and queer theory subverts this by resisting heterosexual theories of difference that become normalising codes.

Sociologists have continued to examine the social processes of gender and this has inevitably led to research and scholarship on transgender (Kessler and McKenna 1978; Plummer 1995; Ekins & King 1998, 1999; Lorber 1994, 1996, 2000; Monro 2000, 2005, 2007; Hird 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2000c, 2000d, 2004a, 2004b). According to Lorber (1994, 96) we have "no social place for a person who is neither woman nor man". Twenty-five years ago, Kessler and McKenna (2000) did not foresee the possibility that there would be people who did not want to fit into either gender, or, indeed, would want to present as neither male nor female. Since then, transgenderism has emerged as a phenomenon which is contributing to a paradigm shift in the traditional binary conceptualisation of gender. Instead of encouraging transsexuals to disappear and pass as men and women (Roen 2001), one political strategy employed in this shift has been to promote Stone's notion of transsexual visibility.

Claiming a right to speak for themselves is a key development in recent transgender writing and politics, and has provided an increasing focus of study for

western trans and intersex activists including Stone (1991), Feinberg (1993, 1996) Bornstein (1994, 1997), Wilchins (1997), Prosser (1995, 1998), Halberstam (1998, 1999, 2005), Whittle (1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2006a, 2006b), Whittle & Turner (2007) and Namaste (2000). These shifts in thinking have demanded constant discussion and debate within the transgender community and a need to constantly revise the language and discourse available for trans people. One of the key questions that arises from current theoretical thinking is whether it is possible to value the transgressive potential of transgender lives without disparaging the alternative desires and needs of those transsexuals who wish to live as women and men (Elliot 2009).

This chapter, so far, has explored how the emergence of the terms "transsexual" and "transgender" have fed into wider theoretical debates within anthropological, feminist, queer and trans studies, around the shifting conceptualisation of sex and gender. Contemporary writing and research into transgenderism, strongly influenced by queer theory, plays a critical part in the destabilisation of western dualistic thinking. At the same time, the deconstructive theoretical underpinnings of queer theory represent a threat to some of the advances that feminist work has been making in using identity categories as a basis for political and cultural organisation (Monro 2007). Yet, transgender identities and practices cannot be understood solely within either postmodern accounts of social construction or essentialist accounts of identity. In holding that the term "queer" is a system of discursive possibilities rather than a fixed theoretical model, Halperin (1990, 1995), Jagose (1996), Warner (1993, 1999), Yep, Lovaas & Elia (2003) offer the notion of conceptual elasticity and political commitment. It is this kind of space that avoids theoretical hegemony and promotes a productive tension between queer theory and identity politics. This has enabled a move away from a medical definition of transsexuality, allowing gender variant people to describe themselves in their own terms.

Contemporary scholarship divides the study of transgender identities into the rough categories of subversive and hegemonic (Love 2004) but these categories often fail to account for the complexities and contradictions of trans lived experiences. It could be argued that as a result of this over simplistic categorisation, transsexual

identity has become easily reduced to an essentialising discourse by queer thinkers. Gearhart (2003) alerts queer thinkers to the dangers of distancing themselves from essentialist thinking by recreating the very dichotomy that queer theory challenges. Gearhart (2003, xxviii) is mindful of acknowledging the interdependence of contrasting pairs of things when she suggests the practice of correlatives — the involvement of a mutual, reciprocal relationship between any pair of qualities. Instead of constructing dichotomies that label, separate and negate, can we think correlatively and name and affirm, avoiding the tyranny of extremes and oppression? In this way, we can acknowledge the essentialist thinking that is required when exploring the "essence" of queer, and keep in mind that the definition of essentialism does not in itself imply fundamentalism or oppression, but a foundation upon which hierarchical judgments are placed (Gearhart 2003, xxix). In this way, theorising can move beyond the constrained binaries of identity politics and queer theory.

The following section explores how the lived experiences of transgendered people engage with the above mentioned theoretical debates and the ways in which recent empirical research contributes to the theorising of transgender identities. In particular it draws attention to how the sex/gender distinction has limited ways of thinking about the subjectivity of gender, while recent developments in the field have led to an increasing interest in the notion of "embodied gender".

2.3 Empirical research

2.3.1 Introduction.

This section draws on recent empirical research that examines the current theoretical tensions between locating gender as a stable identity category and as a fluid process. Section 2.3.2 reports the reality of how some people want to fit into the dualistic gender system, and the difficulties of remaining in an *"in-between space"*. Section 2.3.3 illustrates how the power of regulatory frameworks constrains the narratives that transgendered people tell and, at the same time, incorporates new configurations and identities. Section 2.3.4 continues with transgender writers and theorists making a strong case for the essentialist nature of transgendered people to

be taken into account, counteracting queer theory's focus on the body being a product of cultural beliefs. In this way, the notion of embodied gender is becoming a more accepted experience. These conceptual shifts are a result of paying increasing attention to transgendered "lived experience" as a key contribution to the developing academic study *with* transgendered people, as opposed to *on* them. 2.3.5 describes how the focus on the phenomenology of lived experience of gender need not be in opposition to developing postmodern critique and destabilisation of binary identities. 2.3.6 examines some of the implications of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, where the categories of "sex" and "gender" are being contested within the legal framework, freeing up the category of "sex" in particular as being socially constructed. This is significant to my own research interest in allowing a more flexible framework for people to experience and construct their sexed and gendered identities.

2.3.2 The power of sex/gender binaries

Despite recent efforts to theorise the diversity of transgender identities, sex and gender are still understood culturally and theoretically as adhering to the gender binary. In her ethnographic research on transgender identities in Perth, Australia, Wilson (2002) conducted twenty three semi-structured interviews. Overall, her findings shows that while there is a multiplicity of gendered identities, her participants feel an urgent need to fit into "normal" existing gender boundaries. While Wilson (2002) began with the notion that the third space may be a way of stepping out of gender binaries, she was confronted with the reality that people felt a pressing need to define themselves within recognisable "normal" gender boundaries. Instead of marking differences from the norm, many participants seemed to disguise or eliminate them. In a cultural space such as Perth, gender variation was not rewarded and the dualistic system prevailed. The rewards for conforming outweighed the punishment many had received when sitting between two genders. The study demonstrated that transsexuality was grounded in medical discourse and viewed as problematic and pathological, acceptable only as long as the long-term goal in treatment was adjusting to the desired new gender role.

Wilson (2002) hypothesises that most people who are transgressing "normative" gender boundaries will occupy a "liminal" space where genders are suspended and a remodelling occurs. The English word "liminality" is derived from the Latin "limen", meaning doorway or threshold. Wilson's (2002) use of the term "liminal" appears similar to the borderline status that Bornstein (1994) refers to as transgender. In psychological liminality, a person's identity is hung in suspension. In liminality, the "I" status is not fixed, it is unanchored and this allows it to float and wander across forbidden boundaries. This description usefully conveys the transgender experience of situating oneself within all the ambiguities of the in-between, the neither this nor that, with the emphasis on the fluid and the changing. But in Wilson's (2002) research in Australia, she found that rather than staying in this space and forging a new gender category, the goal of most people was to subsume themselves into one side of the gender binary. Hence, the opportunity that is presented is rejected in favour of what is constituted and perceived as normalcy. Wilson (2002, 434) goes onto to describe her experience of "The Butterflies", a transgender collective and draws on the work of Turner (1974) to illustrate the dynamics of liminality as private communitas:

> […] persons deeply divided from one another in the secular or non-religious world nevertheless in certain ritual situations cooperate closely to ensure what is believed to be a cosmic order which transcends the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the mundane social system (Turner 1974, 238).

In the liminal space that "The Butterflies" provide, gender becomes ambiguous and is an "in-between stage" for many who are searching for who they are on the gendered map. Liminality is used by Stein (1983), a Jungian analyst, to describe the midlife process, linking it with Hermes, the Greek god of transitions, who exists essentially within transitional time and space. He describes Hermes as a messenger from the archetypal unconscious, and suggests that we learn how to listen and move within this ambiguous experience as opposed to organising and controlling it. Stein (1983) uses it as a framework for thinking about the midlife task of letting go of psychological structures and identifications.

While Bornstein's (1994) shamanic model could be seen to reflect the liminal space as sacred with a potential for transformation and healing, May (2002) is mindful about the realities of an "in-between" or "liminal" space for the transgendered individual. May (2002) puts forward the view that if gender identity were able to occur in a split second, maybe society would have less difficulty with it. May's suggestion that it is the gradual process of metamorphosis which presents the challenge, points to society's difficulty with seeing anything between the fixed binary genders. May's (2002) image of the tadpole transforming into a frog raises more realistic images of the mess and discomfort that can be bound up with moving from one shape to another. What does this have to offer the perception of the transgendered person? It can be compared to the actual physical transformation that occurs in the refashioning of bodies, yet society's notion of a fixed conception of recognisable binary gender leaves little room for any in-between gender space. This might help to explain some transgendered people's essentialist framework and is an interesting point to consider in the light of liminal space and the unease people have with "in-betweens". It is interesting to note that the term "Butterfly" adopted by the transgender collective could be seen as a reflection of how society attempts to tidy and "beautify" a liminal space. However, the reality for many is that the current gender system requires adherence to the gender laws in order to be accepted as a meaningful member of society.

May's (2002) consideration of the medical model as a psychosexual therapist is thoughtful, encouraging and challenging of the psychosexual literature and the treatment of transgendered people. Her clinical experience of working with clients who are moving between transgendered identities led her to question the medical model's fixation with categorisation and its inability to tolerate the existence and expression of gender contradiction and ambiguity. She critiques the medical model as being too restricted and limiting and she supports a re-thinking of sexual and gender categories. This includes a re-evaluation of the usefulness of "passing" which focuses on stereotypical notions of womanhood and manhood. She argues that the medical practitioners who work with the management of transsexualism need to become aware of the current debates within the broader context of cultural studies, feminist theory and gay and lesbian history. All of these are concerned with how

sexuality and gender function within social systems and most of all they ask questions about understanding what is natural and what is normal.

2.3.3 Contextual and negotiated identifications

Prior to the 1950s, most of the contributions to the literature on gender diversity were made by medical professionals (Hirschfield, Krafft-Ebbing, Havelock Ellis). It was not until the late 1950s when transgenderist Virginia Prince presented papers at sexology conferences that gender diverse people began to reclaim their own voice. Christine Jorgenson was one of the first American transgender autobiographies in 1967 and, since then, transsexual and transgendered autobiographies have become significant voices in the literature on gender diversity, providing a rich source of empirical data (Elbe (pseudonym Neils Hoyer), 1933; Morris 1974; Richards 1983; Bornstein 1994; Green 2004). However, Denny (2004b) notes, as much as transsexual autobiographies seem to be in demand today, this is not the case for non-transsexual transgendered people. In other words, the personal stories of gender diverse people who are not being treated medically and surgically are mainly absent. One of the reasons, of course, may be due to the lack of alternative discourses available in the last fifty years in understanding gender diversity other than the binary structure of heterosexuality. Why that is still happening in the 21st century is testament to the continued dominance of the heterosexual matrix in constructing people's experiences. Nevertheless, recent empirical research reflects an important body of work on transgender by western feminists and sociologists that examines transgender in relation to the deconstruction and disruption of sex/gender binaries.

Whilst Hines (2006) underlines the absence of empirical work in the U.K. on transgender identity, Sanger (2008a, 2008b), Hines (2006, 2007a, 2007b) and Monro (2005, 2007) remedy this in their recent empirically driven studies in the UK. Hines' (2006) research into transgender identities in the UK illustrates the diversity and complexity of transgender identity which does not fit neatly into medical discourses or poststructuralist deconstruction of gender. She compares her findings with empirical research completed outside the U.K. which points to transgender conformity through a desire to assimilate into a gender binary system (Lewins 1995;

Gagne et al. 1997; Wilson 2002). Hines (2006) conducted two-stage in-depth interviews with thirty white British transgendered people at different stages of transition. Her findings show that while the construction of transgender identity often relies on dominant medical discourse, new identities are developing depending on generation, transitional time span, and social and cultural understandings and practices. For instance, some of her participants demonstrate the importance of cultural resources and representations in developing their self confidence and emerging new gender identity which suggest a link between the roles of community in identity formation. Hines (2006, 63) draws attention to the significance of "lived difference" within the diversity and fluidity of gender identities which all fall under the broad of umbrella of "transgender". Hines warns against the homogenisation of the category of "transgender" and offers the notion of a "queer sociology" as a framework for exploring and understanding transgendered lives. She argues for a "queer sociology" which can address the materiality of transgendered people's lives within a social, generational and cultural framework that does not deny or reduce the lived experience to a disconnected poststructuralist transgender theory. Hines' (2006) notion of "queer sociology" goes some way towards addressing the debates and tensions within transgender studies that take place along the essentialist/constructionist continuum, which can also be conceptualised as gender conformity/gender transgression. Although she does not define herself as transgendered, sociologist Lucal (1999) uses herself as a case study and analyses her own experiences as a woman who lives life on the boundaries of the gender binary and the consequences of this for her own identity and her social life. In arguing against Lorber's assertion that "gender bending" actually perpetuates gender binaries, Lucal suggests that as a teacher, her gender display as masculine regularly provokes a "category crisis" as it challenges the sex/gender binary. This could be seen as "queering" the gender binary. In this way, Lucal's lived experiences reflect the material that she is teaching: theory and practice complement each other.

Monro's (2007) recent empirical material is generated from three qualitative studies that were carried out in India and the UK between 1996 and 2006. The focus was particularly on finding participants who destabilised the sex/gender binaries with the aim of providing a cross-cultural comparison between India and the UK.

Methodology included in-depth interviews, group interviews and participant observation over ten years in India and U.K. Participants included transsexuals, cross-dressers, intersex people and others. Key themes to emerge from the Indian research were the importance of socio-economic factors, caste/class systems, spiritual heritage, and locations to the identity choices of sex/gender diverse people. Overall, three main types of gender and sexual classification systems emerged: the Hijra and Kothi systems (in western terms this is the term transgender and same sex expression merged and structured by sex/gender binary system) and western systems. Although in the U.K. there is less historical acknowledgement and, to a certain extent, acceptance of gender diversity (albeit stigmatised) as there is in India, Monro's (2007) empirical findings report disruption of sex/gender and sexual orientation binaries by people who have transgender and intersex identities. Monro's (2007) research outlines how her findings problematise the idea of sex/gender binaries which limit people's understanding and experience of themselves in India and the U.K. She maps out different ways of thinking about gender diversity as a typology that includes expanding gender binaries, moving beyond gender and gender pluralism. Monro (2007) advocates a conceptual framework of sex and gender as a spectrum, with people moving between positions, experiencing the fluidity and liminality that is described by poststructuralist transgender theorists (Monro 2005).

Sanger (2008a) conducted thirty seven in-depth interviews with a diverse group of transgendered people in England and Ireland between 2002 and 2006. She draws on the narratives of transpeople's intimate partnerships as way of finding out how the gender binary has impacted on their lives and subjectivities. Inevitably, her study reveals how the pervasiveness of gendered subjectivities poses problems for those wishing to resist a gender binary. Although in a unique position to challenge binaries, society and cultural regulation influence self-regulation and desire to "fit in". However, a number of her participants did not identify within the gender binary and this was dependent on contact with others who identify as trans and having alternative narratives available to frame their experiences. Whilst recognising the difficulty in moving entirely beyond normalisation, Sanger (2008a) draws on Butler's (1993, 237) notion of "working the weakness in the norm" as a starting point to move beyond regulatory discourse and a way of encouraging

transpeople to question and rearticulate their identity. In other words, Sanger (2008a) argues for expanding the possibilities for thinking ourselves differently.

Roen's (2001) empirical research with eleven self-identified trans people and one group discussion in New Zealand demonstrates how individuals deploy the two seemingly opposing discourses of gender binary and the deconstruction of binaries at different times (passing or crossing) depending on their circumstances and purposes. Most of the research participants agreed that the gender binary needs to be challenged, but remained careful regarding who they articulated this to. Reducing the conceptual possibilities to one discourse rather than another seemed to be a situation set up by the medical professions. Overall, Roen's research illustrates how both positions are rarely exclusive and that both rely on human rights discourses in terms of how they are used in the reality of people's lives.

The ways in which sex/gender categories are constructed and conceptualised in western societies have developed in the last ten years. Recent research suggests that transgendered people strategically position themselves, depending on locality and socio-economic position. Davis (2009) argues that gender presentations and identities are negotiated with particular people in particular settings and are contingent on the form and function of the particular interactions. She draws on informal interactions and observations, conferences, support communities and forty in-depth interviews with mainly white transgendered people. Her respondents include people who explicitly claim a transgendered identity as well as those who explicitly reject transgendered identification. Her findings reveal how the categories of "man" and "woman" fail to represent fully the participants' experiences and self-understandings, yet they continue to represent themselves publicly as men and women. This serves to illustrate how regulatory frameworks structure what is acceptable and intelligible. Contextual settings and corresponding perceptions about the level of danger mediate how individuals present and perform their gender, yet it is overly simplistic to read this as merely reifying binary gender order. Her interviews reveal how individuals engage in both hegemonic and transgressive actions, challenging and replicating the sex/gender binary. In other words, neither the focus on stable identity or fluid processes can account for everyday practices and experiences of transgendered people. The above studies surely highlight the

justification for more empirical research on transgendered identifications that continues to build on the contradictory and complex nature of sex and gender identity outwith the binary structure of heterosexuality.

Interestingly, Davis (2009) draws attention to the experience of some transgendered people's identities being regulated by subcultural norms within the transgender community, as well as the wider regulation of sex and gender identities. In this way, a hierarchy of transgender identities can be promoted, reflecting the different theoretical frameworks that promote gender as a stable identity or fluid processes. The terms "transsexual" and "transgender" are still being deployed as distinct categories and remain a major site of dispute — transsexual often associated with those who place themselves unproblematically within the gender binary, and transgender describing a more complex relationship with gender norms (Sanger 2008a). Elliot & Roen's (1998) empirical study highlights the complexities involved when their participants are asked to articulate their own meaning of their transsexual/transgender identity. They critique current transgender theory in its neglect of transsexual embodiment and their findings indicate differences within the transgender community which are often overlooked and oversimplified in the focus on the deconstructive potential of transgenderism. The following sections take up the notion of embodiment, suggesting that future research considers the "felt", "lived", "sense of" gender in transgender theorising, alongside Butler's notion of performative gender.

2.3.4 Reclaiming essentialist identity

Recent research sets out to challenge some of the current poststructuralist debates that are interested in deconstructing sexed and gender identities. Prosser (1995, 1998), Rubin (1999, 2003) and Namaste (2000) argue for the "essentialist" nature of transsexuals, relying on the gender binary to describe the transsexual/transgendered identities. Namaste's (2000) book, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People,* suggests that transsexuals are subjectified for academic study. Namaste (2000) argues that transgendered people are not so much "produced" by medical and psychiatric discourses as made invisible in cultural and institutional

settings. Namaste (2000) criticises sociologists, queer theorists and trans activists for their deconstructing of the sex/gender binary as part of a process of social change and argues for the essentialist position of transsexuals to be considered as a valid embodied position. In an interview for the New Socialist Magazine (2002-2003), Namaste (2000) makes clear her views on academic approaches to transsexuality when she accuses scholars of overlooking the everyday lives and circumstances of transsexuals. She points out that many transsexuals object to being included under the term "transgender", arguing that the specific needs of transsexuals are lost under this umbrella term. Also, she is not interested in how transgendered people may or may not disrupt the sex/gender binary but rather how their health care, housing and employment needs are erased and excluded from social and institutional systems. Namaste (2000) is equally critical of Butler's (1993, 1999) theory of gender performativity and Garber's (1992) study on cross-dressing, arguing that these authors use transsexuals to illustrate their own theoretical points without considering or caring for the reality of transsexuals' lived lives.

Monro (2000) conducted research in transsexual and transgender communities, tracing developments in current theoretical models of gender theory. Some of her findings contradict the current dominant understanding of identity where the self is seen as formed by dominant discourse. Her participants clearly experienced a sense of self, disagreeing with Butler's (1999) concept of performativity. The participants felt an innate sense of self which is not gendered, hence the impulse to change sex is not experienced as constructed via external discourses but "as an innate and non-mutable urge" (Monro 2000, 39).This contradiction need not be positioned as dichotomous if we can experience identity as both an "innate sense of self" *and* as a product of a particular time and culture. Just because an identity is historically situated does not undermine its subjective meaning or make it any less real. Wilton (2000) is concerned about the effects of transsexual discourses on the gendered politics of sexuality, particularly the medical model assertion about the nature of gender. She takes issue with the experience of "being in the wrong body", pointing out that it is whatever *inhabits* the transsexual body that matters. Wilton (2000, 241) asks "what is the *you* that is contained within the skin, and to what extent may *it* be gendered or sexed independently of the contours of the

body". Wilton argues that the transsexual experience, where the body stands in opposition to gender, does not work if you try and apply it to other socio-political differences — such as race or disability. There is no theory of transageism to explain how a young person can feel trapped in an old body or of transracialism for white people trapped in black bodies. It would seem that gender is the only paradigm of difference within which the "self" is allowed to be at odds with the body. Thus, her stance is that both embodiment and experience define gender.

Schrock et al. (2005) draw on in-depth interviews with nine white American male-to female-transsexuals to illustrate the link between the materiality of the body and subjectivity. They are critical of studies that focus on the doing of gender (Bolin 1988; Ekins & King 1998, 1999; Garfinkel 1967; Kessler & McKenna 1978; West & Zimmerman 1987) which say little about the bodily and transformational experiences of transsexuals. Their analysis shows that consistent practice in breaking down the embodying of womanhood into small units of behaviour and appearance help to shape how gender is subjectively experienced. Their findings suggest that transsexuals' retraining and redecorating of the body indicate that subjectivity and the body are not easily separated and that body transformations are clearly connected to cognition and feeling. Where previous research has suggested that the body is used in doing gender (Garfinkel 1967; Bolin 1988; Ekins 1997), Schrock et al. (2005) show how retraining and remaking the body interacts with subjectivity. In other words, their analysis supports an embodied approach to gender which understands the body as subjectively experienced in a felt sense. In this way, the transsexual participants viewed the category of "transsexual" as a liminal stage on the way to womanhood.

Drawing on her own experiences, Stone (1991, 295) was one of the first proponents of reclaiming the "lived experience" (in her *Posttransexual Manifesto)*; although her focus was to argue against transsexual "passing" and the notion of being in the "wrong body", she drew attention to the effects of self erasure when she said, "it is difficult to generate a counterdiscourse if one is programmed to disappear". Stone (1991) identified the notion of "posttransexuality" as a possible alternative subject to the invisible transsexual's early attempts to fit into the gender binary. This seems to be Stone's attempt to move beyond fitting into a transsexual identity of

either man or woman to a space beyond, that has a transsexual subject position. Halberstam (1999) writes of "natural" gender as a fiction and challenges the notion of dichotomous genders. Halberstam (1999) promotes the idea that transgendered people are not the only ones who experience their sex or gender as something to which they do not belong. She writes that: "the *post* in *post*transsexual demands…that we examine the strangeness of all gendered bodies, not only the transsexualised ones and that we rewrite the cultural fiction that divides a sex from transsex, a gender from transgender" (1999, 132).

It is worth noting that while psychotherapeutic models were deemed to fail the transsexuals' dilemma, Benjamin (1966) advocated surgery and hormones as the "cure". This reflects the notion that gender identity is fixed whereas biological sex can be changed; thus changing the body is easier than changing the mind. Transsexualism can be seen to dispute the immutability of "natural sex" as surgery and hormones proceed to construct the body in order to fit into the gender — the felt sense of who transsexuals felt themselves to be. Seventeen years later, Stone's (1991) attempts to bring a sense of agency to the transsexual subject are gradually being taken up as the idea of gendered embodiment is coming to the forefront of contemporary trans theory – a discourse which places the *being* firmly beside the *doing* of the transgendered person.

2.3.5 Phenomenology of lived experience

The focus on the phenomenology of lived experience represents a temporal shift in research which is substantiating transgendered people's experience of embodied gender. Namaste (2002/2003) warns the reader to be critical of the information and knowledge available on transsexuals, particularly given by "transgendered" people who disparage transsexual desires to live as men and women within the sex/gender binary. She cautions that "in practical terms, this means reading more than Leslie Feinberg, Riki Ann Wilchins, Kate Bornstein, or Judith Butler". Namaste (2002/2003) critiques existing scholarship of queer theory and social science for failing to bridge the gap between theory and practice and for continuing to set transgendered people up as objects of fascination. As much as Namaste seems to

position herself away from these writers' activism and outspokenness, they share common attributes and are a reminder that not all transgendered writers agree with each other. The differences between transgender writers and theorists merely illustrates the essentialist-constructionist continuum which maps out the diversity of transgender identities and marks the notion of embodied gender as becoming more of an accepted experience. If anything, tensions and differences, explored through dialogue, can serve to further development of transgender theory.

The notion of embodied gender in female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals is an increasingly apparent gap in the literature. Most of the research has been conducted and centred on male gender diversity, illustrating the marginalisation of female-to-male transsexuals. Cromwell (1999), Rubin (2003), Green (2004) and Dozier (2005) make visible an otherwise hidden and overlooked population within society and raise the question of why there is so much resistance to learning about FTM. Dozier's (2005) interviews with eighteen racially diverse female-to-male trans people contests the idea that gender is the socially constructed correlate of sex by using transsexuality as a standpoint to emphasise the importance of the body to gender identity. The participants challenge the underlying assumption that sex, gender, and sexual orientation align in correlated fixed binary categories — their experiences show that sex is not the initiating point for gender but a crucial aspect of gender, and the gendered meaning assigned to behaviour is based on sex attribution. In other words people are not simply accountable for a gender performance based on their sex (West & Zimmerman 1987). Participants also illustrated this point through their sexual orientation which could be seen as fluid, depending on the perceived sex of the individuals and the gender organisation of the relationship. In this way, the binary structure of heterosexuality is not a useful framework for these FTMs because of the gendered meaning that situates them as women in intimate relationships.

In the first in-depth examination of what it means to be a female-bodied trans person and drawing from his own experience as a trans man, Cromwell (1999) conducts extensive participant observation and open ended interviews with female-bodied people who have lived as men and contemporary FTMs and transmen. His study reveals aspects of female gender diversity that do not fit into the categories of men and women or discourses which have insisted that FTMs are denying their

homosexuality. In enabling them to speak for themselves, Cromwell (1999) foregrounds the complexities of transgendered peoples' lived experiences, which "queer" the western binaries of body-equals-sex-gender-identity as well as the binary of heterosexual and homosexual.

Rubin's (2003) empirical research with twenty-six white American female-to-male transsexuals deploys Foucault's notion of genealogy complemented with a phenomenological approach which engages debates on gender essentialism and social constructionism. One aspect of Rubin's research draws attention to how historical and biographical identity works are mutually reinforcing processes. An example of this is his exploration of the historical category confusion between the categories of "lesbian" and "FTM", whereby the emergence of FTM identity has depended on making a clear distinction between sexuality and sex. It remains important for FTMs to distinguish themselves from lesbians in order to meet the standards of "gender identity disorder" to gain access to medical treatment. I suggest that this reflects how the binary structure of heterosexuality regulates the possibilities for FTM identities, though this is already being challenged by the emerging diversity of transsexual men (Rubin 2003; Hansbury 2005). Rubin's research also reveals how FTMs experience their bodies as failed expressions of their core selves and hormones and surgery were a way to become the men they always felt they were. Rubin's (2003, 60) use of a phenomenological approach through in-depth interviews and fieldwork observations encourages transmen to tell their essentialist narratives with them saying they had "sex confirmation" instead of a "sex change".

FTM researchers (Cromwell 1999; Rubin 2003; Prosser 1998; Green 1999, 2004) are major contributors to the phenomenological approach for two reasons; first they increase the visibility of the history of female-to-male transsexuals in social scientific literature on transsexuality; and second, they give credence to the experience of gender essentialism by emphasising the importance of the body to gender and gender identity. Prosser (1995, 1998), Rubin (2003), Cromwell (1999) and Green (1999, 2004,) challenge dominant theoretical paradigms where transgendered people's essentialised experiences are not taken into account. Prosser's (1998) book, *Second Skins; The Body Narratives of Transsexuality,* exposes the failings of queer theorists for their focus on bodies as being products of

cultural beliefs. Prosser (1995) draws on autobiographical accounts of transsexuals where their essential identity is experienced as grounded in matter and constructed through biology. Prosser (1995) sees the transsexual narrative as one of essentialist constructionism – its aim is to reconstruct the fleshly body so that the subject might feel more comfortably embodied. In other words, Cromwell (1999, 43) calls for a middle road between essentialism and constructionism where "[…] neither alone can account for individual experiences […] both theories need to be taken into account".

The idea of embodied gender is supporting the collapse of sex/gender distinction and recent empirical research is beginning to incorporate the significance of a phenomenological approach to the relationship between the subjective, the material and the social world (Rubin 2003; Hines 2006, 2007; Salamon 2006). Salamon (2006) argues that the phenomenological approach can make a significant contribution to the understanding of transgendered embodiment in that it defines the material body without denying the "real world". Salamon (2006, 578) calls for a return of "real" gender, as opposed to "gender theorised", drawing a distinction between how gender is conceptualised and how gender is lived. As recent research shows, the notion of the "lived experience" is becoming more central in recent transgender theory and Salamon (2006, 582) proposes that the notion of a "felt sense of bodily being" must not be positioned oppositionally to social construction.

Salamon (2006) draws on her observation of a self proclaimed "dyke bar" in San Francisco which sold a calendar for the year 2002 titled "Boys of the Lex" — the individual club staff photos all read as transgressively masculine. The photographs play with representations of sex and gender and challenge binary heterosexuality as being insufficient for understanding the various erotic identifications depicted in the photographs. Salamon argues that those everyday examples of embodying transgressive gender *are* how we theorise gender. Salamon (2006, 582) suggests that "mapping the tension between the historicity of the body and the immediacy of its felt sense is the precise location of bodily being, and mapping this tension is the work of both transgender studies and theories of social construction". She describes the usefulness of how social forces can help to understand *how* that felt sense arises. In other words, accepting that people *experience* identity as essential is not the same as accepting that identity *is* essential.

Instead of essentialism and social constructionism being set up as binary oppositions, contemporary scholarship is interested in a dialogue in which both the embodied subject and the social structures determine how this is defined.

Browne & Lim (2009) contribute to the notion of embodied gender by examining trans lives through narratives. Their study derived from a larger qualitative and quantative participatory action research project in order to effect social change for LGBT people. It consisted of large scale questionnaires with 819 respondents and twenty focus groups. The questionnaire had 43 trans participants from which there were two focus groups on trans experiences. The participants ranged from queer fluid identities to binary categories of man and woman. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus particularly on how some of the participants attempted to articulate alternative understandings of their experiences and identities. In the main, they described being "trans" as a physical thing that they felt — an embodied phenomenon. In this way, the notion of "a sense of gender" emerges — a sense that belongs to the body, (*of* the body) but not the same as its fleshly materiality. Moving beyond the mind/body dualism, Browne & Lim (2009) theorise a broader rethinking of the relationship between gender and the body without relying on the sexed body as a basis of gender difference. They acknowledge that inevitably, senses of gender emerge in relation to normative genders that are produced through discourses and as experiences, yet cannot be understood within a normative framework. In this way, Browne & Lim (2009) suggest gender is not conceptualised as solely performative or an essence, but can be seen as an effect that can emerge in relation to an experience of dissonance and to discourse.

2.3.6 Progress and tensions within legislation

Hines (2007a) and Soley-Beltran (2007) take up the concern that legislative understandings of transgender remain tied to a medical perspective and as such marginalise practices of gender diversity. Soley-Beltran (2007) addresses the area of legislation and gender conformity in her cross-cultural research in Spain and the UK. She conducted twelve in-depth interviews — six in Spain and six in U.K. Cross-cultural comparison revealed the differences in the negotiation of meaning between

different types of knowledge: medical, public and private. For instance, there is more stress in the U.K on differences between transvestite and transsexual, perhaps reflecting the stronger influence of the psychiatric model in U.K On the other hand, transsexualism is more a self-referential process in Spain, depending on more of a collective assessment represented by the social milieu and the medical and legal profession. Overall, the study exposed the cultural variations of gender and transsexuality as well as the performative character of scientific categories and the ways in which social institutions act to perpetuate the erasure of gender fluidity. Hines' (2007a) discussion on transgender citizenship charts shifting cultural and social attitudes to transgender, drawing on empirical research which explores how current policy developments affect trans people in the UK today. Based on her data, which was generated through interviews over a nine month period in 2002, Hines (2007a) draws attention to how continuing reliance on normative binary understanding of "gender" underpins recent legislative and social shifts which still exclude contemporary transgender transformations and identities. As such, she argues that the present framework for transgender citizenship does not account for the complex relationship between gender identification and embodiment, creating tensions around the "desirability of assimilation" (Hines 2007a, 1).

Whittle & Turner (2007) suggest that the UK Gender Recognition Act 2004 challenges what constitutes a "sex change" and the changing usage of the terms "sex" and "gender". Whittle & Turner (2007) underline how the Act has demobilised the sex/gender distinction whereby, instead of the category of "female" referring to the sexed body and the category of "woman" referring to cultural gender, gender now refers to female, and sex refers to woman. Notably in the wording of the Act, gender precedes sex. This is a reversal of the historical sex/gender distinction which presumes that gender is culture written onto the sexed body. Whittle & Turner (2007) point out that the Act states that one's acquired gender becomes the legal sexed body — sex is determined by gender identity, the social role that one chooses to take. Thus, there is little difference between sex and gender and the legal definitions of the categories of "man" and "woman" are not based on biology or the body. This expands the possibilities of identities for trans people who may identify as man and have a vagina, or a woman with a penis. Whittle & Turner (2007) explain that

changing sex is not, therefore, about changing biology or bodies but changing how sex is legally defined. This begins to free up the category of "sex" from the constraints of scientific discourse and makes it easier to think of sex as socially constructed. However, Whittle & Turner (2007) cite Sandland (2005) and Cowan's (2005) reminders that the Gender Recognition Act does not necessarily undermine the binary system as there are still legally, only two sexes.

The following table illustrates the various frameworks used to think about sex and gender.

Figure 1 Summary — Mutability of Sex and Gender

	Person in the street/essentialist view	Transsexuals and experts on transsexuality	Feminist sex/gender distinction	Moving beyond the sex/gender distinction
SEX	Immutable	Mutable	Immutable	Mutable
GENDER	Immutable	Immutable	Mutable	Mutable

Friedman (2006).

2.4 Summary

This chapter has reviewed key theoretical approaches to transgender and explored the historical and cultural conditions within which the nature of subject/identity is constructed. I have crossed the disciplinary borders of medical and psychological discourses, anthropology, sociology, feminist and queer studies. They have all contributed to significant discursive shifts regarding the interrelationships between biological sex, gender identity, gender role and sexual orientation as dictated by the heterosexual matrix. Studying in between the spaces of these borders has created a shared space, avoiding one particular unified theory. Existing literature has explored how definitions of sex and gender are historically and culturally constructed, with each definition dependent on the other.

The following questions have emerged out of a series of debates I have identified in the literature, where two main discourses are apparent - those approaches that support the essentialist nature of transgendered identities, and those poststructuralist theorists who are interested in the sociological aspects of how transgendered identities are formed. While some transgender theorists celebrate the potential of "queering" sex and gender identities, others have little interest in the cultural analysis of gender and argue for the right to live as men and women. This source of tension produces diverse responses between feminist, queer and trans theorists and activists regarding the conceptualisation of bodies, genders and sexualities in the twenty-first century. Yet as long as debates still take place at the level of conventional biological or sociological frameworks, still caught in the nature/nurture paradigm, the constant division of people into binary categories reinforces and reproduces the heteronormative cultural matrix. I am not so much interested in whether transsexualism and transgenderism are subversive or hegemonic (Rubin 2003), but am engaged in exploring the role that discourses play in how transgendered people develop their sexed and gendered identities.

In the last 10 years, the conflict between medical and postmodern models of transsexualism has resulted in a paradigm shift, whereby there are more people who have chosen not to assimilate and accept "transness" as part of their identities. One of the questions my research aims to address is whether there is a difference between the lived experiences of contemporary transpersons and classical transsexuals. In other words, are transsexuals able to reinterpret their experiences in the light of emerging transgender discourse, or are they still conforming to the transsexual discourses that are constructed within the heterosexual binary structure? As a result of developments in transgender theory, is there less pressure to conform to surgery and more openness to cross-living without surgery or hormones? These questions raise further points for reflection such as whether the term "transgender" is concerned with *moving across* the gender binary system rather then *moving beyond,* or is it *both*? In real life, is it possible for people to experience themselves outside of the usual binary categories?

This thesis aims to investigate this point — whether transgender is merely a theoretical challenge to the social construction of gender, or can it be lived in the

social world? Recent studies show that, while the regulatory framework of heterosexuality proves difficult to destabilise, transgendered people often strategically position themselves according to social context. In other words, gender diversity coexists with gender regulation (Davis 2009). Recent empirical research is significant to my research findings which identify a gap in discourses other than the heterosexual matrix in helping people experience and understand their sex and gender identities. The various tensions within the narratives of transgender identities suggest that the notion of "lived" difference (Hines 2006) can be expanded to move beyond a framework of binary heterosexuality — with its presumed link between sex, gender and desire — in order to develop new sex and gender identities. In this way, the lives of transgendered people raise critical questions regarding the relationship between experience, discourse and identity.

The literature and research show that transgender is a concept that is a constant dynamic process of change and negotiation, and the complexity of that process is demonstrated in the Gender Recognition Act. "Transgender" is not a fixed category which has stayed the same since it was first created. I am interested in how people are using the term "transgender" in the early twenty-first century and if it opens up a space for gender ambiguity, whether as hybrid identities or queer identities, which might enable us to develop an analysis that moves beyond binary gender categories (Bondi 2004). In chapter three, the significance of the phenomenological tradition is explored as a key aspect of my overall methodological approach, particularly as it prioritises transgendered peoples' lived experiences of gender, sexuality and embodiment.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of my overall philosophical approach and how this has influenced the theory and the principles which underlie my methodology. My aim in this thesis is to explore the relationship between experience and discourse: namely, how transgender identity is constructed and discursively produced in the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century. I examine the ways in which identities are embodied and articulated through an analysis of semi-structured interviews with self-identified transgendered people in the U.K. My aim is not to find an objective truth about what a transgender identity is, but to find out how people who self-define as "transgender" use this category to describe their identity and how it brings meaning to their experiences. In order to do this, I use qualitative methodology which reflects my overall philosophical approach to the topic. I draw on two theoretical frameworks: "phenomenology" which is an attempt at direct description of basic experience in the lived world, and the "Foucauldian theory of discourse" which is concerned with the ways in which discourses construct particular knowledge and truths about identities and bodies. Phenomenology can meet the challenges of engaging with the complexities of sexed and gendered identities in that it focuses on the lived experiences and voices of the participants, while exposing the main discourse of heteronormativity that dominates how people understand their sexed and gendered identities. These two frameworks formulate the specific lens through which a more complex picture of transgendered identities emerges.

Qualitative research, being a broad term, requires refinement in relation to my research as well as an exploration of how my initial research questions informed subsequent methodological decision making. Qualitative research seeks to develop understandings of how the world is constructed, and implicit in this kind of inquiry is the notion that there is someone doing the constructing. This social construction of reality focuses on experience, meaning, narrative and language, and views knowledge as something that is created through interpersonal interaction. Hence qualitative research is undertaken on the basis that individually and collectively we

create the world we live in and so can change it (McLeod 2000). Qualitative research is informed by a variety of intellectual traditions: post-structuralism, feminist studies, interpretative studies (Denzin & Lincoln 2000), and is defined by specific approaches: discourse analysis, phenomenology and grounded theory.

Qualitative research does not represent a unified set of techniques or philosophies but has a range of philosophical underpinnings all concerned with the nature and impact of the social world (Mason 1996). With the development of qualitative research, phenomenology has been used by different disciplines as a way of constructing a different kind of knowledge, allowing people to speak in their voice rather than being reduced to categories imposed on them. Phenomenology is one of many kinds of qualitative research and is based on the philosophical belief that knowledge and understanding are embedded in people's life experiences. Having said this, the term "phenomenology" is often used in relation to philosophy, approach, research, methodology and method, resulting in conceptual confusions in qualitative research. I have used the phenomenological tradition to develop my overall methodology, which comprises of how phenomenology informs my philosophy and is linked to my subsequent research methods. I begin with a discussion of phenomenology because these ideas have had a profound impact on my conceptualisation of the research as a whole and consequently they set the context for the methods that I have employed.

Section 3.2 outlines the key aspects of the phenomenological tradition as developed by Merleau-Ponty, specifically drawing on his notion of perception and lived experience. This section explores the development of postmodern phenomenology and underlines the political underpinnings and the interrelationship between knowledge and the construction of reality. I build on the work of feminist and queer scholars, in particular, drawing on Ahmed's dialogue between queer studies and phenomenological theory to address questions about "lived spatiality" and the "orientation of perception". Section 3.3 identifies some of the current work being done by theorists working with phenomenology and genealogy. The focus here moves away from the essentialist/constructionist debate, and moves towards an integrated approach of considering subjective lived experiences, whilst still thinking of embodied subjects as discursively constituted within a historical period. The

following sections explain how these abstract ideas have been translated into fieldwork design and the methods used. Section 3.4 takes up the first of two main aspects of the methodology used to explore the relationship between subjective lived experience and discourse. I explore the use of narrative as a way of constructing experience, emphasising how narratives are linked to particular socio-historical conditions that regulate how sexual and gendered identities are produced. Section 3.5 demonstrates how experience is constructed by narrative, with a particular focus on how postmodern thought and psychological knowledge emphasise knowledge as interrelational and structural. Section 3.6 specifically draws on the notion of reflexivity and psychotherapeutic tools as ways of thinking about the co-construction of knowledge. Section 3.7 is concerned with how I designed the fieldwork, explaining the decisions I made and why.

3.2 Phenomenology

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a branch of philosophy known as phenomenology was founded by Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl was interested in the structures of consciousness, stating that in order to study consciousness, one would have to distinguish between the act of consciousness and the phenomena at which it is directed. One of his key concepts is the notion of intentionality which refers to the fact that whenever we are conscious, it is always to be conscious of something. Husserl laid the foundations for the phenomenological movement which was further developed as existential philosophy by Heidegger (1927-1962) and then moved in an existential and dialectical direction by Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Their particular focus on issues such as death, anxiety, freedom and the meaning of human existence reflected the situated context of early war-torn twentieth century Europe (Racher & Robinson 2003). The work of these philosophers led to the development of different phenomenological philosophical traditions reflecting differing bodies of thought, resisting the subject-object dualism and concerned with the exploration of human experience (Thomas 2005).

Racher & Robinson (2003) describe phenomenology as portraying the study of essences (Merleau-Ponty 1962), the science of phenomena (Van Manen 1997),

and the exploration of human experience (Polkinghorne 1989). Building on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty emphasised the link between consciousness and the world, characterised by ontological assumptions that reality is complex, holistic and context dependent (Monti & Tingen 1999). The philosophical idea here underlines Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 59) lifeworld perspective that describes how the perceptual field breaks into a circuit where "every object is a mirror of all others". This circularity suggests that people are not separate from the context in which they live because they have access to the world through their bodies. I will emphasise Merleau-Ponty's ideas concerning embodiment and spatiality because they provide a central base for my research.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) places the role of the body in human experience to the forefront of philosophy where the lived perception is fundamental to phenomenology. He defines phenomenology as describing perceptual contact with the world with bodily existence giving perception a meaning. As such, the body is lived as an experiential body and, if we want to understand the body, we have to use a phenomenological method. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) antipositivist and antireductionist stance refutes Descartes' mind-body dualism, suggesting that consciousness is experienced in and through bodies and it is through the flesh of the body that we know and understand the world. The body is indivisible and a "fusion of body and soul" (1962, 73). In other words, the "I" that thinks is inseparable from the lived body, and consciousness is perceptual and inseparable from the external world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) challenges the dichotomous structures of self/world, subject/object and thought/language through his ideas of the lived and existential body. He challenges the idea of the body as an object that a transcendent mind can control but, far from replacing the priority of the mind with the body, he suggests that mind and body are inseparable. Merleau-Ponty (1962, 71) places the body as central to understanding experiences – "I am conscious of my body via the world […] I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body". Thus the human body is an expressive space which is a medium for our perception of the world and the individual is understood as a "body-subject" with consciousness embedded in the body.

In his work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes perception as not grounded in either objectivity or subjectivity, but in a reciprocal process whereby the lived experience of the body denies the detachment of subjectivity from objectivity and mind from body. Merleau-Ponty is concerned with examining the immediacy of the lived experience before it is objectified. His phenomenology of existence explores the perceptual nature of our being-in-the-world and serves as access to our inner selves, our external world and the *experience* of being alive. Merleau-Ponty (1962) underlines that perception opens us up to reality, providing a direct experience; all knowledge is experienced *within* the horizons opened up by perception and all meaning occurs through perception (Thomas 2005). For the purposes of my study, I now focus particularly on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) theory of lived spatiality that places the body in a core position by which the world is known and inhabited.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues there is a distinction between lived or phenomenal space and the Cartesian notion of objective space that can be measured and quantified. He proposes that lived space cannot be conceived without horizons or the movement of the body against the horizons and he considers that only by seeing the body in movement is it possible to see how it inhabits space. This raises the question of what it means to have a body that is spatially and temporally situated – what kind of space is the body moving in? The body needs to be viewed within a particular context and space as it does not exist outside people's symbolic construction of socially inhabited space – "to be a body is to be tied to a certain world, as we have seen; our body is not primarily *in* space: it is of it" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 131). Hence, it is necessary to consider how the cultural conception of social space regulates the movement of the body and the production of identities. My research aims to address the relationship between embodied selves and social spaces in the formation of sex and gender identities.

Phenomenological accounts of embodiment need to consider the social, historical and political contexts within which bodies are situated and understood. This is because, for Merleau-Ponty (1962), relationship to environment structures lived experience, and lived space is mediated through the body: "The body is the vehicle of the being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be

intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and to be continually committed to them" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 71). In other words, consciousness and perception are embodied and situated. In this way, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach lends itself to considering the relationship between experience and discourse because they describe bodily horizons as "sedimented histories" (Steinbock 1995, 36). Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body-subject occupying a spatial realm is significant to my study as it illustrates how the production of sex and gender identities is constructed by the heteronormative spatial realm. As such, the participants use the heterosexual matrix as a way of making sense of their lived experience – which then becomes truths. Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to this process as "sedimentation" whereby knowledge becomes laid down as solid ground (Langdridge 2007). I now explore a small but relevant body of literature that focuses on how postmodern phenomenology has developed mainly due to the resistance of groups such as feminist philosophers and theorists, gender theorists and gay and lesbian activists.

Phenomenological inquiry has been developed within different disciplines, and none more so than feminist research methodologies. For example, Rose (1993) describes the crucial significance of phenomenology for the discipline of feminist geography as providing a way of researching the gaps that previously were not considered important within the patriarchal world of geography. Through phenomenological philosophy, Rose (1993, 43) describes how human geography recovered the essence of the experience of place, differentiating "place" invested with human interpretation and meaning, from time-geographic measureable "space". As a result of this claim, feminist geographers began to problematise their position in the production of knowledge which led to efforts to address the dualism created by the positivist notion of researcher and the researched. This in turn, led to the development of the "situated" or "positioned" production of knowledges (Rose 1997, 308) where the research relationship should be "made visible and open to debate" (Gilbert 1994, 90). In this way, reflexively studying ourselves as well as our participants recognises that our lived experiences, by way of feelings and constructions, are part of the social construction of the production of knowledge. The

notion of reflexivity is taken up later in the chapter in exploring the experience of narrative construction.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body has influenced feminist philosophers including Butler (1997b), Grosz (1994, 1995), Bordo (1987, 1993) and Young (1990). They have developed a feminist phenomenological approach in their analysis of sexuality and gender as a way to undermine the dualisms of sexual and gendered norms and ideals. Butler (1997b, 403) describes how "phenomenological theories of embodiment have also been concerned to distinguish between the various physiological and biological causalities that structure bodily existence and the meanings that embodied existence assumes in the context of the lived experience". Butler (1997b) draws on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) reflections in the *Phenomenology of Perception* when he claims that the body is an historical idea rather than a natural species; and de Beauvoir's (1949/1987) claim that "one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman", to illustrate the performative aspect of gender that is constantly moving.

Although phenomenology is just one of the philosophical and theoretical traditions in which feminist thought critiques unexamined male bias, at least potentially, phenomenology offers a way out of reading theory as neutral or objective; thus avoiding reification and hegemony. Yet the uncritical and unexamined use of lived experience, which then becomes the basis of truths, has also been a core criticism of phenomenology by feminist scholarship. Fisher (2000) picks up a specific omission in Merleau-Ponty's writings when he (Merleau-Ponty) fails to articulate his male bias (I use a gendered category here to describe the social and cultural influences on biological men) in his notion of phenomenological attitude or "epoche" where the researcher "brackets biases and assumptions". In this way, Merleau-Ponty fails to make use of his own phenomenological reduction by way of considering the interweaving of embodiment and social context in the situatedness of his own position. Fisher (2000) reports how a common perception of phenomenology is that it is an essentialising discourse which has subsequently positioned feminism and phenomenology as representing different world views. She suggests that feminist charges of essentialising, universalism and absolutism of phenomenology can be disarmed by acknowledging a dialectics that feminism and phenomenology both

share. For example, Fisher (2000, 28-29) argues that feminist thought emphasises the uniqueness of women's experiences, while at the same time it endeavours to articulate "women's situation" — the shared and generalised situation that reflects role and oppression in society and culture; and phenomenology attempts to account for the structures of subjectivity from the perspective of individual subjectivity. In this way, feminist thought and phenomenology are emphasising the unique subject as a thread of invariance that gives shape and coherence to the variance — articulating the tension between the general and the specific.

Merleau-Ponty's work of embodiment and lived experience has drawn attention from feminist scholarship (Battersby 1998, Davidson 2003), despite reservations about his failure to address specificities of sexed and gendered experiences, and his assumption of a de-sexed and generic body. The postmodern shift in phenomenology links the issues of embodiment and lived experience with more critical and deconstructive questions of epistemology and ontology.

Stoller's (2006) recent work creates a dialogue between Merleau-Ponty and the feminist philosophers De Beauvoir, Butler and Irigaray, by suggesting that Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body has much to contribute to feminist and gender theory. Stoller (2006) explores how these three influential feminist philosophers, by drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of existence and gender as embodied, move away from biological reductionism to the notion of gender as a "lived experience". This creates a potential meeting place for constructionism and phenomenology to complement each other; where the materiality and the historicity of the body are not in opposition.

Salamon (2006) explores a similar position when she underlines the current complexity in theorising transgendered bodies. She is keen to argue that social construction must not be positioned oppositionally to a "felt sense" of bodily being. She draws on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological work on embodiment to move away from the tension between the historicity of the body and the immediacy of its felt sense that is a central debate in transgender theory. Salamon (2006) claims that the body *feeling* natural is not the same as claiming it *is* natural and, in this way, includes the agency of the individual, also recognising the part that dominant discourses play in constructing how we experience and think about our bodies. In

other words, because experiences can be seen to be socially constructed does not mean they are experienced as any less real or important.

Rubin (2003) and Ahmed (2006) suggest that phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies because it emphasises the importance of the lived experience and provides a set of tools for theorising the significance of the body. Yet they do not stop at the lived experience, and can be seen to be answering those critics who have accused phenomenology of ignoring the sociocultural conditions in which the phenomenon being investigated is embedded. Rubin's (2003) combined approach of phenomenology and genealogy and Ahmed's (2006) offering of queer phenomenology begin to explore how genealogy (how objects arrive) and phenomenology are interwoven. They highlight how norms, particularly heterosexuality, easily become part of the background affecting how objects are arranged and experienced. This outlines how bodies are gendered and sexualised by how they take up time and space, preventing a horizon of possible identities. I refer to Ahmed's (2006, 55) use of the term "horizon" as defined by Ihde (1990, 114): "horizons belong to the boundaries of the experienced environmental field. Like the edges of the 'visual' field, they situate what is explicitly present, while in phenomena itself, horizons recede".

Ahmed (2006) combines phenomenology and queer studies as a way of thinking what it means for bodies to be situated in space and time, and links this with political and social questions about gender and sexuality. She builds on the work of feminist and queer scholars such as Young (1990, 2005), Haraway (1991), Butler (1993, 1997b), Weiss (1999), (Fryer 2003) who have critically engaged with issues of embodiment and phenomenology, drawing in particular on Merleau-Ponty's notion of the subject as an embodied subject. Undermining Cartesian dualism has led to acknowledgement that subjectivity and identity cannot be separated from specific forms of embodiment and that the body cannot be transcended (Bordo 1993). Ahmed (2006) opens up further dialogue between Merleau-Ponty's accounts of embodiment and queer studies. For the purpose of my thesis I am interested in her questions concerning orientation.

Ahmed's (2006) work on orientation focuses on the phenomenality of space and how space is dependent on bodily inhabitance. She defines the term "orientation"

as a way of describing how bodies take up time and space by *how* they "point" to each other. For this reason, phenomenology and orientation offer a significant resource in the emphasis on lived experience. In the absence of a Cartesian boundary between self and the world, the phenomenological experience of space is central to our sense of who we are, and the lived space is mediated through the body. Ahmed (2006, 12) suggests thinking of space through orientation, which opens up "how spatial perceptions come to matter and be directed as matter". She draws attention to how space acquires "direction" through the way in which bodies inhabit it, and bodies acquire direction in this inhabitance. She also explores the etymology of "direct" as relating to "being straight", and shows how the concept of direction contains within it, a concept of "straightness". Hence, to follow a line might be a way of becoming straight and not deviating at any point. Ahmed (2006, 19) refers to landscape architecture terms of "desire lines" to describe unofficial paths where marks are left on the ground by people who have deviated from the paths they are supposed to follow. These marks generate alternative lines which are formed by people following their desire. Yet these lines do not necessarily extend the shape of the world; it seems to me that compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) and the straight mind (Wittig 1992/1998) remain dominating discourses that continue to "straighten" bodies and desires.

Ahmed (2006) describes the notion of "orientation" as a way of exposing how sexual and gendered identities get directed in some ways rather than others through what paths are already available to us. She draws on Merleau-Ponty's work where she explores how the concept of orientation is informed by the phenomenology of perception and argues that perception involves orientation; that what is perceived depends on where we are located as this gives us a certain take on things. She describes orientation as being about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places, and the work of inhabitance involves orientation devices concerned with how bodies extend into space. For example, she examines the kind of "orientation" a body takes in terms of having certain objects within reach, in particular how the norm of heterosexuality becomes part of the background affecting how objects are arranged. The naturalisation of heterosexuality involves the

presumption that there is a straight line that leads each sex towards the other sex and that "this line of desire" is "in line" with one's sex (Ahmed 2006, 71).

Ahmed (2006) proposes a "queer phenomenology" that reveals how social relations are arranged spatially and how queerness disrupts and reorders these relations. In other words, she offers a phenomenological approach to the very question of what it means to "orientate"' oneself sexually towards some people and not others by way of examining the genealogy of the term "sexual orientation". Ahmed (2006, 21) argues that we do not simply have sexual orientation, but that certain objects are available to us because of the lines already taken, and the notion of "orientations" allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others. Her exploration highlights how the heterosexual matrix operates as a straightening device which rereads queer desires as deviations from this straight line. She refers to how Merleau-Ponty (1962) relates the distinction between "straight" and "oblique" to the distinction between "distance" and "proximity", suggesting that categories are meaningful only in relation to phenomenal or orientated space (Ahmed 2006, 165). Phenomenology can support the exploration of queer moments of disorientation, giving validity and credence to those experiences that contest heteronormative assumptions. Given that this is precisely what this thesis seeks to do, the relevance of this theoretical perspective becomes obvious.

3.3 Phenomenology and genealogy

Rubin (2003) combines phenomenology and genealogy in order to foreground the ongoing debate about whether the basis of gender identity is essential and biologically based or socially constructed. These two frameworks formulate the specific lens through which a more complex picture of transgendered identities emerges. Genealogy was developed by Foucault (1984) as a system of analysing power and knowledge which investigates the historical "emergences" of discursive practices and how they inform the way power and knowledge are formed. Foucault (1984) believed that like everything else, power and knowledge have a history, and the goal of genealogy is to chart the discursive limitations on human knowledge and action. Genealogy foregrounds the dominant social categories of the time, illustrating

how individuals make sense of their lives within the available categories of a particular historical period. Combining genealogy's focus on tracing the emergence and movement of historical categories with phenomenology's emphasis on the body's subjective lived experience of the world, means focusing less on the dualistic essentialist/constructionist debate and potentially provides a more inclusive discourse for thinking and analysing transgender experiences. Where the former view emphasises subjectivity being fashioned by historical forces, namely drawing attention to the limitations of the heterosexual matrix in how people construct their gendered and sexual identities, the latter focuses on the significance of lived experience which privileges the inner identity and authority of the individual. Being historically situated does not automatically mean that subjective experience is undermined — in other words, because experience is constructed does not mean it is experienced as any less real.

The phenomenological method returns subjectivity and authority to the experiencer and returns legitimacy to the knowledge generated by the experiencing "I". Phenomenology recognises the epistemological significance of bodies and considers bodies as the ultimate point of view on the world. In this way, phenomenology allows transgendered people to claim agency and authority to their lives and legitimises the significance of bodies in the lived experience.

Rubin's (2003) research into FTMs illustrates how they resist the genealogical accounts that historicise transgender experience, because these accounts undermine their own experiences of "essential difference". His findings draw on the phenomenological method, enabling rich descriptions in a strong essentialist narrative and the epistemological significance of the embodied experience. Yet this does not lead to an essentialist idea of the body being fixed and unchangeable. While recognising the significance of the body, phenomenology replaces the naïve notions of fixed identities and essences with a more fluid idea of essences and identities always unfolding (Rubin 2003).

In her examination of the developing relationship between queer theory and qualitative research phenomenology, Martinez (2004) critiques the liberal bias and racial exclusions often perpetuated in postmodern theorising in American culture. Martinez (2004,120) offers "semiotic phenomenology" as a non-essentialising

approach in that it understands the relationship between a given moment of experience, our awareness of that experience and the semiotic systems within which those experiences and awareness are situated. For the purpose of my thesis, I refer to a semiotic system as "the science of signs or sign-system" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 24) consisting of "oppositional categories embedded with language". Martinez (2004) underlines that, in foregrounding experience as knowledge, we are required to be cautious of making these experiences "truths" and to read experiences in relation to the social and historical context of the time. In other words, Martinez (2004, 111) suggests that semiotic phenomenology offers "the cool edge of a precise theoretical argument and the burning fleshy experience".

Rubin (2003) and Hoxsey (2008) draw on Mills' (1959, 6) "sociological imagination" in order to locate personal biography within larger social circumstances, and they describe how "the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society". The integrated approach of considering individual biography and social history helps to avoid the undermining of subjective lived experiences whilst still thinking of embodied subjects as discursively constituted within a historical period.

Hoxsey (2008) builds on Mills' integrated approach when he draws attention to the need for a flexible theoretical approach for understanding people from non-homogenised communities. Using his own personal experiences, Hoxsey (2008) describes how using Mills' notion of the "sociological imagination" helps to broaden understanding of why he might present himself in one way and not another. Mills (1959, 3) outlines how "neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both". In referring to Mills' (1959) bifocal vision, Hoxsey (2008) avoids engaging in the essentialist/constructionist debate that over-relies on agency or structure and context; instead he focuses on how the role models that are available for the individual depend on cultural collective processes. In other words, he stresses the importance of situating personal experience within a social and cultural context. In my thesis, this is translated into showing how the participants' lived experiences are organised within the "straight line" of the western dominant discourse of the heterosexual matrix, with elements of their experiences

presenting examples of "straying off the line". This is significant in terms of creating new discourses and thereby contributing to a changed, more open and fluid context.

Yet new possibilities depend on the ways that society is available for possibilities to merge. I argue that the heterosexual matrix shapes what bodies can do, whereby bodies become "straight" and develop a set of norms as an effect of repetition over time. We need to examine how bodies extend into spaces and grow into identities. I will now turn to the world of stories as a method of identifying how narratives are linked to particular socio-historical conditions that regulate and "straighten" how sexual and gendered identities are produced.

3.4 The narrative construction of experience

> All life stories are reconstructions, attempts to make sense of a narrative
> structure for oneself as well as others (Weeks & Porter 1991, 2).

In my research, I use a narrative approach which gives precedence to storytelling as a method of investigating meanings that people give to gender, and how it is constructed and lived. In so doing it addresses the relationship between experience and discourse. The representations that people give of their differently lived experiences have been termed narratives, which Popay and Groves (2000) suggest are a diverse landscape of perceived experiences. The narrative approach to gathering data on transgender shows how people have constructed their experiences in two ways; first, how they experience it influences how they talk about it and, second, how they talk about it influences how they experience it.

Narratives order and organise life events into a meaningful whole that also brings a sense of narrative identities; hence identities are constructed narratively through the stories we tell (Langdridge 2007). The narrative approach uses the storytelling metaphor, which emphasises that we create order and construct our lives in particular contexts. The notions of "storied narratives" are narratives that have a close relationship to genres of stories (Byrne 2003) which illustrate how certain identities are discursively available for the participants to describe themselves. Narratives help us to understand how social lives and identities are constructed and

perpetuated in society. In other words, storytelling is embedded in cultural discourses and reflects the social movements of the time and as such, the stories that are available are limited by the world we live in. This in turn, limits possible ways of being and the identities that we can construct (Langdridge 2007). I am interested in how spaces are created for stories to be told, and how these stories are fed into wider networks. I draw on Plummer's (1995) focus on how emerging narratives are linked to particular socio-historical conditions which in turn give rise to the construction of new identities.

Plummer (1995) describes storytelling as a political process and, particularly in sexual storytelling, power is everywhere and seen as a dynamic flow which has many shapes and forms. His detailed analysis of the changing character of sexualities and identities uses narratives to highlight the social processes of producing stories and the social role that stories play. His emphasis on seeing stories as symbolic interactions and political processes recognises that stories do not float around abstractly, but are grounded in general cultural and historical processes. The social and cultural embeddedness of narratives are key in investigating relationships between individual experience and normative expectations. I am interested in the relationship between social processes and people's personal lives. Accordingly, I use a sociological and historical lens to analyse the data and, in the process, illustrate how culture creates the framework within which identity develops, showing how lived experiences and identities are relational and contextual.

Plummer (1995, 18) describes various approaches to "stories" — in anthropology they are seen as pathways to understanding culture; in psychology they are the bases of identity; and in philosophy they are bases for new forms of world-making. His interest lies mainly in developing a sociology of stories, which involves the ways they are produced and read, and their role in the wider political order. I am less interested in analysing the formal structures of stories and more keen to explore beyond the text, looking at the wider cultural discourses of the time which have helped to support the storyline but also make it difficult to tell new or different stories. It is easy to see how stories perform conservative and preservative tasks, which bring some order to the general ambiguity and disorder of the world. Langdridge (2007, 147) uses the term "canonical narratives" to describe those

narratives that are found in personal stories but which represent broader societal stories of how lives should be lived. At the same time, these stories can create a process of organising which includes tighter classification and strong boundaries, closing down other possibilities. According to Plummer (1995), some of the sexual narratives of the twentieth century —— modernist tales — are cliched, in that suffering, surviving and surpassing are recurrent themes throughout. In these narratives, there is an emphasis on an absolute sexual truth waiting to come out and, from this, identities have been formed. Social movements have been reflected in stories and Plummer (1995, 5) quotes Langer (1942, 10) in saying that "culture itself has been defined as an ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves". Now, these stories of the truth are fracturing into new ways of telling stories, which describe difference, multiplicity and a plural universe.

3.4.1 Capturing coherence

Heaphy (2008) considers how sociological narratives tend to be partial in two particular ways. Heaphy's (2008) notion of "reflexive sociology" and the "sociology of lesbian and gay reflexivity" as distinct sociological conceptualisations of lesbian and gay identities is worth considering in the context of my research. Heaphy (2008, 10) draws attention to the difference between the "reflexive sociology" of lesbian and gay lives that is concerned with "explicit and critical reflection on dynamics of difference and power that are central to the construction of sociological narratives of lesbian and gay lives" and the "sociology of lesbian and gay reflexivity" that is "more often concerned with constructing a powerful narrative about lesbian and gay lives that for the sake of coherence often erases difference".

This raises methodological questions regarding the different kinds of knowledge produced about transgendered identities. Heaphy (2008) notes how self-fashioning and self-determination are well-rehearsed themes in lesbian and gay life, with reflexivity (awareness of self-creation) at the heart of lesbian and gay creativity and agency (Weeks 1995, 2005). Heaphy's argument that lesbian and gay reflexivity has been crucial, with coming out narratives as personal-political resources, lends itself well to the more recent "creation" of self-fashioning

transgender identities and the work towards cultural and political change. However, my aim is not to merely (re)produce normative and affirmative accounts of transgendered identities and a transgender ideology, but to expose the differences and diversity that can "[…] challenge (if not always subvert) all norms relating to desirous identity […] (Giffney 2004, 75)".

3.4.2 Against capturing experience

Hendry (2007) describes narrative research as providing a method for "telling stories", giving voice to those who are traditionally marginalised, taking into account the situated and contextual nature of telling stories. She rethinks the narrative, not as a scientific act but as a spiritual act that honours the sacredness of stories. Hendry suggests there is too much attention given to seeing the narrative as a method for "capturing the experience", and not enough emphasis on the conditions necessary for stories to be heard. She argues that the notion of researchers "capturing" reflects a positivist view of knowledge as absolute, and questions the power with which the narrative has been invested.

I chose interviews as a method for generating data as it reflects the postmodern approach where there is an emphasis on knowledge as neither inside a person nor outside in the world, but as interrelational and structural, and relying on conversation as a site of knowledge. This reflects a move from modern formalised knowledge systems to narrative knowledge embodied in storytelling (Lyotard 1984) and openness to *qualitative* diversity and a multiplicity of meanings. Davies & Davies (2007) explore how qualitative researchers generate accounts of experience through interviews as a way of debating the way in which identities and categories are produced in particular social worlds. They (2007, 1141) suggest that "experience, like Eurydice, cannot be captured with our gaze"; experience is not something to be had and then made into a transparent account. They argue that experience ceases to become the thing it was before it was looked at, and that "life continues to unfold in the accounting of it, and the account making is, in that sense, always a new event, a new experience" (Davies & Davies 2007, 1141). McCormack (2004) describes stories as re-presenting the outcome of a series of reconstructions beginning with the

initial reconstruction by the respondent in relating the experience, and the researcher then reconstructing this experience when transcribing, analysing and interpreting the experience. Further reconstruction occurs when the reader reads and reacts to the experience, and this process of reconstruction illustrates how knowledge is situated, partial and transient characterised by multiple voices and meanings (McCormack 2004).

Davies & Davies (2007) alert the researcher to the dangers of reading experiences as fixed truths about particular identities; they argue that the interview data produce moments of life as it is being lived which can then form archives that enable the researcher to study how lives are produced and the discourses that inform the production of those lives. In my quest for new knowledge, I need to be aware of how I could potentially subscribe to "capturing" the participants' experiences as a commodity (Hendry 2007), instead of being open to contradiction and the complexities of the relationship between experiences, discourses and identities. To a certain extent I will be working within the boundaries of the heterosexual matrix and my task will be to stay alert to how participants' experiences and identities can be captured and reorganised into coherent sexual and gendered categories. In other words, I need to monitor how I constitute and regulate my own experiences in the interviews and in the analysis of the data.

The following section begins to draw comparisons between the research interview and the therapeutic interview, moving on to explore some of the therapeutic conceptual tools that supported me in continuing to reflect on how my own position might influence the knowledge produced in the data.

3.5 The experience of narrative construction

Kvale (1999) suggests that there has been little systematic reflection on the practical and conceptual issues of using research interviews as a research method and this may be due to the similarity between the research interview and conversations of daily life. Since the beginning of the century, psychoanalysts have used the idea of conversation as a systematic tool for knowledge. Kvale notes how changes in the concept of knowledge, with the postmodern loss of belief in objective reality, are

helping the inter-relational knowledge of the interview to be recognised, giving validity to the research interview as a source of knowledge. He notes that analysts such Freud, Jung and Adler produced insights into the human condition through their therapeutic interviews which remain central to contemporary psychological theories. In this way, both the research interview and the therapeutic interview are concerned with developing an understanding of how the world is constructed by individuals.

3.5.1 Postmodern thought and psychological knowledge

Kvale (1996) describes how postmodern thought and some strands of psychology emphasise knowledge as interrelational and structural, and as existing in the relationship between the person and the world. Kvale (1999) explores the compatibility of postmodern philosophical positions and the psychoanalytic interview, comparing current developments in social sciences interview research and psychoanalytic therapeutic interviews. He draws attention to how postmodern conceptions of knowledge and the psychoanalytic interview focus on the relational and constructive aspects of knowledge production. Within the postmodern approach, I draw on the tradition of phenomenology that "thought cannot be thought other than through the body" (Simms 2003, 51) because it is particularly significant for the lived experiences of transgendered participants. This is because the phenomenological approach gives transgendered peoples' subjective experience an authority that has been denied, either by pathologising it as mental illness by medicine, or viewed by some trans theorists as colluding with a heteronormative binary system. Phenomenological philosophy and psychoanalytic theory are bodies of knowledge that emphasise the interrelational and constructive nature of knowledge. Simms (2003, 52) underlines Ricoeur's (1970) idea that the psychoanalytic "dialect" of relation with others has the same structure as phenomenological "recognition" of others and, as such, leads to a reciprocal relation.

Kvale (1999) notes that despite the contributions that psychoanalysis has made to current philosophical discussions in the last century, there is no discussion of therapy as a research method in mainstream qualitative research literature. McLeod (2000) argues that there has been equally little discussion of qualitative

inquiry within the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry which have been mainly dominated by quantitative methods of measuring. McLeod (2000) and Bondi (2005) introduce the qualitative (human science) tradition to the world of psychotherapy as a way of opening up inquiry into the philosophical underpinnings of how knowledge is constructed.

In the same way, I propose that the work of feminist scholarship's development of reflexivity and positionality as research tools is contributing to building a bridge between the two disciplines of social science and psychotherapy. Bondi (2005) argues that psychotherapy offers a theory of practice which provides insights for researchers in social sciences, and the next section draws on the advances made by feminist researchers to the development of current relational approaches in research practices.

3.5.2 Relational and contextual knowledge

The notion of universal and objective knowledge and the hierarchical power relationships implicit in positivist conceptualisations of research relationships (Oakley 1981) has been extensively challenged by feminist scholarship. Finch (2004) draws attention to the impact that second wave feminism had on sociology in the 1970s, laying the foundations for continuing links between feminist research and qualitative methods. The belief that women's voices needed to be heard drew on qualitative methods, placing women's experience at the core of the research. Finch (2004) describes Oakley's (1981), *Interviewing Women: a contradiction in terms?* as an influential point in establishing a link between feminist research and qualitative methods. In her 2004 paper *Feminism and Qualitative Research,* Finch (2004) also credits, albeit regretfully, her 1984 paper *"It's great to have someone to talk to"* as contributing to the partnership of feminism and qualitative research that she argues has resulted in the muddling of epistemology and methods. In other words, she regrets that these historically contingent factors remain influential today in that feminist research is most likely to be equated with qualitative methods. It seems to me that her comments reflect the differences between second wave feminism's focus on experiential knowledge and contemporary third wave feminism's focus on

understanding identity and subjectivity situated within a twenty-first century postmodern context of deconstruction and destabilisation. Nevertheless, second wave feminism paved the way for the emergence and importance of feminist epistemologies which have been central in destabilising knowledge and truth claims, providing a platform for other marginalised voices to be heard.

Feminist critique of positivist research has advanced the fact that all knowledge is produced within specific contexts, and the acknowledgement of the situatedness of knowledge has emphasised the need to be self-reflexive. Feminist scholarship in various disciplines has emphasised how the nature of fieldwork is contextual, relational and embodied, hence issues of reflexivity and positionality need to be considered. Also, feminist scholarship's work on overcoming dualistic distinctions such as subjective and objective, internal and external, has destabilised the vision of persons as autonomous, bounded and intentional agents (Bondi 2005). The notion that relational qualities between the researcher and researched informed research agendas and knowledge claims, contributed to the idea that knowledge is partial and situated and embedded within broader social and cultural contexts. Feminist researchers have continued to make significant contributions to the politics of knowledge production by engaging in issues of reflexivity and positionality. Finlay (2003) maps the development of reflexivity in research practice and identifies five "variant" styles of reflexivity as a way of conceptualising different reflexive styles according to different research aims. Finlay underlines the fact that research no longer questions the need for reflexivity but questions how to do it.

In the next section, I specifically draw on the work of feminist researchers as a source for exploring the notion of reflexivity which enabled me to reflect on my own position within the phenomenological field of the research relationship. I begin with work being carried out in feminist fieldwork in developing further understanding of the intersubjective nature of knowledge in the dialogical process that is research.

3.6 Reflexivity

Various feminist theorists have been inspired particularly by the work of Haraway (1991) on the notion of situated knowledge. Rose (1997, 308) cites the work of Haraway (1991) as being important in theorising the notion of "position", indicating the kind of power that enables a certain kind of knowledge. Haraway's (1991) focus is not on a single feminist position or standpoint, but on an epistemology and politics of engaged and accountable positioning in a bid to avoid a hegemonic account of the world. Being reflexive about one's positionality enables the researcher to examine and reflect on self, process and representations whilst attending to issues of accountability and ethics (Sultana 2007). On the other hand, Rose (1997, 313) cites Kobayashi's (1994) and Madge's (1993) suggestion that this notion of self-discovery may be more a process of self-construction when they caution that feminist researchers can naturalize oppressive concepts. Hence Kobayashi (1994) argues for a process of self-critique. It could be said that self-critique includes the self-discovery of self-construction.

In my view, phenomenology contributes to the notion of situated knowledge because it offers feminist researchers a resource for emphasising the significance and influence of lived experience in how research is located and embodied. Haraway's (1991, 190) notion of "situated knowledges" reflects the "particular and specific embodiment of the knower which reflects her position with social networks". The task of situating knowledge means that feminists "make visible our own critical positioning within the structure of power" (McDowell 1992, 413). Haraway (1991) underlines how foregrounding knowledge as situated conversation at every level of articulation raises questions about the previously passive categories of objects of knowledge, such as sex and gender. Particularly relevant to my thesis is Haraway's (1991) theorization of difference as biologically situated, not intrinsic, and how this problematises the binary distinction between sex and gender categories, calling for the reworking of categories within the new frames of situated knowledge.

Historically, the "field" in fieldwork has referred to a physical assignation (Nast 1994). However, the work of feminist geographers developed the notion of "field" as less concrete and more as a metaphor that acknowledges that the researcher

has a position in the "field". Reflexivity is the ability to reflect on the phenomenological experience and implications of the researcher's position. It is within the "field" that Nast (1994, 57) locates the idea of "betweenness" and "the fact that we (feminist researchers) can never not work with 'others' who are separate and different from ourselves". Moss (1995) takes up the idea of betweenness and notes how inbetweenness problematises the notion of margin and centre; emphasising the fluidity of boundaries, moving away from the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity in western thought and recognising the research interview as an intersubjective interaction. Feminist research moves away from a monolithic and singular truth where the subject /object become dichotomised and it moves towards a more interconnected view where the researcher is both observer and participant; and where a pluralistic truth is not only acceptable, but desirable. Madge (1993, 296) draws attention to the role of the (multiple) "self ", showing how the researcher's positionality (in terms of race, nationality, age, gender, sexuality, and social and economic status) may influence the data collected and thus the information that becomes coded as "knowledge". Awareness of positionality can avoid adopting one position, giving credence to the negotiation of multiple social positions which are assigned various significances over time. Otherwise, as Moss (1995) notes, how easily the embeddedness of the positionings become truths and facts, emphasising how the politics of the researcher and the researched play a crucial role in the production and maintenance of a hegemonic knowledge.

These reflexive considerations require the researcher to adopt the skill of critical self-reflection as well as an external reflection on those being researched. In other words, the reflexive researcher exercises a double reflexive gaze that includes the spatial division between the inside and the outside (Moss 1995). Bondi (2005) takes up this division when she explores how the call to consider the subjective dimension of human life has inspired researchers to explore the phenomenological lifeworld which addresses the external and internal worlds. Having said that, Bingley (2001, 2002) notes there has been little debate on the subject of the development of interactive skills within qualitative research methodology, excepting discussions by the feminist researchers Olesen (1994), Finch (1984) and Stacey (1988). Bingley (2001) draws on her psychotherapeutic background to employ psychotherapeutic

skills in supporting her research methodology. Bondi (2003, 2005) conceptualises the research relationship as central to the embodied situatedness of knowledge claims.

I will now go on to explore some of the basic skills and conceptual resources required for reflecting and understanding *how* interrelational knowledge is constructed in research relationships.

3.6.1 Listening

There are certain key psychotherapeutic skills that can guide the researcher in the facilitation of foregrounding phenomenological experiences in the interview process. In particular, I will explore the skill of listening and the idea of empathy as a mode of knowing that contributes to developing reflexivity and the narrative construction of experience in research interviews.

Hendry (2007) draws attention to the centrality of the quality of the relationship between researcher and respondent and the skills of listening and receiving. In other words, instead of the emphasis being on analysing and verifying, the researcher "plugs into" the experience of listening. Kvale (1999) outlines some criteria for interviewer qualifications that include: knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and interpreting. Yet without the art of listening, the human relationship can become objectified and can reify a positivist view of knowledge by reducing people's stories to objects to be ordered and explained. Hendry (2007) argues that, through really listening to what is being said, researchers are less likely to impose their own narratives and opinions on the analysis. The art of listening is a central feature of psychoanalytic work and, as such, has much to offer in developing research interviews as a craft.

King (1996) describes paraphrasing, reflecting, summarising and open questioning as key listening skills. While they are invaluable techniques in helping participants get in touch with descriptions of their experiences and feelings, the art of listening begins with listening to oneself (Rubin & Rubin 1995). The art of listening requires a commitment to self-knowledge and self-reflexivity in order to give credence to the inter-relational mode of producing knowledge. Lothane (1980) quotes Lang's (1963) publication, *The Art of Listening,* to illustrate the central

involvement of the therapist in the interactional field of the therapeutic relationship. Lang (1963, 358) names the bipersonal field as that which happens in the therapeutic relationship and goes onto to say:

> […] the order of precedence must be me: me as a therapist before her as a patient….I always do it in that order: I want to know where I stand, and what she is picking up from me. What is left is then going on inside her. It is a nice way to approach it, instead of the usual way: patient first, therapist second, or never; patient sick, therapist healthy. Both are human so both are sick and healthy. It is a matter of proportion. So we must sort it out again and again.

3.6.2 Empathy

So how do we sort it out again and again? Bingley (2002) and Bondi (2003) draw attention to the use of psychotherapeutic skills in qualitative research interviews and how these skills can provide ways of thinking about the many dimensions of research relationships. They argue that the psychotherapeutic skills of facilitation, interventions, trust, empathy and holding, enable attentive exploration and enquiry into an area where researcher and participants are often vulnerable to personal issues and ways of relating that may profoundly affect the fieldwork. Bondi (2003) introduces psychoanalytic conceptualisations of identification and empathy as ways of thinking about fieldwork interactions. She conceptualises research encounters as relationships, providing a way for researchers to reflect on and understand issues such as power and positionality in qualitative fieldwork. Bondi (2003) explores the psychoanalytic concepts of identification and empathy as conceptual resources for understanding the subtle communications and positionings that take place in a research interview. She suggests that these resources offer rich sources of information yet to be discovered. Bollas (1987, 203) describes these subtle communications as a "not-knowing-yet-experiencing state" or the "unthought known" referring to inarticulate elements of psychic life (1987, 210). Bondi (2005) refers to this as countertransference and argues in favour of researchers making use

of the fluidity and pervasiveness of emotion in the context of a situated approach to knowledge production.

In her exploration of the theory and philosophy of empathy from a phenomenological perspective, Finlay (2005) draws on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of embodied consciousness as a way of understanding the "other", underlining that empathy is a felt, embodied, intersubjective experience. Finlay (2005) explores the embodied intersubjective relationship we have with participants and names it "reflexive embodied empathy", involving moving in and out of three separate layers of empathy to different intensities. In other words, Finlay (2005) describes the reflexive process we have with participants as dancing in and out of the relational involvement. Yet in order for dancing to take place, there needs to be an available psychic space which Bondi (2003) conceptualises as empathy, in which movement between positions is possible.

The conceptual tool of empathy is dependent on the researcher's self awareness and self knowledge. Bondi (2003, 65) suggests: "the concept of empathy entails oscillating between participating in processes of (unconscious) identification, and remaining aware of-observing- some distinction (however fragile) between one's own and the other person's inner realities". This is comparable to Lang's (1963) description as cited in Lothane (1980, 354), of "listening in an extended sense to encompass the wide scope of communicational exchanges between the two participants". Thus, the researcher is first required to listen reflectively to his or her own experience, including primarily, the motivation and purpose for undertaking a particular inquiry. This, in turn, models the type of exploration desired of the participants by initiating a field of sympathetic resonance that facilitates the capacity of the participants to listen to the depths of their experiences (Anderson, 1998).

It is within this area of knowledge that Bondi (2003) urges caution when she differentiates between psychotherapy's production of knowledge as psychotherapeutic and meaning-making for the client, and for academic and intellectual knowledge production. Bondi (2003) is keen to distinguish between the research interview and the therapeutic interview, emphasising the different purposes and outcomes of each practice. At the same time, Bondi (2003) encourages researchers to emphasise the importance of empathy as a process that can offer

potential insights in a research interview. Kvale (1999) recognises potential problems with using the psychoanalytic interview as a research method, such as overinterpretation, overgeneralization and a general misuse of the therapeutic situation; but he is more concerned with neglecting potential benefits that come from using the interview as a source of discovering new phenomenological knowledge. Kvale (1999) draws similarities between the qualitative research interview and the psychoanalytic interview that include the interrelational nature of knowledge, the conversation as a site of knowledge production, the importance of personal knowledge and ethical issues. In other words, both kinds of interview are a construction site of knowledge. Kvale (1999) describes new developments in conceptions of knowledge as involving a change from an objective reality, to knowledge as a social construction. This knowledge is a situated knowledge which is context dependent and not necessarily transferable, and it moves away from the duality of the subject/object, knower/known. I will now consider the phenomenological method, the "epoche", as a potential reflexive tool in supporting the researcher's commitment to developing the notion of situated knowledge within the researcher relationship.

3.6.3 A view from somewhere

Phenomenological exploration seeks to describe the first person lived experiences of the world. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), the phenomenological method directly describes the given as precisely as possible. A "phenomenological reduction" calls for a suspension of judgement about the phenomena in order to arrive at an "unprejudiced description of the essence of the phenomena" (Kvale 1996, 54). The epoche is the process by which the researcher aims to "bracket" his/her own interpretations and judgements (Langdridge 2007), enabling him/her to put aside initial biases and assumptions in order to focus on the phenomena being investigated. Husserl's (1931/1967) belief was that through this method we can discover pure consciousness, which he later posited as a means to transcendental idealism. Theoretically, this may be a goal to aspire to but it does not take into account the situated approach to knowledge production, the link between the inner

world of direct experiencing and the outer world of concepts, and the language needed to express the experiencing. How, in an interview context, is it possible to separate experiencing the essence of an object without considering the concept ladenness of language and its interpretative nature?

To understand how language is being used, it is necessary to look at the people who use the words, and this is where the meaning will be found. This is central to the hermeneutic view, where the basis for all understanding is determined by a historical and cultural process. In short, what we see depends upon more than what we are looking at. The interpretation of meaning is set within the bigger context, with an emphasis on the historical process which leads to social action. This has repercussions for Husserl's search for essence, which Davis (1996, 103) concludes is in fact "a search for the essence-in-language or an essence-in-concept".

Wittgenstein (1953) and Davis (1996) question this philosophical quest for "essences", believing that any first person quest for certainty is misconceived. They criticise Husserl's disregard for the fact that language is socially constructed and, as such, is interpretative in nature. If this is the case, how is it possible to have direct experience of the essence of an object without it being filtered through an interpretation? Although he was committed to Husserl's phenomenological reduction, Merleau-Ponty (1962) did not believe it was possible to set aside our biases and assumptions enough to produce truths about our experiences. Merleau-Ponty (1962, xvii) argues that the inner and outer world cannot be neatly split when he writes that "the world is not what I think, but what I live through".

In considering Husserl's use of "phenomenological reduction" as a way of setting aside my expectations and assumptions, I believed the issue to be one of whether I could use my subjectivity as a tool with discipline and thoughtfulness. This meant being conscious of the situated nature of my subjectivity — the world I am living through — and recognising that we always have a view from somewhere (Ricoeur 1996). Salamon (2006) compares the idea of an uninscribed and "real" body to Husserl's phenomenological reduction in that we are asked to bracket off any history or psychic investment attached to the body or experience to a space beyond out perceptions. Salamon (2006) suggests that phenomenological reduction can make

us aware of our problematic presuppositions about that world, and about how what we know may prevent us from discovering possibilities that we do not know yet.

Langdridge (2007) describes doubt as the core of epoche. Doubt enabled me to engage with critical moments of not knowing, which I could draw on as a researcher as a way of moving beyond the apparent lived experience of the participants to the recognition that we are both in situated positions. Sometimes I found this helpful as a way of thinking about the participants' narratives without imposing frameworks of meaning on them. In my thesis, this meant acknowledging that I situate myself as part of the same heteronormative system, and therefore remaining aware of how this influences the meaning that the respondent and I will jointly construct of the participants' experiences. The epoche was a place that reminded me of the importance of questioning, not only the participants, but myself. Langdridge (2007, 2008) draws on Ricoeur's notion of a multi-layered approach for understanding meaning, with both researcher and participant subjected to a demythologising (empathic) process and a demystifying (suspicious) process. The former is similar to Bondi's (2003) description of empathy which recognises the fluid movement between separate psychic realties and merging psychic realities; and the latter as a reminder of the need for a "suspicious" position that lends a critical eye to the empathic engagement.

Almack (2008) raises methodological questions concerning what constitutes a reflexive account as she draws attention to the complexities of issues such as recruitment, rapport, self-disclosure and the researcher status as "insider"/"outsider". Almack (2008) argues that the researcher providing a biographical account on its own does not necessarily lead to a reflexive account, and she underlines the need to reflexively trace and document methodological decisions along the way. Langdridge (2007) takes up this point as he reflects on how the researcher might demonstrate reflexivity to the readers of research in order to involve the reader in the reflexive process. I draw on and demonstrate two suggestions he makes: first, in chapter one, I informed the reader of how I situate myself in relation to the topic of my thesis; second, I endeavour to bring myself into the analytic process as necessary and continue the reflexive process in the discussion and conclusions.

In this section I first describe how potential participants were approached and selected. Secondly, I describe the ways in which the interviews were conducted and the ethical considerations involved. Thirdly, I explain how I recorded and transcribed the data. Finally I describe how I analysed the data.

3.7.1 Recruitment

I am interested in how self-defined transgendered people in the U.K have come to know themselves as such, and in how knowing and labelling themselves in this way shapes transgendered people's identity and behaviour. In order to gain access to self-defined transgendered people, I chose to approach three organisations. They all agreed to display my flier (Appendix 1) in their community area. In addition, I sent emails, along with fliers, to six trans organisations; also to Press For Change (PFC), a national trans organisation, which agreed to post my flier on their website. At this stage I was unsure about the level of response I would get, so decided to wait and see before taking further action to secure contacts/prospective interviewees.

The responses were gradual, and seven people contacted me over the course of six weeks. One person phoned to check that my flier was not a hoax and was suspicious of my motives. Despite my reassurance that my research was genuine he did not ring back. Two participants whom I interviewed introduced a friend who was willing to participate in my research. I was also approached by someone at a conference where I was presenting a paper on transgender identities. She was the mother of a transgendered teenager and thought it might be helpful for her to work with me. The participant was 15 years old at the time of interviewing and was enthusiastic to talk about his experiences. Both he and his mother gave informed verbal consent. His mother brought him to the interview and came back after the interview was completed. Following on from this, I attended a conference on *Cutting Edges in Gender* and asked one of the presenters if he was willing to be interviewed, which he was. Most of the participants had chosen to be interviewed as they wanted more social awareness of transgender issues. Others were keen to dispel any myths

about transgendered people being misfits of society and wanted to be seen as regular people who had the same issues as everyone else.

I decided to stop after eleven interviews because I thought that I had a broad enough range of ages and diverse transgender identities to give me a good sense of different experiences. My sample was purposive in that the participants were selected because they shared the experience of identifying with the idea of transgender. The sample does not represent a definable population but helps me to understand through examples the process of formulating and living experiences as transgender. My initial assumption that there would be a correlation between age and transgender experience proved to be untrue, with younger participants as well as older ones making choices to transition to men or women.

The focus on a small number of participants' stories made it possible to investigate the relationship between the participants' experiences and the discourses available, namely the heterosexual matrix. In analysing the data generated by qualitative interviews, Crouch & McKenzie (2006, 493) argue for small samples, drawing on Mills (1959) "sociological imagination" when they describe participants not just as individuals, but as existing within a field of particular circumstance. Crouch & McKenzie (2006) argue that studies that seek to provide a dialogue between individual experience and social context — linking analysed data and conceptual frameworks — require only small samplings so that all the material can be kept in the researcher's mind as a totality. Based on phenomenological assumptions which focus on participants' subjective experiences, in-depth interviews scrutinise the dynamic qualities of a situation rather than its constituents. I was not attempting to represent all transgendered people or make universal claims about transgendered identities. I interviewed eleven self-identified transgendered people who were confident enough to be seen and recognised as transgendered. This meant that, in some way, they were connected to the wider LGBT community where I had placed my flier requesting participants. It is likely that these people are not representative of those who are more marginalised but this does not devalue the experiences of those people who did participate in this study or what can be learned from them. A brief summary of the participants' stories are located in Appendix 4.

Gender is not always the main focus of these stories as they are also stories of mental health and of the search for identity. Gender is a way of linking up general everyday issues that affect most people at some point in their lives. The articulation of these stories is dependent on the social and historical conditions that produce the cultural resources and support available in the participants' environment. There are several factors that enable their stories to be told in the U.K. in 2005 — the main one being the lesbian and gay movement which is instrumental in providing a social world for these stories to be heard.

3.7.2 Interviews

I interviewed each person as soon as it was possible to meet up, largely because I did not want to lose potential participants. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews in the LGBT Centre as I considered it to be a safe trans-friendly space and I had access to a room where I could set up my tape–recorder. I began the interviews by outlining the background of the study, mainly my motivation and purpose for doing this research and relating it to my work of teaching sexuality and gender to counselling and psychotherapy students. I advised my participants about confidentiality and asked their verbal permission to audio-tape the interview. I did not seek written consent. I explained that the interview would last approximately one hour and that I would ask them some questions based on their experiences of being transgendered. I suggested that at times I might interrupt their story in order to clarify or to ask for more information regarding something specific. I invited the participants to ask me any questions before we began the interviews so they could form their own opinions and where they might "situate" me. Only one respondent took me up on this offer and asked about why I was doing research on transgendered people. I chose to answer this by disclosing personal experience. I advised the participants that they could terminate the interview at any time and offered them an opportunity at the end of the interview to ask further questions. When the interviews were completed, the general feedback was that the participants had enjoyed the opportunity to talk about themselves and were pleased that their gender story might help other transgendered people.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as part of my narrative approach to illustrate how identities are constructed and experienced in society. The qualitative semi-structured interview seeks to describe the lived world of the participants; it reflects a move from modern formalised knowledge systems to narrative knowledge embodied in storytelling (Lyotard 1984) and openness to *qualitative* diversity and a multiplicity of meanings. I conducted semi-structured interviews which had a sequence of themes to be covered, yet at the same time maintained openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given (Kvale 1996). Since transgender is a broad area of inquiry, I developed an interview checklist to create a framework and focus and devised open questions that would invite my participants to give me specific information (Appendix 2). I wanted to find out how people who self-define as transgender use this category to describe their identity, and how it brings meaning to their experiences. In order to answer these questions, I started to develop mini research questions that converted into potential interview questions (Mason 1996). In this way, I could draw on the questions to identify themes on which to construct my analysis and argument (Mason 1996).

I began the interview by asking the participants how they defined themselves in order, to establish what we were talking about. I then invited them to tell their gender story in the form of a life history, beginning with when they first became aware of their assigned gender and their first remembered experiences of dissonance. My interview checklist included questions about what resources were available to them in their various explorations of their identity, and if and how this changed over time and according to location. In other words, I asked about how people came to construct their personal stories and how these stories reflect the cultural and social conditions that make it possible for their stories to be told. It is possible that the specific questions I asked structured participants' responses, but this was necessary to provide potential themes within which to order and analyse the data; though this may have come at the cost of preventing alternative data to emerge. One way I attempted to address this was to ask, at the end of the interview, whether the participants had anything else they felt they wanted to say about this topic.

3.7.3 Ethical considerations in recruitment and interviewing

The process of doing research raises a series of methodological and ethical debates that require consideration and reflection. In 2003 when I began my research at Edinburgh University, there was not a requirement for me to present my research proposal to a formal ethics committee. This section sets out my own ethical framework which provides guidelines for thinking about moral issues in research such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent entails giving the participants adequate information about the purpose of my research in order for them to make an informed choice about their participation. This includes the right to withdraw from the interview at any point. Issues of confidentiality include information about who will have access to the taped interviews, which in this case is me. In researching marginalised groups, often the idea of anonymity is crucial where participants are in need of protection. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity as staying alert to "outing" people was paramount in considering issues of anonymity and confidentiality. For this reason I chose to gain verbal consent to ensure maximum confidentiality which the participants agreed to. Some participants might not have wanted their communities to be "outed", thus, I describe the participants as a diverse, generic group living in the U.K.

Although qualitative research methodology addresses basic ethical issues of confidentiality and informed consent, there is little debate on the subject of development of interactive skills (Bingley 2002). In order to act ethically, I drew mainly on my own ethical framework of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/) that is based on a set of values that respect and appreciate human rights and dignity. These guidelines encompass such issues as fidelity, autonomy, beneficence, self-respect and justice. The ethical principle of beneficence — "acting in the best interests of the client […] requiring systematic monitoring of practice" — means that I had a responsibility to reflect on possible consequences for the participants' and the wider transgender community as a whole.

Rather than view the notion of ethics as a fixed point of reference in terms of a set professional code (Jenkins 2009), my commitment is to reflective and relational

ethics as an unfolding process. As a psychotherapist I was very familiar with reflective practice, with particular emphasis on ethical *relational* practice engaged in by the researcher during qualitative interviews. To a certain extent, I took for granted my confidence in my ability to facilitate a trusting and empathic space for the participants to tell their stories and at the same time to hold an overview of the interview process. The advantage of using interviews was that they provided personal and direct contact and the opportunity to establish a rapport which enabled me to make use of the interpersonal process in establishing safety and trust. In agreeing to take part in my research, the participants opened themselves up to being asked highly personal questions and such inquiries can risk a level of intrusion and distress. At times there is an uneasy balance that can exist between encouraging participants to open up, and the researcher maintaining control of the interview. This has ethical implications and emphasises the need for adequate interviewing skills and an awareness of some of the dynamic processes associated with in-depth interviews (King 1996). I consider the psychotherapeutic skills discussed in Section 3.9 as key components of the interviews, helping to steer me through the sensitive territory of the participants' lives. Similar to a psychotherapist, as a researcher I had responsibility to the participants to maintain an empathic and safe enough environment. As the research instrument I was in a position to structure and, to some extent, control the quality and flow of the interview. As indicated earlier, I referred to a set of questions as an interview guide which ensured that the same questions were asked in each interview. This minimised variations in answers which maintained the focus on systematic information, though not necessarily in sequence as each interview was shaped differently. Having a list of the questions to refer to enabled me to keep the interview on track and provided boundaries to what was potentially emotionally laden material. In this way, I was involved in privileging some information over other information and, as such, this reflects the purpose of my thesis — examining how heterosexual discourse shapes and constructs self-defined transgendered peoples' experiences and identities.

Reflexivity's endeavour to produce situated knowledge foregrounds the positioning and interests that inform it to the extent that they are known and knowable (Haraway 1991). Instead of aiming to neutralise or control my own

situated position, more realistically, I draw on the notion of the "epoche" as a way of questioning my expectations and working with my ethical guidelines.

3.7.4 Recording and transcribing

Audio cassette recordings were made of each interview using a tape recorder and external microphone. Kvale (1996) draws attention to how transcribing involves a series of decisions, with the first one being who would do the transcribing? Although labour intensive, I chose to transcribe the interviews myself as this allowed me to stay in close and consistent contact with the data and meant there would be no breach of any confidentiality by introducing a third person. The second decision was whether the interviews should be transcribed verbatim or transformed into a more formal style. Oliver et al. (2005, 1273) debate the complexities of interview transcription, drawing attention to the tendency to view transcription as a "behind the scenes management that remains unexamined rather than an object of study in its own right". Oliver et al. (2005) suggest that transcription practices lie on a continuum with two dominant approaches reflecting certain views about representation. The first approach is one which emphasises language as a representation of the *real* world where every utterance and element of speech are transcribed; the second is a denaturalised approach which emphasises that speech contains meanings and perceptions that construct our reality (Cameron 2001).

I chose to use a denaturalised transcription approach which was informed by my research objective of focusing on the discourses and ideas that the participants used to describe their lived experiences, as opposed to focusing on how these ideas are conveyed in dialogue. In other words I wanted to analyse the discourses, not the conversation. Nevertheless, I initially chose to transcribe the audio data in a naturalised form containing details such as punctuations and pauses, for several reasons. First, a full verbatim version allowed details of the interview material to be heard in a literal way and also retained an overview of the particular gender story which I could refer back to. This also allowed for the participants' voices to be heard and it honoured their own words and intentions. A full verbatim version also enabled me to capture the lived world of the participants descriptively, prior to me

interpreting and attaching my own meaning to the data in a more denaturalised form. Finally, I returned to my initial decision which meant I was less interested in the mechanics and more interested in the meaning of the data which would allow me to construct a theory of transgender based on the interview data. This required paying attention to the epoche and, as such, remaining conscious of my "view from somewhere", employing doubt as a critical tool.

For reasons of confidentiality, I have not used the participants' real names. I chose not to give the participants pseudonyms as most of them had already changed their names during transition and I wanted to honour this in some way. I have given them a code which is a single letter (Appendix 4). Throughout the thesis, I use the terms FTM and MTF — even though not all the participants identify as FTM or MTF — as a way of clarifying the complexity of the categories that are currently being used and created by the respondents. All participants will be referred to as their preferred gender *at the time of the interviews,* whether or not they have fully transitioned.

3.7.5 Data analysis

According to Lanigan (1979, 1988), Nelson (1989) and Orbe (1998), phenomenology includes three steps of discovery: a) collection of descriptions of lived experiences, b) reduction into essential themes and c) interpretation of themes. In this section, I discuss the analysis of the data which was conducted after the interviews had been transcribed, namely how I reduced the participants' lived experiences into themes and how I interpreted the themes.

Phenomenological inquiry allows for an inductive approach, representing a methodological framework that provides a discursive space for the recognition of the participants' diverse lived experiences (Orbe 2000). Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld (lebenswelt), the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualise it or theorise it (Husserl 1970). In this way, analysis focuses on conscious experience rather than hypothetical constructs (Orbe 2000). An inductive approach facilitates the generation of theory from focusing on the perceptions and experiences of the respondents and their

understandings of the world. Yet it could be argued that all research involves both deduction and induction in the broadest sense of those terms (Hammersley 1996) — in my case, this meant moving from data to theoretical ideas as well as from theoretical ideas to data. The literature enabled me to draw upon a range of theoretical resources and perspectives that inevitably explained and interpreted the themes and codes.

How I organised and analysed the data was informed initially by returning to the aim of my thesis: to explore how transgender identity is constructed and discursively produced in the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century. In order to achieve this, I returned to my interview questions which were designed to focus on the wider cultural conditions that shaped and informed the participants' understandings of their biological body, gender identity and erotic relationships. The questions were designed in a linear way, taking them back to the past to explore their first remembered experiences of when they became aware of their assigned gender, and the subsequent cultural influences and discourses that led them to their current self-defined transgender identity. In other words, the questions were designed to locate their personal biography within a larger social and historical context (Mills 1959).

It could also be argued that the interview questions, intended to be open and exploratory, raised other questions about the ways in which a certain story was expected and elicited. This, in turn, certainly shaped the themes I chose to analyse the data. In my own need to create questions that were recognisable, perhaps I played it too safe and supported the reproduction of normative forms of knowledge. For instance questions such as "have there been any particular events in your life that crystallised your sense of being transgendered" depend to a certain extent, on a coherent whole self, claiming intelligibility and agency for oneself (Byrne 2003). This may have erased some of the complexities involved in analysing and understanding the creation of identities.

Each transcript was coded with emerging categories that were based on the interview questions, and which were later developed as chapters. In this way, my coding of the data can be viewed as an interpretative process (Cant & Taket 2008). Main categories were; dissonance between aspects of identity, particular narratives

that the participants had developed, different aspects of transitioning, the production of new identities, sexual desire. Through in-depth reflections on the transcripts, I began the task of identifying themes that "emerged" (Glaser & Strauss 1967) within these categories. I began the task of identifying themes and set about manually cutting, collating and colour coding the data accordingly. These coloured quotations were then reordered and reorganised within the larger relevant category. The process of differentiating between the interviews and the transcripts was central to: first, decontextualising to ensure anonymity; second, analysing the discourses, not the participants. Having said that, I found myself switching back and forth in order to recontextualise the information within the participants' narratives. The original complete versions of the transcripts served as frames of reference that helped to maintain an overview of their stories.

Mills (1959) and Berger (1963) write about how general social patterns can be understood in the behaviours of particular individuals: emphasising the importance of seeing the general in the particular. In my analysis, I am drawing from eleven self-defined transgendered people's experiences in the early twenty-first century in the U.K. to examine and reflect on how the binary structure of sex and gender categories influences and shapes how they construct their identities. In other words, my analysis is not a generalisation of their experiences, but an exploration of how the heterosexual matrix, in general, regulates the particular of identities.

The process of analysing the data was by no means unproblematic. The interpretative stage involved discovering the interrelatedness among the themes that linked the phenomena under investigation. This was a process of thematising, bracketing, interpreting and then beginning the process again (Nelson 1989). Initially I experienced frustration and confusion in my attempts to fit the participants' experiences into neatly coded themes. The transcript categories fell apart numerous times and I had to rework themes, let go of ideas and adapt and amend. In this way, I found meanings that were not originally apparent in the earlier steps (Lanigan 1988). I often found that several themes were interconnected and could be combined under a more general heading which in turn, reduced the larger number of general themes to major themes. Browne (2008) cites Doel's "indeterminable buzzing" (2001) as a way of honouring the queer moments — moments that do not rely on heteronormativity

— that emerge in the research process. I found this a useful way of resisting the urge, particularly in the most confusing times during the data analysis, to classify and solidify identities and categories that were refusing to fit into the binary organisation of the heterosexual matrix. I became interested in my normalising impulse to reduce those moments of disruption into particular products of research. Doel's (2001) use of the term "buzzing" as a way of allowing space for such moments helped me to value that which was unknowable or not easily thought about. I found it useful to use the conceptual tool of queer to question, contest, and deconstruct (Elia 2003, 82), in this instance, my own internalisation of hegemonic cultural ideals of "normal" sexed and gendered identities. Ahmed (2006) draws attention to how orientations are organised and argues that to make things queer is to allow moments of disorientation that disturb the normative order. In this way, phenomenology can offer a resource for queer thinking insofar as it emphasises the importance of lived experience and the significance of what is ready-to-hand. Having said that, I am aware that my analysis has by no means exhausted the wide variety of interpretations and multiple realities that could be presented in this thesis. Implicit in this, is an acknowledgment that my analysis involved focusing on some realities and editing out others (Heaphy 2008).

It could be argued that in beginning chapters 4 and 5 with setting out theoretical concepts (Lev 2004; Plummer 1995) I was allowing pre-existing structures to influence my analysis of the data. The process of bracketing was a useful and necessary tool to navigate my way through this by helping me to aim for openness without manipulating, altering or reshaping their life experiences, and at the same time, drawing on those structures to present the findings as a series of themes and subthemes. Employing pre-existing categories in phenomenological research certainly required me to negotiate preconceived ideas and prejudices that I brought to the process in order to be open to alternative explanations. One of the main limitations of using pre-existing categories is the oversimplification of complex experiences and universalising and essentialising the very diversity I was exploring. In other words, if I was to advance current conceptualisations of sex and gender identity and take these discoveries into the lifeworld, I needed to stay alert to centralising the participants' experiences without essentialising them (Bell et al. 1999 quoted in Orbe 2000). This means recognising that as a reflexive researcher, I am

involved in the production of the participants' stories and of knowledge-power (Foucault 1978) and, at best, can provide an ethic of critical reflection and an openness and willingness to examine my assumptions.

Chapter 4 Dissonance Between Aspects of Identity

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the centrality of the identity categories of "sex", "gender" or "sexual orientation" to research participants' descriptions of their own identities. This chapter outlines the personal dissonance experienced by transgendered people when their sexed and gendered identities are not congruent with the binary categories of the western heterosexual matrix. My intention is to open up the possibility of questioning the predominant heterosexual discourse that is used to understand the concepts of sex and gender, and to illustrate how discourse influences both how experiences are described and what is experienced. This chapter begins to explore what happens when the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the heterosexual matrix are interrupted by people assuming contradictory relationships between aspects of gender identity, gender role, biological sex and sexual orientation.

Hall (2000, 19) describes "identity" as a:

meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to "interpellate", speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken".

By this account, identity is who we are, or who we think we are, and it influences how we relate to others and to the environment. Even those who would say they have never thought to question their own identity will inevitably have been compelled to make significant choices in their lives which reflect issues of identity that range from clothing, appearance and beliefs, to environment and jobs. Identity marks who we are similar to, and who we are different from.

Identity comes from the inside and the outside, with self-identity being the conscious image that people have of themselves and social identity being their status

within any number of social groups. Giddens (1991) draws on the relational psychoanalytic approach to identity as a theoretical resource for the sociology of identity. Giddens (1991, 186) describes self-identity as being "created and more or less continually reordered against a backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life." He emphasises how self-identity is not just a given, but is created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual who then develops a sense of biographical continuity and is able to conceptualise the notion of personhood.

Self-identity arises out of our sense of being embodied, which is shaped through social interaction with the external world. Giddens (1991, 77) argues that "the body is part of an action system rather than a passive object" and that it is through our bodies that we gain knowledge of the world. This is articulated and given meaning through the dominant ideology of the time which, at the very least, enables us to live a liveable life in a social space. The identity categories of "sex", "gender" and "sexual orientation" are central to people's descriptions of their own identity. If we are to understand identity as being formed through individual interaction with the external world, we need to pay closer attention to how the ideology of the heterosexual matrix shapes individuals' sense of sexed and gendered identities.

Lev (2004) separates out four components of human identity that have been developed as a discourse of duality in understanding sexed and gendered identities. She distinguishes between biological sex, gender identity, gender-role and sexual orientation in order to understand how they relate to each other and how they underpin people's understanding of sexed and gendered identities. Lev (2004, 80) borrows terminology used by other theorists (Coleman 1987; Diamond 2002; Money & Erhardt 1972; Money & Tucker 1975; Paul 1993; Shively & De Cecco 1993), and in this chapter, I draw on the following definitions in order to highlight how sexual and gendered identities are organised within the specific heterosexual matrix based on dualistic difference.

Biological Sex is a complex relationship of hormones, chromosomes, genes, gonadal and biochemical components that influence the anatomy and the brain (Money 1995). The terms most commonly used to signify biological sex are "male" and

"female". The category of sex is assigned at birth, usually by a medical practitioner and is based on visible gentilia (Lev 2004). In this way the biological body is sexed, which then produces two sexes, male and female.

Gender identity is an internal identity, and in contemporary western societies is experienced as a core identity, a fundamental sense of belonging to one sex or another (Stoller, 1968). In the vast majority of contexts, gendered identification consists of two sets of meanings which people use to understand ourselves and to be understood by others — "man" or "woman". For most people, gender identity is congruent with their assigned sex — if she is female, then she experiences herself as a woman. The process of "gendering" is external and relies on what people see. These become signs that people learn in order to read gender, and gender becomes a way of knowing. Gender is a way of marking and defining sexed human beings.

Gender Role is an external identity — a visible identity that is projected outwards to society - and is the expression of "masculinity" or "femininity". This is a reflection of one's gender identity and is socially reinforced. Gender roles describe how gender is performed or acted and they use gender signifiers such as clothing and behaviour to categorise all humans as either man or woman. Society predicts, on the basis of gender, what kind of gender identity a person will have. In general, gender roles are a reflection of one's biological sex but in practice they may or may not be related to gender identity or biological sex.

The category of "gender" is often used interchangeably with the category of "sex" and their meanings vary depending on the context within which they are used. The Oxford English Dictionary quotes the term "gender" as being used as a synonym for sex since the fifteenth century. Diamond (2002) suggests that maintaining clear conceptual distinctions between the two words is helpful for the psychological understanding of identity, particularly in the context of transgender identities. Prior to the 1970s, the primary model for understanding sex and gender was based on difference, particularly the physical difference between the biological sexes; then gender was mapped onto this as an innate personality characteristic. Oakley (1972) and Rubin (1975) were among the first feminist theorists to make the distinction

between sex and gender, and this contributed to an emerging feminist and sociological critique in which the category of gender was expanded from being seen as essentialist, (describing biological and physical characteristics), to include new sociological and cultural characteristics (such as behaviour, modes of interaction, clothing).

Sexual Orientation is the self-perception of a person's sexual and emotional desire towards someone else. Sexuality is experienced through the person's gender identity (regardless of his or her biology) and can become an identity in its own right. As described above, the working definitions of sex and gender, as set out by Lev (2004, 79-86), are conceptualised within the "terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures" (Butler 1999, 13). In this way, all possible sexual identity positions are informed and regulated in accordance with the ontological and epistemological assumptions that structure the contemporary categories of gender and sexuality. This means that erotic desires which fail to make sense in terms of their basic logic of binary gender are rendered unintelligible (Valentine 2006).

The four terms defined above provide the basis for the forms that dissonance can take, in that the transgendered participants involved in this research experience dissonance between gender identity and biological body, gender identity and gender role, gender role and biological body, gender role and sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual orientation, biological body and sexual orientation. Dominant western heteronormative discourse imposes the view that biological bodies are either female or male; that gender identity and behavioural and social roles are either masculine or feminine; and that sexual orientation is either heterosexual or homosexual (Lorber 1996). These categories then become social identities that often remain unquestioned. We cannot understand our lives without the constraints of the heterosexual matrix because our identities have been, and continue to be, both constructed and constricted by the dominant heteronormative discourse.

We tend to collude in reproducing dominant heteronormativity by still using it as a major lens through which we think about people. This is evident in the development of liberationist movements that have attempted to open up alternative identity and social possibilities, yet result in reinforcing heteronormative dominant

binary sex and gendered categories. Seidman (1993, 110) describes how in the 1970s, gay liberation theory aimed at freeing individuals from the constraints of the sex and gender binary system that locked them into mutually exclusive heterosexual/homosexual roles. Although this model began to mobilise and legitimise different kinds of identities, its emphasis on a unified (gay) identity created its own essentialist story of identity. Gay identity constructions reinforced the mutual dependency of the heterosexual/homosexual binary identities, yet the historical importance of essentialist identities cannot be underestimated in the emergence of long repressed gay communities.

Eliason & Schope (2007) critically review literature on LGBT identity formation, providing an extensive exploration of the early linear stage models of the 1970s and 1980s. Eliason & Schope (2007) credit Altman (1971) and Plummer (1975) with being the first to develop models of identity formation, focusing on a stable homosexual identity. They summarize later stage models that built on Plummer's work with a focus on an essentialist identity (Ponse 1978, Cass 1979, 1996; Coleman 1987, Faderman 1984, Minton & McDonald 1984, Sophie 1985, 1986).

Eliason & Schope (2007) identify as common to the various stage models: a) a feeling of differentness that initiates the development of a new identity, b) the developmental process of identity formation, c) the need for disclosure and d) the need for cultural immersion and/or pride in the new identity. A key limitation of stage models is their linearity. However, the processes identified by Eliason & Schope (2007) are useful and are taken up in this thesis outwith the structured and delimited stages of stage models. In other words they are viewed as common experiences that extend over time, often overlapping in time and without fixed beginning and end points. Section 4.2 begins to explore the first stage — what happens when the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the heterosexual matrix are interrupted, with people assuming contradictory relationships between the aspects of gender identity, gender role, biological sex, sexual orientation. Chapter five continues to describe the following three stages of coming out and the social and cultural support available in this process.

4.2 Realisation of dissonance

For all the participants who self-define as transgender there are moments when they realise that something is wrong — a personal dissonance or incongruence — when their personal experience of gender identity or biological sex is not congruent with the dominant cultural meaning. In the next few pages, I identify and explore key elements of experiences that emerge when there are significant disparities between an individual's internal identity and his/her external, socially assigned, identity. All the participants experience this dissonance. I draw on three of Lev's (2004) aspects of identity to describe how the participants experienced this dissonance. The fourth aspect of identity, sexual orientation, depends on the heterosexual matrix's organisation of the other three aspects. I explore sexual orientation in chapter seven.

My research reveals the three main ways in which participants come to realise dissonance from dominant norms:

1) *Gender identity* and *biological sexed body;* their gender identity is at odds with their felt sense of who they are and is experienced as mind not fitting body, using language such as feeling, knowing, and instincts.

2) *Biological sexed body;* their uncertainty regarding their biological body and the different decisions they made to resolve the dissonance.

3*) Gender role and gender identity*; their sense of self is not expressed in their gender role. Their gender role does not reflect their gender identity and is experienced as social identity — how they perform gender — not fitting into their felt sense of who they are. Being able to look and behave how they feel inside is key to being comfortable with who they feel, in terms of gender identity, that they are.

The narrative origin of some participants' journey is when their lived experience of their bodies becomes incongruent with their lived experience of their minds. This is illustrated by the following extracts that are representative of the participants as a whole. For example A expresses the mind/body dissonance as follows:

> Every day I meet the typical girls I feel like a boy. Sometimes what is in our minds is completely different. I can only say what gender is by what my chromosomes say and sometimes what our bodies say is not the same as what our minds say.
> A, FTM, age 15

Another surprising revelation is just how unfamiliar people are with their own sexed bodies. Several people express a deep disassociation with the body that looks back at them from the mirror. For instance L says:

> But it got to the point where I was just like a transvestite as it was. It was one night when I got home and I was getting changed and getting ready to go to bed and it was like, it's not the clothes, it's my body. I just looked in the mirror and it was funny as it was a stranger that started looking back at me and — it was that's not me, that's not who I am. It was that one night.
> L, MTF, age 33

This is a defining experience for L, (also discussed in chapter five as an epiphany) which causes L to change her use of terminology and this marks a departure from the category of "transvestite" to the category of "transsexual". She continues as follows:

> It's the defining thing between a transvestite and a transsexual. A transvestite gets their release, their balance brought back to an even keel by getting dressed up for a while looking like a girl, acting like a girl […] With a transsexual its more than that - its about getting up in the morning, looking in

the mirror, not having to shave, not having to stick 10 inches of make up, you just want to wake up and say — there's me — chuck a bin bag on and you still look like a girl.

L, MTF, age 33

L describes the difference between transvestite and transsexual as the difference between performing a gender role with clothes and experiencing an embodied gender identity. She goes on to say:

It is the physicality of it but you have got to be aware that that is matching your mental self as well, that there is a mental component to it. But for us it's more than clothes. It is getting your body to match your mental image of yourself which is different.

L, MTF, age 33

It is interesting to note that none of the participants said that they should change their "mind" to accommodate their body — instead the participants make it clear that it is their body that needs to become more congruent with their mind and not vice versa. This reflects Benjamin's (1954) argument regarding the ineffectiveness of psychotherapy (changing their mind) in changing the way someone experiences their gender, resulting in gender becoming medicalised and part of the medical discourse. What becomes apparent from the data is how important individual experiences are in transgendered subjectivity and how the participants feel alienated from their body. The theme of *knowing* or *feeling* features prominently in the participants' descriptions of their experiences of dissonance. For K, this is manifested as feelings of shame:

I'd be so ashamed of my body for some reason, I didn't *know* what it was, I didn't *feel* right […] I didn't *feel* comfortable with who I was.

K, FTM, age 32

There are as many expressions of this dissonance as there are participants. S describes the dissonance between her internal identity and the assigned external identity as follows:

> Your *senses* never lie, your *instincts* never lie, your *intuitio*n is always right so you're guided with your *intuition* and your *instinct*s but the information you get when you are younger taught me no you are not a girl you're a little boy.
> S, MTF, age 35

In order to cope with this mind/body dissonance, M transforms her pre-pubescent body non-surgically in a bid to match her feelings with her body.

> At the age of 9, they had this game they used to play which was to measure themselves basically and I thought this could be a bit difficult for me as at the time I would invert myself and push it backwards and hid it so if I went to stand in front of a group of people what they would be seeing would be what looks like a vagina and I did that for a while. And on this occasion I felt it was an opportunity to actually open up to my brothers and see how they responded. When I asked them the question how do you measure me now — they were like what's going on? — well I said in a few words I said we are not the same. I had this *feeling* since I was 4 and I couldn't talk to anyone about it.
> M, MTF age 42

Here, M expresses the profundity of *knowing* or *feeling* himself to be a little girl without the accepted corporeal signs that signify as female. Similarly, G challenges the assumption that one needs a particular anatomical body to *know* oneself as female and it is her *knowing* that reveals a mind/body dissonance:

> And I *knew* when I was 7 that I was female
> G, MTF, age 69

The participants' "felt" sense of identity is an internal phenomenological experience and is a hallmark of their subjectivity as discussed in chapter two by trans writers (Prosser 1995, 1998; Cromwell 1999, Rubin 2003; Hines 2006, 2007b; Salamon 2006). T describes this "felt" sense as feeling differently inside compared with what is expected on the outside, and finds ways of identifying with female objects on the outside which seem to match her internal feelings:

> So I just, I suppose I was aware of *feeling* different from an early age and not really fitting in a way. My father was a shift worker in Wales so he was often working or in bed so I was very much part of my mother and older sister's world really[…] As I grew up I was aware of not fitting in and tending to play with my elder sister who is 6 years older and I'd be with her friends and I was resented by them as well sort of tagging along […] And then when I was about 10 in junior school, this girl asked me if I could have anything in life what would it be? And I said a girl.
>
> T, MTF, Transgender, age 48

The participants' stories illustrate that there is "something" which is core and fundamental to their sense of themselves before they are aware of any process of engendering takes place. Generally, in my data, the materiality of gender is a core experience in the lives of the participants and finding a gendered home is the main structure of their journey. Transsexuals' narrative accounts, in particular, evidence an embodied experience which cannot be reduced to a socialised introjection of gender representation. Perhaps here we can see how the transsexual body troubles contemporary trans theory in raising the question of whether an inner essence preceded social coding, being seen as embodied subjects, not merely cultural discourses mapped onto bodies. As Prosser (1998, 96) argues "at what point do our experiences of our bodies resist or fragment our theoretical generalisations, reveal them as displacements of experience and demand from them new formulations?". In other words, the participants' experiences are conceptualised as an inner core, regardless of how constructed they may be.

The participants reflect a general desire to belong to one gender or the other which reflects how the binary structure of sex and gender categories can be seen to influence and shape how they conceptualise their experiences. In other words, my analysis is not a generalisation of their experiences, but an exploration of how the heterosexual matrix, in *general*, regulates the *particular* of identities. When I ask the participants if they think gender is something they are born with or something that they learn, several of them feel that gender is a combination of both:

> Well I think it is the usual thing. I think it's probably a mix.
> T, MTF, age 48

> That's a difficult one; it's a bit of both. There's always been this nature versus nurture argument. Me personally — it is nature. You are born however you are — people can say it's taught or caught but it's only in so far as to how open you are to learning this stuff.
> L, MTF, age 33

J relies on the essentialist argument that gender is something she was born with:

> I don't know if you know this but there was some research done in Holland and it was done with homosexual men and they took known homosexual men, 50 of their brains, and 50 women's brains and 50 known heterosexual men and they took a section off and they found in the medulla — with most blokes it's a pale colour, with women its darker and nearly all the homosexual men had a darker female medulla. Now to me I think that proves that you are made that way or predisposed and I think a lot of people don't like the idea because they still want to point the finger but I think the vast amount of people that are different are different because they are made that way. And I don't feel I should suffer because I am made this way.
> J, MTF, age 62

J appears to feel relieved at the idea of a biological explanation which is reminiscent of the essentialist argument that played a critical role in the development of gay and lesbian politics. Plummer (1995, 86) describes how the coming out stories of the 1960s and 1970s laid the groundwork for identities being created around sexuality where "an experience becomes an essence". Similarly, J's story relies on the biological story of natural difference which she feels enables her to be heard and understood. Like most of the participants, J describes an embodied experience of gender. In this way, gender is conceptualised as a lived experience. The data reveals the participants' experiences of betrayal by their bodies; this tension between who they feel themselves to be and their material body points to the centrality of bodies to a sense of self.

4.2.2 Biological sexed body

Some participants' stories illustrate the dimorphic "sexing of bodies" in the context of uncertainty regarding their biological body. Their narratives illustrate how they took different paths to resolve this dissonance. This section draws on three participants' stories: D and G who were probably born with different intersex conditions, and J whose hormonal make-up provided a biological explanation of gender ambiguity.

D and G experienced some confusion as to their biological sex, albeit in different ways, which prompted them to embark on two very different paths. The first is a self-defined bisexual "Hermaphrodyke" who sees himself in a perpetual transitory state with no destination, and the second, is a self-defined pre-operative transsexual woman who is on a transitional journey with a clear destination. These two bodily identities challenge the sex/gender binary by employing two opposing transgender discourses — a postmodern/queer narrative introducing the term "intersex", and a traditional medical narrative. Both use the notion of "becoming" but in two totally different ways. D and G represent a group of people who are born with ambiguous sexual anatomy and may or may not be classed as "intersex".

D recounts how taking hormones was a way of dealing with his dissonance and of being true to his hermaphroditic body:

> I found out that my testosterone levels were extremely high for a woman but within mid/average range for a male and my female hormone levels were average — they weren't higher or lower than the average female […] I decided I wanted to see what it would be like to privilege the testosterone. […] I thought about it more and did some research and then I went to the doctor […] and said — I'm not a man, let's just be clear about that. I want to be more true to my hermaphroditic body. I want to look more gender ambiguous rather than less. I believe I have an intersex condition but I don't know conclusively. It's in my family so I want to be true to that and even if I don't I still want to tweak so I have more options […] So that's the testosterone story and it's been 10 years.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D refers to the two categories of hermaphrodite and intersex. The category of "hermaphrodite" is explored in Dreger's (1998, 30) richly researched study of hermaphrodites — people born with "anatomically 'ambiguous' bodies" — and their treatment by medical clinicians. She describes how in the middle of the twentieth century this term was replaced by "intersexed" to refer to sexually ambiguous bodies, but in fact this also signalled different ways of thinking about it:

> "Intersexed" literally means that an individual is between the sexes — that s/he slips *between* and blends maleness and femaleness. By contrast the term "hermaphroditic" implies that a person has *both* male and female attributes, that s/he is not a third sex or a blended sex, but instead that is s/he is a sort of double sex, that is, in possession of a body which juxtaposes essentially "male" and "female" parts (Dreger 1998, 31).

In 2006, U.S. and European endocrinological societies announced a change in terminology referring to intersex; the new preferred term being "disorders of sex

development" (DSDs). The change in medical terminology was met by controversy from intersex activists and allies, objecting to the description of intersex conditions as "disorders" (Feder 2009). Here lies a significant debate about the medicalisation and pathologization of human variations but, for the purpose of this chapter, I focus on how the term "intersex" is particularly relevant to D as he "wants more options". This suggests that D is using the intersex category as a way of exploring a space beyond the binary genders by taking hormones. D explains:

> I went to the Adult Intersex Clinic and I wanted to get to the bottom of why I had a high testosterone level, was it adrenal gland? I had all the tests, internal ultra sound, blood tests as I have a chromosomal mosaic, not in all my cells but in a significant number of my cells they are XO, so there's missing chromosomes which you don't usually see in people until they are older than 75 and bear in mind I had these done before I was 40. So it was like an anomaly they couldn't explain. Basically, whether I'm medically, technically, diagnosably intersex is still an open question according to the endocrinologist at UCH and the Intersex clinic for women. He would say that I am but it also depends on the definition. There was no genital mutilation at birth […] so anyway the best medical evidence or theory is that I have some testicular tissue — not a lot — in my right ovary and that it's genetically related on my father's side to my great grandmother.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

Interestingly here, the dominant power to define comes into play with D's self-definition, drawing on the category of intersex as a way of explaining his ambiguous body and finding a "home".

The category of "intersex" has a complex history with various typologies of intersexuality being created by various medical clinicians, and differences in definition being contested. For instance, the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) is keen to distinguish between someone born with an intersex condition and someone born with "ambiguous genitalia" because some people with an intersex condition have genitalia that look typically masculine or feminine. Nevertheless,

despite the differences in opinions, the condition of intersex draws attention to the oversimplified stereotypes we use about the nature of male and female and the variation there is among male and female anatomies. The hermaphroditic body raises questions about what it means to be female and male and illustrates how the indeterminate body has forced medical clinicians to make choices about what constitutes a male and female body. Intersexuals are currently challenging medical typologies and questioning the need for surgical modification. While the intersex community and the transgender community are both marginalised and seen as deviant from cultural norms, D is keen to point out that there are also differences between the two groups:

> I don't want to get too caught into this medical intersex diagnosis as some intersex people are very particular and they don't want transgender movement to usurp and commodify for their own reasons the intersex activism.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

There are increasing debates in medical and psychological journals about intersexuality, and support organisations for intersexuals come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. The ISNA is keen to differentiate itself or its members from being transgender or transsexual because, in spite of similarities, these groups have different needs — the vast majority of intersexed people identify as male or female rather than transgender or transsexual. Nevertheless, it appears that one central aim that they both share is that people can grow and develop in ways that contest the binary system of gender and sex and sexuality. Van Lenning (2004, 33) sums it up when she questions whether the intersexed body is a medical emergency or an interesting alternative: "Is it an abnormality or a possibility, a gender disorder or a gender variation?"

For G, the question of whether she had a gender disorder or a gender variation is not even considered. There was uncertainty regarding G's gender assignment at birth as the doctor was unable to determine G's anatomical sex:

I was a twin and I was 1lb 13oz and when I was born the surgeon could not determine my sex. My twin brother was born 5mins later so the surgeons came in and said to my mother you have a healthy second son but we can't determine the sex of the first born and that went on for a couple of days. And then the doctors at the hospital asked my mother what she was expecting and she said twin boys so they said right you've got twin boys. Up until the age of 12 I was taking vitamin tablets, 4 a day, which I now know they were not vitamin tablets, they were male hormone tablets pumping them through to make me male.

G, MTF, age 69

The western sex/gender model is based on difference and an underlying dimorphism; "western beliefs in the "sexed" character of bodies are not "natural" in basis but, rather, a component of specifically western gendering and sexual regimes" (Helliwell 2000, 798). G's experience illustrates how people born with ambiguous sexual anatomy get reduced into being categorised as either a "boy" or a "girl" because there are many social distinctions that rely on there being only two sexes. In fact, using the term "ambiguous" in itself suggests that analysis is taking place within the dimorphic system. Blackless et al. (2000, 151) surveyed the medical literature from 1955 to the present for studies of the frequency of deviation from the ideal male or female body. The results concluded that the frequency may be as high as 2% of live births, with the frequency of "corrective" genital surgery occurring between 1 and 2 per 1,000 live births (0.1-0.2%). The above study underlines the normative nature of medical science that derives from the platonic ideal of absolute dimorphism which then assumes the bimodality of sexual development, rather than the variability demonstrated by G. As Dreger (1998) points out, the medical treatment of intersexuality today is based on a heterosexist framework which does not allow for a diversity of sexualities and genders. In G's case, her biological body was quickly corrected in order to fit into a male category. It was not until sixty years later, that G decided to have surgery and to transition from male to female.

D, the advocate for acknowledging intersex bodies, describes when he first found out there could be something "wrong" with him:

So then, when I was 13 something happened that made me very alarmed but I repressed it. Another cousin was born and I was told it was a boy then it became a girl. That was my father's brother's child. In my father's family, in my right wing republican mid western birth father's family, the only xx people we know is myself and my cousin Heidi. Heidi was born with a condition diagnosed at birth as "46xx true hermaphrodite". She had ova, testes and both gonads which meant a combination of the ovarian and testicular tissue. So basically at 13 I was like, they've made a mistake so I knew a mistake was possible. About the same time my own body developed that wasn't in line with being female in that I developed asymmetrically — my right side didn't develop, the left side did develop. […] When I was 17 I finally told somebody and I had an operation that was kind of against my will. I had asked to be flat chested. I wanted the left breast simply made into an AA cup — the double DD to the AA. They told me that was possible and when I woke up they said it wasn't possible and they only reduced me to what you would think as a C cup. So I was still asymmetrical and really upset and I allowed myself to be convinced that I what I really wanted was a nice set of tits, nice big set of tits. And since I had long red hair right down to my ass they thought it was best for me. […] I knew my clitoris was slightly larger, maybe double the size if you can have an average clitoris — if your clitoris is the size of your pinkie which is kind of big really, just the size of your nail which is a fairly large clitoris sometimes but I would say mine was around double that size. And then I started from teenage hood I would be plucking the hairs on my chin and by the time I was 20 I would have had a beard if I hadn't been plucking.

D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D's ambiguous body was reduced to fit into what was considered to be acceptably attractive for a female body and no alternative choices were available to her at the time. Today a fundamentally different view is being expressed in medical and psychological journals. This position suggests that a delay in sex assignment, particularly in intersexed people, could avoid future emotional problems (Wilchins

1997; Liao & Boyle 2004). The existence of the reality of intersexed bodies surely exposes the social construction of sex and gender *as* immutable bodies and challenges the concept of woman/man as a unitary natural category at the literal level of biology. Kitzinger (2004) argues that the "natural" body is rarely experienced as adequately gendered, reminding us that intersex people are not necessarily suffering from body dysphoria and may even express contentment with their bodies. There is now an intersex movement which is challenging society's intolerance of genital ambiguity, proposing that instead of being a medical emergency, the intersexed body can be seen as an interesting alternative (Kitzinger 2004; Lenning 2004).

Herdt (1994a) critiques thinking that privileges male/female distinctions, drawing attention to the prejudice of the dimorphic classification system which results in the exclusion of divergent categories. D's and G's stories illustrate how the defined strictures of dimorphism inscribed sex onto their bodies by relying on genitals and breasts as primary markers of gender identity. Their stories show how D and G made different decisions on this spectrum of possibilities, adopting positions that are not tied to their bodies; G in her decision to transition from a biological man to a biological woman through sex reassignment hormones and surgery, and D's decision to take hormones as a way of being true to his ambiguous body, hence situating himself in a permanent transition.

In the case of J, there were no genital anomalies/ambiguities at birth and she acquired an affinity with female identity through transvestite identity and activities. Interestingly, the "male part" of her needs scientific proof that she is "female" in order to act on something she has felt for years. This is another example of reliance on dominant categories and the processes of categorisation relying on the medical model, which comes in the form of routine tests carried out after a car crash:

> I had a car crash and I had to go down to the Neurological Hospital because of the sight problems. And there the chap who was carrying out these tests, he said, this is very interesting he said I think I've got the wrong brain patterns coming up […] He said you've got female brain patterns […] Apparently I use both hemispheres at the same time which is what women do. Whereas men switch on and switch off. It's very rare that the two hemispheres work

together […] They did some blood tests and they found that I do have a very low testosterone count and I also have a slight oestrogen count[…] So I'm going down to the Gender Clinic and […] basically I've never felt as happy as I do now.

J, MTF, age 62

The biological causes of transsexuality have been the subject of debate for many years. Zhous et al. (1997) studied the female brain stricture in six male-to-female transsexuals, comparing them with those of heterosexual men and women. The results of the study found the hypothalamus of the brain in male-to-female transsexuals (regardless of hormone treatment) was similar in volume to that of women and less than in heterosexual men. This scientific proof supports the hypothesis that gender identity develops as result of an interaction between the development of the brain and sex hormones. J experienced relief and validation as a result of the doctor's tests and this has since prompted her to attend the gender clinic where she was diagnosed as transsexual.

This section has explored the different ways that three participants coped with and made sense of the dissonance they felt with their biological sexed bodies. D and G illustrate two different narratives, with D willing to stay with the uncertainty regarding his sexed body, and G seeking certainty. Nevertheless, D still seeks some understanding as to what kind of "uncertain" body he has. J requires scientific proof that how she feels is attributed to biology, thereby validating her experience. In this way, G and J tell a modernist linear narrative or "restitution narrative" (Dreger 1998, 185) - for G, it is one in which a sex is *temporarily* blurred and the goal is a stable and "true" sex, and for J it involves "discovering" her "true" sex through medical tests. This kind of narrative construction opposes D's more postmodern narrative of chaos and confusion when he refuses to reduce his story to simple categorization. This section illustrates that while certain physical facts exist, it is particular discourses that bring meaning to the materiality of the body.

<u>4.2.3 External identity</u>

Dissonance was further experienced when participants' dress and behaviour did not match expectations of the external world. Being able to look and behave (express externally) how they feel inside is key to being comfortable with who they feel they are internally. In all cases, gender identity is incongruent with their gender role in society. The following extracts describe the participants' experiences of not fitting into their assigned gender roles, resulting in them feeling incongruent with their gender identity.

<u>4.2.3a Cross-dressing</u>

Gendered appearance, especially clothing, is a central component in establishing a gendered identity. In order to "be" and "express" who they feel that they really are, the participants are compelled to "cross-dress". Even though the participants are very aware of "society's rules" regarding how men and women should dress and behave, they still feel compelled to dress in clothes associated with the opposite sex. In the main, the participants illustrate their experience of gender on an ontological level, whilst working towards "learning" and "performing" it on an epistemological level. The following excerpts are from biologically born men. They illustrate the importance of cross dressing in secret and emphasise the fear of punishment and chastisement if caught. Uniforms are a way for T and J to be able to safely experiment wearing different clothing that is acceptable to society — kilt and uniforms:

> […] my earliest recollection is 8, and I used to borrow my cousin's clothes. I just felt calmer and different, although because of my age, it was very much a sort of difficult time in those days because people were — like a friend of mine for instance was hauled off aged 11 and given massive doses of testosterone, and actually punished and things so you tended to keep things quiet. I suppose on and off it was a fairly typical story of dressing sometimes and not dressing. But always when I dressed I felt calmer, I felt different, I

felt sometimes the real me, I often used to fantasise about waking up and being a girl. And things like that. The only saving grace was being a Scot you could wear a kilt.

J, MTF, age 62

In this example, J expresses a very strong sense of how women and men are required to measure up to expectations of femininity and masculinity and, as her friend's experience suggests, they were punished if they failed to do so. For J, cross-dressing is relaxing and a way to feel calm as it helps her feel "the real me" and it is only societal sanctions that cause her struggle with identity. G has similar experiences:

I was dressing all the time, wearing underwear. I always wanted my ears pierced but I couldn't get them done. Then I was called up to do National Service and I thoroughly enjoyed doing my National Service because I was posted to Kenya and then seconded to a 3rd battalion and was commissioned. […] It was a matter of you had things to do and you had to be a man about it and if you had to kill someone, you had to shoot. It was either their life or your life. And that sort of hardened me up a bit. But I still knew I was feminine. I still wore underwear even though I wore shorts.

G, MTF, age 69

It is evident here that the pressure to conform to a masculine stereotype is very strong. In order to comply with these pressures, L, J, G, R and T all seek ways to separate it off from the rest of their lives. R describes his experience as follows:

I started cross-dressing in my sister's and mother's clothes as we all tend to do, it's terrible. Never ever did it when anyone was in the house, I was so frightened. I made sure no one would ever catch me. I kept it well hidden. I couldn't even contemplate letting anyone know how I felt. It was just too scary, too many bad things would happen. I was too frightened to explore it in any great detail, between family and peer pressure, it's something you're too scared to confront if you're not a confident person and I'm not a

confident or extrovert person. […] I'd always been in a sort of self denial. I felt so isolated. I was living society's rules- you've got that therefore you must live as this.

L, MTF, age 33

L illustrates how aware she is that cross-dressing is deviant and therefore has to be repressed and kept secret. This is similar to J's fear of punishment as though she is doing something very wrong. T developed a secret part of her which she hid and expressed through identifying with female singing roles and wearing uniforms:

I seemed to remember being interested in my sister's clothes which wasn't really allowed so I kept it secret. A fantasy situation developed whereby I kind of had this secret self within me so when I was in school it was more a question of identification really so that when I was in school and singing songs like — soldier soldier won't you marry me? I identified with the female part of the song. So there was that identification […] but at the same time there was this secret world I had. I was interested in military things and dressing in uniforms and the strange thing was that they were substitutes for the things I couldn't do. So I couldn't really ask my grandmother to make female clothes but she'd make other things like uniforms so I'd dress in those things. So while that's going on there's this other secret aspect — I was doing this thing but really I'm this.

T, MTF, age 48

Despite the stigma attached to transgenderism, the need to be themselves was so strong that the participants found other ways of expressing this need through cross-dressing. S describes this need as follows:

When I was a child I was dressing up in women's clothes and it was like a compulsion.

S, MTF, age 35

In the case of R, he is the only biological man among the participants who is comfortable with his biological sex and retaining his male identity whilst changing gender role:

> I'm a man and I like to dress […]The prejudice against transvestites is straight sexism, that's all it is […] Because women can do anything they like and it would be actually sexist to say to a woman - you've got these awful trainers and jeans and a scarf on, that's not feminine, that would be a sexist thing to say. But you can say that to a man - I don't like the high heels you're wearing or the skirt - but it's the same thing, it's sexist.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

R draws attention to the institutionalisation of gender binaries in the form of rigid dress codes and behaviours that men experience in western culture. R refers here to the fact that women are allowed to cross-dress without chastisement, whereas men are not allowed to wear anything that could be considered feminine attire. This perspective is reinforced by two FTM trans people who have little difficulty in expressing how they feel about wearing clothes they feel uncomfortable in:

> Weddings were a nightmare, they would be trying to force me into a skirt and I'd be kicking up shit and say, no it's not me. My brother's wedding was a big one. I couldn't see myself mincing down the aisle for anyone in lilac high heels.
> K, FTM, age 32

In fact, the terminology that is used clearly demonstrates the emotional reaction to being forced to wear skirts or having to wear long hair and it also indicates how they take quite open steps to avoid adopting unwelcome elements of appearance:

> My mum always asks me to wear beautiful clothes with flowers and I *hate* that. When I was 8 I started to think why I have to wear that […] then I started to choose my own clothes and the things I like to do when by myself.

And I was different to other girls my age. More like a boy […] I *hate* having long hair. How can they use that? I had ringlets and I *hated* that and I had to brush it and it was so painful and wasn't allowed to cut it.

A, FTM, age 15

The insistence on heterosexuality and the way that western interpretations dichotomise the gender role for each sex, as discussed in literature review by Cromwell (1999), contribute to the lack of recognition of female gender diversity. This also leads to the conflation of homosexuality and transgenderism, in that gender and sexuality become conflated. I propose that this has led to what would appear to be the cultural tolerance of women wearing men's clothes. It is likely that this is due to the invisibility of women's sexualities and desires within western patriarchal society where women have not been taken seriously. On a more optimistic note, feminism has been instrumental in opening up possibilities beyond traditional gender roles, making it more socially acceptable for women to wear "men's clothes". Yet, while there have been major shifts in men's and women's gender roles in western society, men cross-dressing is still socially taboo except in very special social circumstances.

As a whole, this section has shown the participants' stories revealing that, in recalling periods of confusion in childhood and early adulthood, cross-dressing was often experienced as relaxing and calming. This suggests that wearing clothing which conformed to a personal sense of self, reduced the discomfort of dissonance that many of these people normally experienced:

But always when I dressed I felt calmer, I felt different, I felt sometimes the real me.

J, MTF, age 62

Cross-dressing provided the participants with a way to mediate between their internal self and the external world and, at the same time, supported them in the development of their self-defined identity. Dressing in clothes marked for the opposite sex allowed them to play and gain confidence in the forming of their gender identity.

4.2.3b Behaviour

The participants work hard to make sense of their experiences within the conventional gender binary. The following excerpts illustrate how "essential" experiences take place within a binary gendered discourse. There is a clear delineation between male and female activities; manly things being football, bikes, climbing trees; feminine things being dolls, cooking, screaming, and being small. Among my participants, it was common for them to seek opportunities to enact their desired gender role or, at least, to take advantage of them when they materialized. For J, this happened in drama classes by virtue of being relatively small:

> I went to an all boys' school and it was great if you got picked for the girls' parts, it was not a problem. And I was quite small at school, I was lucky in that I was fairly small. I grew until I was about 23. So I just kept growing slowly, whereas lots of people just shot up, so I was quite small, one of the girls if you like.
> J, MTF, age 62

G sought activities that would enable her to take part in "feminine" behaviour, while her twin sought the opposite in "masculine" activities:

> My twin played football and all this stuff and I did not want to play football but I never played with dolls or anything like that. My father was quite a strong person and he more or less insisted I do all the manly things and to be a man or a boy like my twin brother which I hated […] I love to cook. My wife taught me a lot about baking and cooking. I used to always be about the kitchen when my mother was cooking and watching and learning. My twin brother would be out in the garden mowing the grass. He had his own friends, always macho, swinging on trees, running about on bikes and football. I don't think he ever suspected.
> G, MTF, age 69

When G sought help with reconciling behavioural dissonance, she was given clear instructions about how to perform in order to be man. Following this advice would mean that her gender role, gender identity and sex would all appear congruent within the confines of the heterosexual matrix:

> So when I was 17 I went to the local doctor and I asked him if he could do something for me. I said I was a female trapped in male body and he said away and join the army or join the rugby club and that'll make you a man […] I went out and tried to do all the manly things that were expected of me. I tried to be like my twin, it was hard. And eventually I went to the dancing and met girls and go out with girls and have a kiss and a cuddle and that was it. I'd rather sit and blether to them all night.
> G, MTF, age 69

Despite the essentialist description she gives, G is also aware of how she had to learn to behave like a woman, and strong encouragement was given to join in masculine activities. This suggests that gender is a performance and therefore a learned experience. In other words, if G *feels* like a woman then she needs to *behave* like a woman. In this instance, G's essentialist description of her gender identity as a woman is required by society to "match" the feminine gender role that is assigned to the category of "woman".

On the other hand, L questions why gender identity and gender role need to be congruent, and advocates the mixing and matching of categories that challenge the binary boundaries. L separates the capacity for gender role to express masculinity and femininity from gender identity, and questions why certain activities are gendered:

> I've been brought up as a guy. I was an engineer, fixed cars, latterly it was computers. And yes I could say sod all that, I could go to college and be a beauty therapist or a hair dresser but that's completely binning everything I learned before. I still like sci fi — it's termed as a masculine type of

thing — just because I'm changing my gender doesn't mean I'm going to not like sci fi and watch Changing Rooms […] Gender is a little bit more than that.

L, MTF, age 33

While the difference between conforming to gendered expectations and challenging them may lie in the different generations that G and L belong to, it does not account for 15 year old A's eagerness to fit into male behaviour in order to be accepted as a boy. Being seen as a boy is very important to A; this is most evident when A talks of activities at school (namely football) and being seen as fearless:

I used to play football in a girls team and sometimes we travelled round the country, 10 hours in a bus. One of these trips we went camping […] and the girls are all afraid, they don't like to go to the forest and they were using lamps and torches and one of the men told some scary stories and all the girls were screaming. I was always in front of them with my torch, I was not afraid and found it lots of fun and they are all scared.

A, FTM, age 15

A identifies competitiveness, sports and boisterous behaviour as male qualities which reflect behaviour associated with a male gender role:

I don't have the same interests that other girls have […] last year I started to play football with the boys because I like football and I am too good for the girls. […] In my first play they were afraid to hit me but after I received a ball in my eye and shot the leg off someone, well I could do some terrible things with their legs and they say, ok you are a boy.

A, FTM, age 15

It could be argued that there is more pressure on A to perform like a boy in order to be classified as a boy, particularly as this is not his assigned gender. It is difficult to

place his enjoyment of male activities as either "natural" or "learned" as it is most likely both.

When the participants first describe their mind/body dissonance, they claim their gender is a core experience they were born with. Despite this essentialist claim, these excerpts suggest that the participants are very aware of the socialisation processes which distinguish boys from girls and of how this has created a gender divide in society in terms of which activities and behaviours are allowed for each group. This would appear to separate gender role and gender identity into two separate categories that are lived experiences. L illustrates this:

> Outwardly I was trying to fit the male role and do whatever the social life plan had laid out for a male as it were, the usual expectations, to be man, to have a girlfriend, to get a car. Everything they tell you will fulfil you and make you happy. To be honest I pretty much managed that […] we got a flat together, pretty much treated it like a marriage although never ever did get married. There was always something that held me back and I'd always put it off if the question appeared.
> L, MTF, age 33

L goes onto describe how she over masculinised herself in a bid to hide any signs of femininity:

> During my childhood I actively avoided stuff that was feminine. I'd think oh I can't be that as its only girls that do that. It is part of the fear that if you do these things folk will know and that's quite a common trait with a lot of us — and sometimes it's a sign […] you tend to over masculine yourself.
> L, MTF, age 33

L links the rigid gender divide with historical roles that do not seem to change much. In other words these excerpts show that gender role and gender identity are very much conflated:

> Yes, it is fear, it's the societal trend that they can't be seen like that. It does date back to long ago when the man was the main bread winner and they had to go out and kill, then the wife would cook the meal and look after the kids. It's frightening how well instilled in society that concept still is.
>
> L, MTF, age 33

L illustrates the social sanctioning of feminine boys or men in society with the delegation of certain behaviours and roles as masculine and feminine. This is also demonstrated by J who sees her self-sacrifice for her family as a feminine quality:

> I think we have such a lot of femininity in us that we do tend to think in the same way and we will sacrifice things that we would want to do for the greater good of the family. And I think that happens.
>
> J, MTF, age 62

Similarly, K tries to live up to the female expectations that are put on him, but at the same time as he complains that he does not get to do the exciting things:

> Back in the 70s when I was at school there was a very big gender divide as to what subjects you could do — the boys did arts and crafts and the girls did knitting and sewing. And I kicked off about that but I was constantly told you're a girl you do that. To me that wasn't a good enough explanation. I couldn't understand the reasons behind it […] my brother was in the cubs and I was in the brownies and he got to do all the exciting things. I got to do egg sandwiches.
>
> K, FTM, age 32

C's gender crisis emerges out of her experience of working in the traditional male job of chemical engineering. Listening to the way the men talk about women makes her question her gender as she cannot identify with the kind of women they describe. This could be interpreted as her gender identity not being congruent with her gender role. She decides that she would rather be like a man and not be talked

about in that way, than a woman who is talked about in that way. So she dissociates from her identity as woman as a way of coping with her hurt feelings and comes to the conclusion that she is in the wrong body:

> I'd cry a lot and stuff and I think one day I convinced myself that it was me in the wrong body and it would be so much easier. I'd obviously worked myself up quite far and I didn't know what was right or wrong […]
> C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

Here, C is thinking of sex reassignment as a way of coping with the incongruence she is experiencing between her sexed body, gender role and gender identity. She goes on to say:

> For me, the transgender option — you know how you hear about transgender people and how they discover the true them and if I had realised I can change this maybe I should have been happy. But it was such dread. I wasn't GLAD to feel these feelings. If this is what's true for me I don't know if I can be that, I don't know if I can change. It was almost like I decided I didn't like being a girl and being male was better but I didn't want to make the decision to change. It made me think more about gender and about my gender and what that exactly meant and my sexuality and all this stuff.
> C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

As C reflects on this experience, she can see how thinking she is in the wrong body seems to be a better option than being a girl. This illustrates the powerful effects that social discourse can have on how people think about men and women. It is understandable, how in light of this, C panics and questions who she is as she cannot identify with the women her male colleagues are talking about.

C also illustrates how this crisis drew her attention to the gender divide in the adult working world:

I started this job and suddenly it hit me that men and women were completely different. Boys and girls at school seemed to be this generic "one" […] I just felt I didn't fit in and the complete inequality thing really hit me, and I never really experienced it to that extent. They thought they were better than girls and gay people were rubbish and lesbians were just a male thing and all this stuff you know exists somewhere but now it affected me in my life.

C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

C's exposure to the sharp gender divide that manifests at work continued to make her question the connection between her gender and sexual orientation:

I think as you grow up and coming out and being gay you always think about gender, well I did. I'd think how that would have been if I'd been male and I still like girls and how is that different from being female and liking girls. Or would that be better for me, would that be better for my life? […] I guess I started to question gender like this would be easier if I was like them, it would be easier to be on that side than the other side.

C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

C hints that if she had been born male and desired females, her sexual and gendered identity would fit into the heteronormative way of having erotic relationships based on difference. The influence of the heterosexual matrix comes into sharp focus as C struggles to make sense of the apparent incongruities between her gender identity and role, and how she attempts to make sense of her desire for the same sex.

An interesting observation here is that while C illustrates the heteronormative pressures of fitting into a particular cultural matrix, it is apparent that another discourse is available to her in terms of making sense of her experience — the traditional transsexual narrative. It is worthwhile pointing out that as close as she gets to the transsexual alternative, she realises it brings no sense of relief. In other words, both discourses are based on the dichotomous sex and gender system which denies the possibility of thinking outside the matrix.

The participants understand gender and sex within the social options available to them and, for S, this means performing certain constructs such as "femininity". In other words, behaving and performing like a woman:

> In his teenage years he had an interest in femininity and when you are interested in it to the degree I am — I'm probably better at it than the real thing, proved it time and time again. You gravitate towards it and you try and put that construct in your life any way you can. I did anyway. I wanted it so much.
> S, MTF, age 35

S underlines how fixed and divided the idea of masculine and feminine is in her mind as she talks about her male self in the third person.

The participants' accounts underline how their lived experiences are mediated through their bodies and, according to phenomenological accounts of embodiment, the social context is central to how bodies are situated and understood. In other words, what kind of spaces are the participants' bodies moving in and how does this influence how their lived experiences are conceptualised? The participants' bodies rely on behaviour and appearance to express their internal reality and view the sexed body as an integral aspect of gender. Their stories also reveal how behaviour is labelled masculine or feminine according to the sexed body. That is, meaning aligned with behaviour is dependent on the social context which is, in this case, is the western heterosexual matrix of binary sexed and gendered categories. C describes this social organisation of bodies into two sexes, and the subsequent gendered roles that are expected, as follows:

> I think it's a gender role. If you're born in a certain body and you're happy in that role, maybe you're lucky. But if you're born in a certain body and you're not happy with the role that's been handed down then, maybe you're not unlucky but you've just got to go against the river, you know what I mean. And I think it's difficult because society puts strong emphasis on men being

very masculine and very sexual and if you choose to be that you've got to be that.

C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

4.3 Summary

This chapter has begun to explore the relationship between subjective lived experiences and discourse, highlighting how the participants tried to make sense of their mind/body dissonance as experienced within the heterosexual matrix. The participants' accounts show while society, in the UK in the early twenty-first century, may be trying to accommodate transgender, it still has to be accommodated with the existing binary classification system constructed within the heterosexual matrix. Particularly interesting is how transgender and intersexuality challenge our unquestioning reliance on categories and the boundaries between those categories.

Initially it appears that the majority of the participants follow essentialist thinking in that gender identity is seen as essential to human beings. Their gendered appearance and behaviour were fundamental in establishing a gendered identity, and the participants had to work at this by adhering to gender stereotypes in order to be accepted by society. In other words, behaviours had to be congruent with feelings according to heterosexual discourse. However, on closer examination, it is evident that there are mixed and contradictory ideas among the participants regarding understanding gender as an ontological concept — a category that underlies the being of people; and as an epistemological concept — a philosophical approach which focuses on the ways that beliefs and experiences are socially constructed. Their lived experiences "queers" and disrupts the dualistic organisation of sex and gender identities by their mixing and matching categories which challenge the binary boundaries, even though they try to operate within them. Furthermore, the reality of intersexuality calls into question the assumption of two mutually exclusive and naturally occurring sexes which suggests that the category of "sex" is socially constructed by the medical establishment (Lucal 2008).

The next chapter continues with the participants' stories of developing identities and an exploration of how these identities are constructed narratively

through the participants' stories (Langdridge 2007). It is not my intention to imply that their experiences are universal or that my analysis holds for all transgender experiences. The following chapters illustrate how the differences between the participants' experiences and identities are shaped through class, generation and geographical location. From a Foucauldian perspective, the essential core that some of them describe is not something to be discovered but is created through the interplay of discourse and practice. As will become clear, the participants' stories evidence a process whereby the participants rely on available social and cultural discourses in forming their identities. Before I explore this, I reflect on my own struggle as a researcher in depending on and reifying those very social and cultural discourses that create normative categories and practices.

Whilst I am at home to a certain extent in my "queer space" and drawn to possibilities for revaluating and unsettling binary thinking, I am also aware of my commitment to identity politics as a liberating and political tool. The tension between these two positions that I occupy became more evident the more I read and worked with the transcripts. The questions I chose to ask may have encouraged the development of a linear narrative that set up a "progression" of identity development. At the same time, I believe I devised questions that could open up binary thinking, challenging the notion of a unified identity. These two positions were reflected in the transcripts and the language as I could not avoid referring to the very structures and language that I would ideally like to transcend. Butler (2001) argues that the received meanings we have about gender are so entrenched in our everyday way of talking that in order to change the meaning of gender, it is necessary to criticise language. Hence, I was alert to the inevitability of recreating normative practices and reifying male/female categories by using particular terminology. I also wanted to make my questions user-friendly and accessible, yet was perhaps too cautious about destabilising the participants' familiar language and, to some extent, reaffirmed the very language and use of categories that I wanted to contest. In this way, I was in danger of using phenomenological experience as a way of normalising the categories that the participants used. For example, Davies & Davies (2007) use Scott's (1992) analysis of "experience talk" to show how the researcher can collude with the closed circuit of the participants, talking the way they do because they are classified as

being in a particular category. Hence, although I could not completely separate myself from being positioned within the common discourses that I shared with the participants, I could reflect on my own tendencies to rush judgements that could foreclose new understandings and possibilities.

Chapter 5   Stories in Space and Time

> Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining
> their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history and telling their
> story (bell hooks 1989, 43).

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four explored the personal dissonance experienced by transgendered participants when their sexed and gendered identities were not congruent with the binary categories of the western heterosexual matrix. It began to explore the relationship between subjective lived experience and discourse, illustrating the participants' struggles with the constraints of the heterosexual matrix in their attempts to make sense of their experiences. This chapter highlights how particular social, spatial and historical conditions influence and regulate how the participants' new sexual and gendered identities are produced.

Plummer (1995) underlines how stories mark our identities, with identities marking out differences that contribute to structuring collective groups. In other words collectives and communities are built through story tellings, shifting notions of what is private and public, secret and known about (Plummer 1995). The kind of stories that the participants tell reflect the discourses available in the wider social world, and the various identity possibilities. At the broadest level, essentialism is evident in how the participants learned to define their identities, reflecting the legacy of some elements of second wave feminist and gay identity politics, whereby "identity" and "essence" became conflated. Fuss (1989) argues that the notion of a stable shared identity overlooks the complicated processes of identity formation, both psychical and social; yet the historical importance of identity politics as an organisational and political tool is not to be underestimated. It is from the identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s that the essentialist story of identity emerges, and the phrase "coming out" was developed as a way of describing the experiences of lesbians and gay men. The coming out stories are concerned with the idea of moving away from "a closet of socially constructed 'passing' behaviours and into one's

'essential' identity" (Turner 1999) and they tell the tale of a journey with a sense of progression in looking for a new identity.

The "coming out story" was a significant narrative that lesbians and gays used to describe their life experiences in the 1970s and 1980s. Plummer (1995) describes "coming out" as involving four critical processes which are not necessarily in fixed sequence: coming out personally, coming out privately, coming out publicly and coming out politically. This chapter maps how transgendered people attempt to negotiate these processes in an attempt to align their internal identity with their external identity. Coming out personally to oneself and coming out publicly are two of the processes evident in the participants' accounts. Both processes raise a number of themes, bringing into focus how transgendered stories are grounded in general cultural and historical processes. Ahmed's (2006, 27) exploration of what it means for bodies to be situated in space and time draws attention to how experiences are organised and shaped according to the conditions from which they emerge — "if consciousness is about how we perceive the world 'around' us, then consciousness is also embodied, sensitive, and situated". This thesis explores how the participants' lived experiences are organised and shaped through their individual environments.

Although I have drawn on Plummer's model of coming out, I am mindful of excluding other narratives from the main narrative presented. If anything, the coming out process exposes the struggles to fit into the heterosexual matrix and, instead of subverting it, often finds ways of bending and twisting into it. Perhaps in this way, the heterosexual matrix is being "queered" without anyone necessarily being identified as a "queer thinker" as such. An example of this can be seen in self-defined transsexual people who visibly challenge the essentialist connection between biological sex and gender identity. Chapters six and seven illustrate those lived experiences that incorporate new figurations including changing notions of what it means to be a man or woman.

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 draw on Plummer's (1995) model of "coming out" as a way of analysing the participants' experiences, referring to the themes of *suffering* and *epiphany* as ways to explore the grounded social conditions within which the participants' experiences emerge. Section 5.2 underlines the initial lack of positive professional help available for the participants, leading to mental health

difficulties such as depression, and the misuse of drugs/alcohol. 5.3 highlights Eliason & Schope's (2007) themes of people's need to disclose, and the need for cultural and community immersion in forming their new identities. This includes describing turning points in the participants' lives that lead to seeking external validation for the new emerging identities, including the significance of cultural and community representation. While the overall organisation of this chapter follows a chronology of transgendered peoples' experiences, from suffering through to epiphany, these processes outline a trajectory of experiences which overlap as they move back and forth.

5.2 Suffering

This section describes the participants' experiences of confusion that led them to seek professional help, which in most cases only intensified their suffering due to the professionals having inadequate knowledge about gender identity issues. Some of the participants began to use drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with mental health issues such as depression and suicide.

5.2.1 Unhelpful professional "help"

Initial experiences of gender confusion lead people to seek help, but the responses from the medical and counselling professions often intensify suffering. Medical and counselling support that is available when people first experience dissonance is influenced by the time and location of these people. An example of the socio-historical context's influence is provided by J when she describes in 4.2.3a how, in the early 1950s, there was a threat of punishment by being given a masculine chemical, suggesting gender is a biological experience. In the mid 80s to mid 90s, similar accounts of dissatisfaction with counselling and the medical profession are illustrated, particularly through not feeling heard, as in
M's case:

However in 1986 I went to speak to a psychosexual therapist and she did a test and said something along the lines of, "what I'd advise you to do is to go back to your friends and form relationships", and I thought no this isn't happening [...] After that experience I left it 10 years before I told someone else. That happened in 1986 and I didn't tell anyone else till 1996.
M, MTF, age 42

M is discouraged from seeking help for some years, and when she does, she is disillusioned further when it seems that the counsellor still does not have the understanding or knowledge required for M to be seen and heard in her own unique experience:

In the run up to getting surgery I spoke to a counsellor once and I got this impression she was trying to get me to change my mind and I said, "I didn't come to see you with the intention of changing my mind, I came to see you as the process says I needed to speak to a counsellor and that's all I was doing" and suddenly finding myself face to face with a person that on the first occasion she was saying, hold on and go and think about it and come back to her some day. So when I got back home I thought, how long is this going to take me? I want to speak to a counsellor and she doesn't seem to want to respond to my life experience here, how am I going to present myself in such a way that she realises that this is something for me I really must do.
M, MTF, age 42

M is not seeking a "cure" or wanting help in changing her "mind" but needs to go through a gatekeeper to access hormone and surgical treatment in order to change her "body". Clearly she has already made her own self-evaluation and requires the counsellor to support her new identity development, as opposed to encouraging her to stay the same.

Coming out to oneself privately/internally depends on the cultural resources available to my participants which could help them make sense of their experiences. Initially K receives good support from his family, and is also referred to a

psychiatrist by his general practitioner. This contact is far from satisfactory as the psychiatrist has a very definite idea about the course of treatment, and mainly focuses on K adapting his behaviour to a stereotype of how a man should behave. In this way, the psychiatrist had power over K's decision to transition.

> I initially saw the psychiatrist who was the biggest wanker I've ever met. He put a lot of pressure on me. My name that I gave myself was too ambiguous, my hair wasn't short enough, he wanted me to wear one earring in my left ear and it was very stereotypical. He wanted me to form this huge bond with my brother. We're just not that close, we never have been. We're two completely separate people with completely separate interests, but he wanted me to go out drinking with my brother.
> K, FTM, age 32

K's experience illustrates the prevailing binary gender paradigm that subscribes to the stereotypical masculine man that is part of fitting into the diagnostic criteria for gender identity disorder. Before the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association Standards of Care were first developed in 1979, there were no guidelines for treating transsexuals. The Standards of Care (2001) act as gatekeeper for the protection of gender-dysphoric people and protect the medical profession against litigation, but more recently feminist and medical literature has criticised the rigidity of the guidelines and how they reinforce cultural gender stereotypes. The Standards of Care are controversial in that transgendered people have begun to challenge the gatekeeping process and how it does not describe the range of gender diversity experienced by them.

L describes her psychiatrist as knowing very little about gender issues and not seeming to know what to do with her.

> I went to the doctor once she had found out about me and she was kind of helpful. By that time I had been diving into a bit of a depression. She sent me to see some psychiatrist and he said — you're just dressing up for the fun of it, go to this wee group and you'll be fine, your doctor will send you out an

appointment. I never ever got an appointment. So I went back to my doctor and she sent me to another psychiatrist […] but they couldn't help with the gender issues. That wasn't their forte. That was the words they used. They couldn't deal with it. They didn't want to talk about it.

L, MTF, age 33

Similarly, in G's case, she was told by the doctor: "there's nothing we can do for you". The limitations of medical and counselling professions are evident in the participants' attempts to obtain help and for L, depression and low self esteem were consequences of not being taken seriously. As this lack of understanding from medical and counselling professions mounts, the participants become distrustful of health professionals.

5.2.2 Unhelpful self-help

In an attempt to find alternative possibilities to professional help, some of the participants joined self-help groups as a way of finding people to identify with. This does not always occur in a positive way and these experiences appear to be bound up with a theme of belonging which emerges in the course of these discussions. For example, R attends a transvestite support group and complains:

I went to a couple of them and I found that horrendous — 50 men sitting around with their legs apart.

R, Transvestite, age 61

R's experience illustrates how finding people to identify with can be difficult. Whether it be a defensive projection or a resistance to self-acceptance, groups can sometimes increase one's sense of isolation and not belonging. Demonstrated here is the disadvantage of collective categories with their focus on "sameness", where individual differences are not considered. R felt that his life was not reflected in how transvestites were generally represented in the transvestite support group.

D and M also had problematic experiences of self-help groups. D discussed the previously mentioned issue of the gatekeeping guidelines and how transgendered people make sure they fit in with the medical professions' understanding of gender dysphoria. He explained how people join groups that follow the gatekeeping guidelines that support the medical narratives' set of criteria which enforce gender binary norms:

> I worry about support groups. I was part of an FTM group. I was part of opening up an FTM group to people that were just questioning. I think that's more the trend, however when people get into support groups, the function of support groups is to help people with the medical narrative that will help them obtain the surgeries or hormones they require.
>
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

Transsexualism is one of the few psychiatric conditions that is self-diagnosed and self-prescriptive and one of the support group's functions is to help identify the criteria that fit the medical diagnosis. D quite rightly identified this tendency as problematic because it encourages people to alter "their own history and their own record in order to belong to this trans group". D went on to emphasise how, in the support groups, transsexuals learn to tell stories that are consistent with what the doctor is looking for. The purpose of the gatekeeping guidelines is to allow only "true" transsexuals access to hormonal and surgical treatment. This often ends up with transsexuals manipulating their story to ensure that they gain access to surgery and hormones. The distinct classification of transsexualism has limited the options available for gender variant people and the gatekeeping model of assessment prevents unique narratives from being told, excluding more expansive models of gender diversity. Some transgendered people seek medical and surgical treatment to help them redefine their gender expression and, as Lev (2004) points out, there is not a nonpathologising model within which to decide who gains access to hormones and surgery. In sum, the hegemonic categories and binaries of heteronormativity remain a dominant discourse in western society, one that has direct impact on individual lives.

The diversity of multiple transgendered identities is challenging the hegemonic power of heteronormativity and its specific understanding of identification and desire. An illustration of this is that, within the traditional medical model, transsexuals were only taken seriously if, post transition, their sexual identity was defined as heterosexual. The last ten years have seen more diversity in the identity of transsexuals which is challenging the assumptions that heterosexuality is a defining feature of transsexualism. This has highlighted the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation while subverting the conflation of gender identity and heterosexuality.

M highlighted the complexity of hegemonic categories — born a biological male and, through sex reassignment surgery, claimed her new identity as a female — when she also claims her lesbian identity. Once M has transitioned, she is not required to adhere to the gatekeeping guidelines and she "comes out", claiming her unique history. Unfortunately, in her lesbian support group, this is not met with acceptance but suspicion as she does not fit in with the group's collective understanding of the term "lesbian". M resists the invisibility that is traditionally expected of transsexuals:

> I discovered all along the line they [the support group] were very resistant to the coinage trans lesbian so I said ok I can refer to myself as a lesbian but I'm not going to at any point say that my history doesn't exist, I have a history, yes I have transitioned but the fact that I am calling myself a lesbian straight out to people's ears or minds might suggest that I'm just seen as a lesbian just like every other lesbian — as if my history is the same as every other woman's.
> M, MTF, age 42

M describes the difficulty in claiming a new category and the lesbian group's resistance to a "different" kind of lesbian. Certainly the category of "trans lesbian" complicates the notion of a "lesbian" identity and unsettles the modernist narrative of the lesbian "coming out" story.

Mills' (1959) 'sociological imagination' places identities in a broader context, illustrating the available identities for transgendered people to model themselves on, shaped through the wider collective processes. Plummer (1995) describes how against the political backdrop of the 1970s and 1980s, the essentialist story of identity was born. Feminism in the 1970s posited the female body as a "truth" and the categories of "man" and "woman" were distinct and fixed; with anatomy comes destiny. M's experience reflects the historically complex relationship between lesbians and transgendered people. This could be seen as a legacy from Raymond (1979, 99) who viciously attacked the constructed transsexual who identifies as a lesbian feminist as "the attempt to possess women in a bodily sense while acting out the images into which men have moulded women". Raymond's ideology is not just about gender: it provides information and education about the dominant cultural beliefs and ways of thinking about bodies, identities and desires in the late 1970s.

5.2.3 Mental health

Nuttbrock et. al (2002) note how there is general disagreement about whether the transgendered population suffers more from mental health issues than the general population, with explanations ranging from early family trauma (Stoller, 1968) to negative body images (Benjamin, 1966). Nevertheless, society's negative response to gender variance creates mental health problems that may not have been there otherwise. Society's negative attitude toward transgendered people can have destructive consequences such as internalised transphobia, isolation, lack of job opportunities, poor access to health care, discrimination and low self esteem. Warren (1999) cites recent studies (Yates, 1998; Masson et al. 1995) which show that the transgendered community is at high risk for substance abuse and HIV. In 2001 the Substance Abuse and Mental health Services in San Francisco (SAMHSA) reviewed current clinical practice for treating substance abuse in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities and reported very little research done on the prevalence of substance abuse in transgendered communities. In 2003, the Inclusion Project (a partnership between Stonewall Scotland and the Scottish Executive Health

Department) carried out research to identify support needed by the LGBT community in Scotland. The report (2003) underlined current levels of negative attitudes towards LGBT people and how this had an impact on health issues such as mental health, sexual health, violence and substance abuse, with 25% of the participants receiving inappropriate advice from health professionals who confused transgender issues with sexual orientation.

Lev (2004, 177) describes how transgender experience and expression have traditionally been associated with mental illness and diagnosis and in order to obtain treatment, the diagnosis of "gender identity disorder" is transgendered people's "admission ticket" to hormonal and surgical treatments. In other words, the current diagnostic system insists that an individual must be diagnosed as mentally ill in order to be approved for treatment. Chapter two explored the historical development of the medical model of diagnosis that is built on a binary gender system, immersed in traditional heteronormative assumptions that have produced the medical transsexual narrative. Although this is changing gradually, there remains little room for developing alternative transgender narratives outwith the current classification system. In the meantime, M is questioning the pathologisation of transgenderism whilst following the medical route:

> What I couldn't understand on another level was when I received a letter, the letter heading had something suggesting mental health and for a while that baffled me but with time I felt they might have reason for doing that so I just felt ok just don't ask any questions because sometimes when I ask questions they can have the kind of effect I don't expect — the kind of fall-out I don't want. And at some point that made me feel that I can't be asking questions at all if I want to get what I want to get, especially with the way the NHS dealt with things. I just felt ok, play the game as they say.
> M, MTF, age 42

M catches on that, without meeting the criteria described in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM), she will not have access to medical treatment, so stops questioning and learns to "play the game". Lev (2004) underlines that in seeking sex

reassignment medical treatments, transsexuals will only be approved if they present certain "truths" about their lives and this is how the "transsexual narrative" came to be developed. M learns of the importance of complying with those "truths" and of being diagnosed as "mentally insane" instead of risking medical rejection.

The participants describe a recurring theme of suffering that is manifested in mental and emotional health, not as a result of being transgendered, but in the lack of acceptance and understanding from society. M explains:

> What I was puzzled about was somewhere along the line there was this impression that transsexuals or transgendered people were mentally insane and I felt where is that coming from?
> M, MTF, age 42

M illustrates how transgendered people are likely to be viewed by most practitioners as having mental health problems that relate to their gender identity rather than as people who bear the burden of oppressive societal norms.

L suffers from depression as a result of not being understood and seen for who she is. L describes how her cross-dressing actually supports her in avoiding mental health problems, contrary to society diagnosing her with problems *if* she cross-dresses.

> This is what folk don't understand. If I wasn't doing this, it'd be quite detrimental to my mental health, I'd be severely depressed and locked up somewhere because I'd kept trying to do myself in — and that's what it's like for a lot of us. People don't realise the confidence it takes to come out and do this. Just like a lot of them out there couldn't go dressed in a different way. It's like taking a woman and dressing her in a guy's suit — a lot of them would not go out the door. We've got to get on with our life.
> L, MTF, age 33

L makes the link between how she experiences her self-identity and how this is received in relation to others, and the consequences on her self esteem and

continuing self validation. Nuttrock et al. (2002) conducted empirical research on the links between transgender identity affirmation and mental health functioning. Their research data pointed to a variation in the extent to which transgendered identity is successfully incorporated into social roles and relationships. Furthermore, their research indicated that transgendered identity support was associated with depressive symptoms, and identity validation and personal empowerment were viewed as critical factors in mental health functioning. J describes the negative effects that staying hidden had, as follows:

> I mean one of the things I said at a conference at the NHS was the problem is that many people who are transvestites in whatever end of the spectrum they are from, because they tend to sublimate they tend to be positive, manifest other problems with the GPs and never tell what the real problem is. So they suffer disproportionately with alcoholism, drug taking, and depression. I said if you can help people come out into the open a bit and be a little bit more accepted in society where yes they might still stay hidden for whatever reasons but it would cut down some case loads, so there would be a cost saving.
> J, MTF, age 62

 Other participants had similar experiences in trying to cope, resulting in them being unemployed and on sickness benefit due to depression.

Transgendered people often suffer from mental health issues such as substance abuse as a result of living in a gender binary in which they do not fit. The effort and stress of pretending to be someone that they are not leads to the participants using drugs and alcohol as a mode of escaping the unbearable reality of having their physical bodies. Alcohol became a way of coping for M:

> One thing I didn't like was having to drink myself into a stupor because I had decades of drinking heavily to the point of every time I was sober it was almost as if my transition was the only thing on my mind. I couldn't think of anything else except transitioning. So I drank and drank until I got closer to

transitioning and that basically brought it home that if I went on drinking I would put on weight and that would make it difficult to get surgery.

M, MTF, age 42

K struggles with society's expectations of male and female behaviour and this is illustrated in the incongruence he feels between his internal experience and what the external world is telling him he should be feeling. This evokes feelings of shame:

From the ages of 13 to early 20s, my mental health took a nose dive. During my teenage years, I used a lot of drugs and alcohol to escape reality because I couldn't deal with the reality that I was in. I was really ashamed about myself, I didn't like myself, I didn't feel comfortable with who I was. I tried to live up to the female expectations that were put on me and I just couldn't do that. Society was saying one thing about me and inside I was saying the opposite and the two were clashing.

K, FTM, age 32

The external pressures from society and family on each sex maintaining congruent behaviour according to the binary system is evident in the participants' struggles to express who they believe themselves to be. R comments on the short life span of transvestites and transsexuals due to either the physical side effects of hormonal treatments or the emotional turmoil they find themselves in. In his words:

Suicides used to be quite common among transvestites, certainly amongst transsexuals. Transsexuals don't live long either — the massive hormones they take, emotional difficulties. Divorce is common among transvestites and suicide used to be. If you happen to be religious and are a transvestite it's harder, it's not right. Today in 2005, you think what the big deal is, but it is.

R, Transvestite age 61

In attempts to stop cross-dressing and to conform to others' expectations, L and S both became suicidal:

We tried to make things work with me not dressing but that didn't happen and I sank into quite a depression. It ended up me saying to her I can't stop this. I need to have an outlet [...] I was going for runs in the car. I could hide in being the boy racer instead of my body being all macho. But I was going out on the back roads — 70, 80, 90 miles an hour. It was getting to the point that I was coming up to roundabouts at 80 miles an hour and saying I don't have to stop here, I could just hit it and it'd be all over. And that's when I realised I had to do something else about it.

L, MTF, age 33

My dad was constantly calling me a poof and god knows what, and then you go out and try and get the love from those people that you so want by becoming what they want you to be. You become what they want you to be and you realise, I'm not happy, is this it? This isn't me? I nearly had a nervous breakdown. […] I've always been into drugs since I was about 19, 20 when I came out of the army and things went bad and I started taking drugs to get away from reality. And I forgot to tell you all the suicides I went through.

S, MTF, age 35

The participants' stories reflect a secret and hidden world where feelings and experiences have to be silenced. Some of the consequences of this affect their mental health through abuse of drugs and alcohol, depression and feeling suicidal.

5.2.4 Undercover operations

My findings indicate a significant gap between the realisation of dissonance internally and the process of coming out externally. Seven of the participants are well into adulthood and a considerable amount of time passes before they are able to actively take steps in the external world. Two are over 60 and they are just now reconciling themselves with what they view as their true selves. Clearly, there is a need to take action and survive and, as the following comments demonstrate,

participants find a way to express this hidden part which gives them personal autonomy and protects them from danger:

> My wife and I were in the antique trade. I'd leave the house on a Sunday night and travel down south and then start buying antiques, making my way back up and get home on the Friday night. But while I was out buying I was dressed as G. I've been dressing as G and walking in heels since the early to late 60s. But none of my neighbours saw me.
> G, MTF, age 69

> So it was very much an undercover operation, in fact any of the spy services could learn from trannies - how to hide things, how to do things in a way that people aren't aware of what you are doing and secret drawers for hiding bits and pieces. I mean the dreadful things you had to do.
> J, MTF, age 62

In Section 4.2.3a, L and T refer to the "undercover" nature of their cross-dressing and the anxiety of being caught. The respondents silence their feelings and experiences and they create a secret and hidden world based on shame and fear of ridicule. For many of my participants, cross-dressing becomes a safety valve and a survival strategy and is part of them coming out to themselves.

5.3 Epiphany

The participants' stories describe journeys of coming out from within hidden worlds of suffering and endurance and, for some, there is a shift in consciousness. Plummer (1995) describes this shift as an "epiphany" which marks significant events as a crucial turning point in "coming out". This turning point reveals a way forward where nothing will be the same again. This section explores some of these turning points whereby the social processes of being witnessed and mirrored by others are significant experiences in constructing their new identities.

C left a comfortable and familiar environment where her family and peers knew she was gay and started a job in chemical engineering in a predominantly all male environment. This exposed her to traditional male and female roles and practices that led her to question her gender, which resulted in her seeking professional help and changing her job.

> And I went to the doctor and he gave me some antidepressants and he said this will help and to be honest they did calm me but obviously I knew there was an issue. I went to see a psychiatrist and I said about the environment not being good for me [...] but it never went much further than that. By that time I had moved from the job and away from the threat and it raised my awareness of something I had not thought of much as an adult, so it was kind of in the back of my mind what do I do about this? It made me think more about gender and about my gender and what that exactly meant and my sexuality and all this stuff.
>
> C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

C experiences an abrupt awakening away from her LGBT social community and into a strong heteronormative environment where she experiences incongruence between her and her female colleagues. Her increased self awareness of the difference between her inner world and her external environment leads to her seeking medical help. She experiences the medical help as neither negative nor positive, yet what is significant is her interpretation of her experience in terms of mental ill-health. In other words, she internalises the perceptions that something is "wrong" with *her*, not the environment. She begins to attend a transgender group in order to explore her gender more fully, not necessarily seeking surgery or reassignment of gender. She is provided with a space in counselling to explore, with no rush to fix or treat her.

For L, her "epiphany" comes in the form of a mirroring but more in the literal sense of looking at herself in the mirror. When she does so, L sees the "wrong" body:

It was one night when I got home and I was getting changed and getting ready to go to bed and it was like, it's not the clothes, and it's my body. I just looked in the mirror and it was funny as it was a stranger that started looking back at me and it was that's not me, that's not who I am. That's when I started looking at the other stories. I'd read stories from other transsexuals way back I was identifying with their stories but I was just like, that's a bit much, I'd never had surgery in my life and I thought I didn't want to go there. I still had myself termed as a guy in a frock the same as society did. It was that one night. It's not the clothes, it's my body. It's the defining thing between a transvestite and a transsexual.

L, MTF, age 33

Section 4.2.1, L describes this as a defining moment in experiencing having the "wrong body" whereby she feels her body is not part of her "self". The inside of her does not recognise the outside body as belonging to her inside self. This reflects a tendency shared by many transgendered people who have great difficulty in identifying with their bodies. For L, it is crucial to understand that this is not a process of shifting from being male to female, but rather that she never identified with being male in the first place. Her self concept has always been male. The transition is from an inner private identity to an external social identity. Once transition begins, social identity becomes a priority.

When for the first time, S dressed in women's clothes she has a revelatory moment — she likes what she sees and discovers her name:

So anyway, then all of a sudden I dressed and looked at myself and looked in the mirror and for the first time in my life, I actually like what I see. I realised it was happiness I felt. I said what's your name? — S — right out the top of my head. I started changing. My voice changed, everything started changing automatically.

S, MTF, age 35

I have described how some of the participants describe significant turning points in their lives when they experience a dissonance between their personal and social identity, and how this prompts them to take the next step into the external world from their inner identity. The next process continues to see the participants moving out from the inner secret world into an external world that is positively validating and supportive.

5.3.2. Cultural representation

Coming out to others is key to the participants' acceptance of their new emerging transgender identity and thus, the participants search for potential avenues to provide external validation. This begins a deeper level of external inquiry into their new self-identity with the participants moving outside themselves. Creating a transgender identity is dependent on the constraints of current discourses, which in turn influence what kind of support is available in the community. The participants' stories are created by that which is known and can only take place within a framework of available stories. In this way, community narratives are formed through stories that are told about them and from stories that originate from within (Plummer 1995). During the last thirty years the main stories available for transgendered people were about transvestites, followed by the transsexual medical narrative. These stories, though limited, were useful frameworks in providing a way into talking about gender identity. The participants have mixed experiences in their initial step out into the world and their stories make it clear that self-confidence and self recognition are dependent on the type of support they initially encountered.

In the 70s, the media was one of the main resources that provided role models in the form of television personalities who, although they did not formulate an identity outside the gender binary, provided opportunities for alternative identities. Yet, these models were not necessarily helpful for everyone because as R explains, there is diversity, not only between transvestites and transsexuals, but also among transvestites themselves:

There weren't any transvestites when I was growing up. There are one or two famous ones today - there's Eddie Izzard, he says he's a transvestite but he's not really as far as I'm concerned. Ru Paul — who else — Paul O'Grady, Lily Savage. Grayson Perry but he's into all girls' stuff. There are so many varieties of trannies. There were transvestites back then but they were in the demi-monde then.

R, Transvestite age 61

Although R draws a clear distinction between transvestites and transsexuals, particularly their visibility, he then hints that perhaps there would be no difference if society was more tolerant of cross-dressing:

I think transvestites and transsexuals are so different. I don't think they should be on the same piece of paper. Transsexuals are totally different people. As I hinted at earlier on, transsexuals are a tragic condition. Why ordinary people have made the transsexual feel they have to have surgery to dress the way they wish I think it's tragic.

R, Transvestite age 61

R's distinction also reflects the hierarchy inherent in transsexuality and transvestism, with him suggesting that transsexuals are "tragic" whereas transvestites are freer to cross dress. The categories of "transvestites" and "transsexuals" are often conflated when in fact, the two categories tell very different stories. As L (MTF) described her "epiphany" in the last section, "It's not the clothes, it's my body. It's the defining thing between a transvestite and a transsexual". The experience of feeling in the "wrong" body is common in transsexuals, whereas transvestites do not want to change their body, just their clothes. Sexologists like Hirschfield (1868-1935), Ellis (1859-1939), and Benjamin (1885-1986), create distinct and separate categories out of what had been known as "sexual deviations". Their case studies and clinical accounts, alongside Benjamin's (1966) subsequent and definitive work in his book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon,* contribute to the medicalised transsexual narrative, distinguishing it from transvestism. These two categories remain significant today

within the medical model, with each positioned at either end of the gender diversity continuum — ranging from the intensity of cross-dressing to the desire to change one's biological body.

The linear traditional medical transsexual narrative provides an explanation for the mind/body dissonance that the participants feel, and enables most of them to claim an alternative identity. A particular documentary helps K to find a narrative which he can relate to and make sense of his life, which comes as a great relief to him:

> When I was about 17 I discovered about transsexualism. There was a programme in the early 80s called *From to George to Julia* and it hit a nerve [...] sometime later my mum got the book from a friend of hers and read it and then I read it and went ok and that set the ball rolling in my own head. If this is possible, if this is who I am, I don't know. There are options [...] I was 23 and *The Decision* came on Channel 4 in Feb. 1996 and that programme is specifically about female to male transsexuals. Fantastic programme and they did a follow up few years later [...] I just sat and watched it and everything those guys were saying I was yes yes, I agreed with it and it was like ok. I have to do something. I can identify with what they are feeling, what they've gone through, what they are going to go through and thought right, I now have to make a decision.
>
> K, FTM, age 32

As K's experience demonstrates, the media can provide a rich medium through which participants can discover that they are not alone. In this way, the media supports them coming out, with documentaries that tell personal stories, making private stories more visible and reaching mass audiences. Alternatively however, the response of others to such material can lead to further repression of internalised identities. In L's case, a fascination with transsexuals portrayed on television was coupled with fear and denial when she listened to how her family berated men for cross dressing. As she explains, this had the effect of driving her further underground:

I couldn't even contemplate letting anyone know how I felt. It was just too scary [...] too many bad things would happen. My grandparents and my mum and dad always had opinions of gay people [...] they'd be watching television, the likes of Julian Clary and their negative attitudes coming out towards these people […] I'd always been in a sort of self-denial I felt so isolated. I felt like I was the only one on the planet that done it [cross-dressed] in my eyes. It's silly but I'd watch Jerry Springer and I'd watch lots of transsexuals and I'd be fascinated but at the same time the two thoughts that were running though my head were (a) I'm not like them and (b) I could never look as good as them.
L, MTF, age 33

On a private level, disclosing to herself takes time while she searches for information. In the 21st century, this process is easier than ever before because the internet offers private access to information about alternative identities. L discusses this as follows:

At that point I went on the net. I didn't know any of the terms to describe it, transgender, transsexual, it was landing on gay sex as well but that wasn't what I was looking for. Eventually I found a couple of sites where I started to learn the right terminology and started looking for the right things […] It was amazing to find so many people that felt how I felt and had put into words the feelings. At that point I thought I was like a transvestite. And that opened the doors for me to explore it a bit more.
L, MTF, age 33

In the 21st century there is more social awareness about gender identity and the technology of the internet is becoming an invaluable source of information for transgendered people. For L, the "coming out" process entails a search for an accurate narrative that reflects her life experience. This process includes searching for the "correct" terminology and language that is capable of describing her identity, and this varies according to when and where people come out. Lev (2004) describes

the process of telling one's story taking place within a cultural matrix and how behaviour is defined within this context. In L's case, her new identity becomes "possible" and is validated by reading other transgendered people's stories on the internet. In this way, L can practise at "coming out" on the internet, and still be "in".

J, who was 62 when interviewed, describes how she witnessed the changes in society and how the development of the gay community is leading the way towards more acceptability. Nevertheless, she makes it clear that this improvement is still dependent on where one lives:

> You all think you're the only one in the world. Nowadays I don't think that's as true as it used to be, I think its different now to what it was. You've got an easier life to some extent. Whereas then you were very much on your own and when we moved back up to a highland village, that was interesting. And it was only a few years ago. [...] But no there weren't any role models and I remember this girl April Ashley she was so stunning. […] So I suppose she was a role model and then there was no more. There was nothing else for a long time, all you saw then were bad images or you'd see something in News of the World. […] There were no LGBT centres in those days.
> J, MTF, age 62

J went on to describe the main difference between sexual orientation and gender identity as a matter of visibility. She points out how it is more difficult to be a transvestite because self-expression involves dressing as the opposite of the gender binary:

> Being a transvestite was more difficult because if you were lesbian or gay or bi you could do that and unless you had a tattoo on your forehead or went out openly displayed no one really ever knew. Whereas with ourselves if you forgot to take your make-up off or whatever, it became pretty obvious, you had to be ultra careful, you had to be so careful taking nail varnish off, making sure you got all the edges out.
> J, MTF, age 62

Having said this, J also makes it clear that the growth of lesbian, gay and bisexual communities has enabled the tentative visibility of transgendered people:

> I think about ten years ago it got easier. I think things started to ease off and I think to be fair, once the gay community came out and started to be more acceptable and also was decriminalised, then I think people started to emerge a little bit more.
> J, MTF, age 62

J's comments reflect how changes in social attitudes, the growth of gay and lesbian political groups and the declassification of homosexuality are affecting how transgendered people can construct their identity. The participants' stories reflect Plummer's (1995, 87) point that for narratives to flourish, there needs to be a community to hear them, and he draws a parallel between the "biographical hi*story* of a gay identity and the social hi*story"* of a gay culture. In other words, the narratives we have access to are limited by the world we inhabit (Langdridge 2007). The coming out stories that originate in the 1970s in the gay and lesbian communities paved the way for discovering new identities in gender stories which in turn continue to build a community that defines a transgender reality. However, queer theorists argue that the limitation of coming out stories for the work of transgender identities is that it is grounded in traditional identity politics, which argues is a form of disciplinary regulation (Langdridge 2007). With its focus on a beginning, middle and an end, the traditional coming out story seeks resolution in the form of a stable unified identity, consolidating and reinforcing the sexual and gendered binaries with little space for other kinds of stories to emerge.

A's story points to a loosening up of the gender binary in popular discourse and reflects a different kind of story waiting to emerge. A also illustrates a different distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity but it differs from J's point about visibility. A is able to identify with a cartoon Japanese character that gives him the confidence to be who he feels himself to be:

Well I like Japanese animation a lot and the Japanese have a thing for the western people and some of the actors in the series are boys that appear to be girls and girls who appear to be boys and a lot of this in the western world is called gays but sometimes they are not, they only appear like girls. And there was one character that was a girl, she dressed up like a boy and had a girlfriend. The couple were always involved but its something different I had never seen before and it was in the television series I started to see in 1996. A, FTM, age 15

There is a sense of A beginning to construct an identity around a particular female figure who dressed in male clothes which is enabling him to tell his story within the cartoon stories produced by Japanese culture.

In the main, the type of support available for the participants in creating a transgender identity in western culture is dependent on the broader context of current discourses, which in turn, influences what kind of support is available in the community. In other words, in the participants' search for identity, the dominance of the heteronormative binary system is revealed as the only discourse available. Transvestites and transsexuals appear to be the main visible alternative to traditional sexual and gendered identities; and, even then, some of the participants struggle with finding suitable language to describe their individual circumstances.

The next section continues to see the development of social groups and support, illustrating how popular narrative is employed in creating identity. This is summed up by Ricoeur's (1991, 437) point that "We learn to become the narrator of our own story without completely becoming the author of our own life".

5.3.3 Community representation

For some of the participants, the knowledge that transsexualism and transgenderism exist helps to crystallise feelings they have lived with for years. Within this new context, they have a name for their feelings and who they believe themselves to be. G received validation for her inner feelings through meeting up with like minded people. She expressed this as follows:

> […] Meeting J, a post operative transsexual, I had a good long talk with J and she got out my inner feelings that I had suppressed. She told me there is a life - to me it was a closeted life I led. She said come out and be your true self, how you feel, don't hide it. Come out. So I don't hide anything now.
> G, MTF, age 69

Self-help groups provide a rich context for gender stories by supporting people in coming out and creating new identities. Telling their story helps people to construct themselves and it allows them to map out boundaries between the past and the present — who they are not, and who they are. Similarly, going to a conference and finding others who felt the same as him helped K to alleviate his sense of isolation:

> A lot of my other friends, even though they were really accepting, they couldn't really understand so I found it difficult talking to them about stuff […] But I was quite frustrated because I couldn't just sit and say how I felt, I had to explain it all […] I booked myself on a GENDYS [support network for transgendered people and relatives and friends] conference and that was the first meeting of trans people and that blew my head. That was 1996 — I was 23, 24 — that really blew me away.
> K, FTM, age 32

G and K experience a validation from social groups which illustrate the need to be mirrored and be seen by people like themselves. Their experiences and feelings are reflected back to them by people who are like them. Demonstrated here is the advantage of collective categories in that they unite people in their "sameness", and gain strength and validation from having a public collective identity. In my view, the importance of this can never be underestimated in terms of people developing the ability to live a liveable life.

In rural areas where there is a lack of resources, people are forced to form their own groups with the focus on self-help:

There were always people emerging. The Beaumont Society did a fair bit; the problem is the Beaumont Society up here is almost non existent. And certainly where we are it is non-existent. So it's been self-help up there.

J, MTF, age 62

The Beaumont Society was established in 1966 and is one of the largest support groups for transgendered people in the UK. They offer local and national activities and information lines, and promote an understanding and education about transgenderism, transvestism and gender dysphoria. Recognition and acceptance of an identity often comes when the participants meet others who have the same struggles, and the Beaumont Society plays an important role in this. This is evident from L's experience of being with similar people. Her confidence developed from being in a context where her emerging identity was validated and cross dressing was accepted:

At that point I'd found on the web the Beaumont Society, but they were down south, a bit out of my reach. Eventually I found out about a group for transsexuals and I thought that's close enough. I visited that. The first 3 times I was so scared. I didn't even dress. It was a shock to meet all these gorgeous women talking in big guy voices. Oh my god. It took me a wee bit to get my head round it but it helped build my confidence to the point where I'd take some clothes with me. […] and obviously started talking to people and going out with people. That made a huge difference.

L, MTF, age 33

For some of the participants, self-help groups help to mobilise the emergence of a new self-identity within the larger collective identity. In a similar way, G5 described how she searched the public world of newspapers and helplines for information and a language that could help to make sense of her story:

I didn't know I was transsexual, I didn't know there was such a word as transsexualism until I saw an advert in one of the papers for the Beaumont

> Society in London and I phoned them up and told them all about myself and
> they gave me the number of the LGBT groups and I phoned up the helpline
> and person told me about the transgender clinic and transsexualism, she
> talked me through a lot and I discovered the LGBT group.
> G, MTF, age 69

Clearly, the participants experience relief when they find a collective identity category to which they can belong. It is worthwhile at this point, reflecting on how my own situated position is likely to have impacted on how I constructed my interview questions and subsequent analysis of the transcripts. Far from being a detached observer in search of some "truth", as a reflexive researcher, I was aware of how my politics played a significant role in how I generated the information that produced a certain kind of knowledge. For instance, whilst I concur with Langdridge's (2008) challenge to traditional models of identity, I am also mindful of my allegiance to identity politics. This results from being a product of the early 1980s where identifying as a lesbian feminist was a profound and significant aspect of my development. This means that while, on the one hand, I am contesting the self-limiting and regulatory functions of identifications, I also acknowledge the importance of the idea of a unitary identity that has been central to evolving gay communities in the 1990s. I am not interested in resolving but exploring this contradiction, and creating a space in which these tensions and paradoxes can be negotiated creatively and dynamically (Bondi 2004). However, I also acknowledge that the way I structured the questions may have actively contributed to the (re)construction of categories within normative frames — hence, foreclosing potential lived experiences of the participants.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has explored how the participants' coming out stories begin with secret experiences of suffering that produce shame and silence, and it has discussed the consequences of this for transgendered peoples' mental health. This is followed by their gradual emergence into the external world where they seek support for their

new identities through cultural and community representation. This process also exposes the complexities of secret cross-dressing and of unhelpful self-help groups. In the main, the participants' experiences point to a "discovery" of that which was already there, and their subsequent search for an identity that describes their experience.

Eliason & Schope (2007) describe how Devor (2002) has proposed one of the few theories to explore transgender identity formation based on Cass's model. They highlight how Devor (2002) reports two social processes that underlie all identity formation; being *witnessed* by others for who they believed themselves to be and second, being *mirrored* which involves seeing oneself in the eyes of someone who is similar. This chapter has explored how cultural and community representation provided witnessing and mirroring for people to recognise themselves and position themselves accordingly.

The classic transsexual narrative has been the most popular story told about gender diversity. Its origins lie in the early clinical accounts recorded by sexologists Hirschfield (1910) and Benjamin (1954/2006) which became the basis upon which a transsexual diagnosis was made. Since then, autobiographies and case studies have become widely available whereby transsexuals learned to tell the "right" story in such a way as to ensure eligibility for surgery. This classic transsexual narrative relies upon and reinforces the heterosexual matrix's organisation of the sexed body and gender identity and has been central to how transgendered people have understood their experiences and constructed new identities. The transvestite identity and the transsexual identity have become two of the most well-known identities of the last fifty years and reflects the dominant western discourse of heteronormativity where transgendered people organise their experiences around the divisions of men and women, and through which heterosexual relationships are the goal.

In the early 21st century, there are different kinds of stories emerging which challenge the limiting categories of "transvestite" and "transsexual", and transgendered people are making conscious choices about who they wish to be. For instance, M's new identity is created around who she wishes to be and around the object of her desire, and in doing so, challenges and destabilises the categories of

"woman" and "lesbian". D is even more explicit about wanting to opt out of binary gender categories and in his demands for more choice:

> I want to be seen as what I am — a chimera, a hybrid, a herm. I am a hybrid. I'm doing this because I can. There are many people doing it, people almost always gravitate towards the poles and I want there to be another choice.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

Hence, as much as transgendered people's stories tap into the dominant western view of heteronormativity within the modernist story of a progressive linear journey, the data also reveals a fluidity of identity and multiple possibilities. This is illustrated by some of the participants in their struggle to belong to self-help groups, where they feel excluded and limited by the emphasis on a unitary identity category. The data show how stories that functioned to bring order and clear classifications to chaotic lives are joined by diverse stories of shifting perspectives and multiple identities. In other words, the participants illustrate that in the U.K. there is not one specific universal transgender experience or identity. The data shows how various social and cultural resources — including the role models that are available for the participants to model themselves on — shape different possibilities for transgender living.

The phenomenon of counternarrative (Plummer 1995, 2003; Apfelbaum 2001; Andrews 2002; Freeman 2002) was useful in alerting me to the attraction of creating theoretical and narrative coherence about transgendered lives which could relieve me of the complexities I was faced with in analysis of the data. Andrews (2002) describes the counternarrative as a story which offers resistance to dominant cultural narratives. This need not be in opposition to the master narrative but contained within it. Andrews (2002) argues that a master narrative offers people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience, which in turn becomes a vehicle through which we understand other stories — a lens through which we look. This is relevant in people's gender stories where issues of inclusion, exclusion and the social construction of normalcy will become visible. Freeman (2002, 193) suggests that the counternarrative is "culturally-rooted aspects of one's own history that have not yet become part of one's own story". Freeman's (2002,

194) study on *Cultural Memory and Autobiography* illuminates the permeability between the individual and the collective, and between the self and culture; suggesting that the counternarrative lies hidden within the master narrative that "surges into reflection, infusing one's history with new meaning, complexity and depth". As the data demonstrate, these additional stories challenge hegemonic binaries and their fixed assumptions about gender identity and sexual orientation, and I draw these challenges out further and with greater clarity in the following chapter. My aim is to draw on phenomenology to give credence to these new stories, and attempt to avoid a "capturing" coherence and experience, hence avoiding an homogenisation of the participants' narratives.

Chapter 6 Transitioning in Space and Time

6.1 Introduction

Chapter four began to explore the journeys that the participants undertook in
experiencing and realising the incongruence and discomfort between their gender
identity, gender role and biological sex. Chapter five described the participants going
through a process that began with "coming out" to oneself, followed by "coming
out" into the external world which creates a visibility of self-identity. This chapter
and chapter seven explore two mutually reinforcing processes involved in
transitioning - passing and self-identification which occur simultaneously. I do not
intend to reduce the complexities and subtleties of the transitioning process but for
the purposes of analysis I will write about them separately. This chapter explores the
notion of "passing" as the opposite sex in the development of a new identity and
focuses on the physical and emotional changes involved in this transitioning process.
In order to receive social validation, one must negotiate the cultural norms of gender
presentation. This chapter explores the participants' diverse ways of creating
coherence for themselves within the contextual regulation of gender identity.

Transitioning is not necessarily a linear process, but for the transsexual
medical route there is a clear sequenced pattern of stages. The medical route is,
historically, the traditional route that self-defined transsexuals take as a way of
aligning their self-identity and body. This derives from the fact that until recently, it
was the only discourse available to people who felt their physical bodies betrayed
who they felt themselves to be. Bolin (1994) notes that transsexualism, as a historical
phenomenon, is defined by the development of two important technologies that made
physical changes possible; hormonal therapies and sex-reassignment.

Self-defined transsexuals' transformation involves a rite of passage whereby
they "become the opposite sex", and this includes a transmutation of social and
personal identity alongside physical changes. Transsexual identity is to be outgrown
as an identity and for biological men, physical feminisation is a central part of the
process of personal and social transformation; for biological women this usually
takes the form of physical masculinisation. Transitioning encompasses changes in

social presentation of self, hormonal treatments and various surgical modifications. After a period of assessment by the gender specialist, the individual is required to take part in the "real life test" where they are asked to live in the opposite sex/gender role for a minimum of one year. During this period, transsexuals depend on a system of medical approval that grants them access to hormones and surgery. This includes an expectation that the individual be employed, studying or doing voluntary work to ensure he/she can live in the community in the opposite sex role. Hormone treatment will be offered throughout this time which will cause physical changes such as redistribution of body fat and breast development for transsexual women (MTF), and deepening of voice and male pattern hair growth for transsexual men (FTM). Surgery is then considered which consists of breast augmentation and construction of female genitalia for MTFs and mastectomy and hysterectomy for FTMs. Constructing male genitalia is more complex surgery and some FTMs prefer to wear prostheses instead.

Section 6.2 begins by describing the importance of "passing" as the opposite sex in the development of a new identity and is key to gaining self-confidence in being read as the opposite gender/sex to that previously ascribed. This includes showing how transsexuality is viewed as a transitory category of gender/sex. Section 6.3 describes the participants' pleasures and fears involved in the process of transitioning, illustrating how the participants' capacity to experience pleasure reinforces a sense of identity and, how the capacity of fear, undermines a sense of identity. In this way, the participants illustrate the inseparability of self-identification and the processes of passing. Section 6.4 presents how participants describe the process of passing, including the significance of hormones and surgery in their individual transition decisions. Section 6.5 explores how they change their gender role (behaviour and dress). Throughout this chapter, even though I focus on descriptions of processes of passing, I will highlight that process descriptions are inflected with evidence of changing self-identifications.

6.2 Passing

As suggested above, a key aspect of "coming out" into the outside world (transitioning) is being able to "pass" as the opposite sex according to the cultural

coding of gender and therefore to look how one feels. This means hiding the fact that someone is transsexual and/or transgendered and does not neatly fit into the heteronormative view that biological bodies are either female or male with the correlating gender identity as either feminine or masculine. For transsexuals, an aspect of passing requires invisibility and a "blending in and becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable as either a man or a woman" (Cromwell 1999, 39). This has meant a considerable denial of one's personal history and creating a life built on lies in order to "pass as" the new gender category. For G and S, their goal is to "pass through" the identity of transsexual in order to "pass as" their chosen gender identity in the binary system:

> I'm not going to plaster myself as a transgender woman […] if they accept me as a woman and treat me as a woman, that's what I want.
> G, MTF, age 69

G and S clearly view transsexuality as a space to move beyond rather than moving in (Prosser 1998, 96), and passing enables this transition to occur. Like G above, S makes it clear that the final goal in their transitioning is to become invisible as a transsexual and to emerge and be accepted without comment as a woman:

> Actually the good transsexuals I meet, we just disappear in the end. We get to where we want and we just disappear [...] the big mistake is saying you're a transsexual.
> S, MTF, age 35

G and S illustrate how the idea of passing for the transsexual subject is a step towards their goal of becoming and embodying their "true" gender identity. Hence, transsexuality is largely a transitional category which offers a taste of what it will be like to be the opposite sex. As Prosser (1995) suggests, it aligns inner gender identity and social identity so that one is "taken" in the world for who one feels oneself to be psychically, internally. Hormones and surgery are significant parts of making passing happen in a visibly convincing way. In this way we can see how the process of

passing is inseparable from a shifting sense of self. In other words, the participants show how important visible appearance is for identity. The term "journey" is often used in the classic transsexual narrative, symbolising the departure from one identity to another built on a linear story line. Prosser (1995) points out how this is in contrast to the queer trajectory which celebrates unbelonging and leaving the home ground of identity for the mobility of crossing identifications. Edelman's description of queer theory as a "site of permanent becoming" (1995, 348) is at odds with the transsexual reading of being in transit until finding a home.

Roen (2001) describes the notion of passing as central to current transgender/transsexual dialogues, with some transgendered people arguing that passing is being complicit to normative gendering. Prosser (1998) and Devor (1999), cited in Califia (1999), strongly argue against ambiguous gender positionings in their critique of postmodern thought around gender. Prosser (1998) and Devor (1999) state that gender identity is not just a socially constructed "fiction" but is also an embodied and real experience for many. While not dismissing the constructedness of gender altogether, Prosser (1998) and Devor (1999) argue that postmodern/queer theorising underestimates the materiality of identity, and advocate surgery to create a bodily home for those denied representation of their "true gender" (Prosser 1998, 211). O'Hartigan (1993), cited in Califia (2005), points out that she changed her bodily sex to enhance a gender continuity — this suggests a core gender identity deeply embedded in the personality. In fact Devor (1999) and Prosser (1998) go as far as to say that many trans people are "anything but queer […] they are not, and do not aspire to be, in any way transgressive. What they want is to be authentically themselves […] this requires that they straighten (not queer) the relationship between their sex and their gender" (Califia 2005, 154). On the other hand, trans and genderqueer categories are interested in destabilising and transgressing traditional gender identities. Califia (2005) warns against oversimplifying sexual and gendered groupings, but for the purpose of this chapter, I draw a distinction between those who seek a stable gender identity and aim to "pass as" either male or female, and those who question these categories as unitary and coherent, promoting a more ambiguous and fluid position. In doing so, I do not intend to position stability and fluidity in opposition to each other, but rather focus on the situated and negotiated nature of

identification (Davis 2009) which undermines the presumed dualism of stability and fluidity. The next section illustrates some of the contextual nature of where the participants choose to pass, and the pleasures and dangers that arise around their choices to "pass as" their new gender category.

6.3 Pleasures and fears in passing in public spaces

The pleasure gained across the transgender categories in creating the illusion of passing as the opposite gender is clearly highlighted by the participants:

> The response you get from people is staggering. You go to the races and people are blown away by it. They are so complimentary. I was walking down the street and these girls crossed the street to tell me how good looking I was.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

There is a sense of triumph and confidence that develops when passing is successful which reinforces their desired self-identity. This is expressed by the participants as follows:

> […] we walked round the block and it was great. It was wonderful. It was funny because there was this drunken guy, about 35, a big beefy guy who had his Friday night skinful and as he walked close he said "alright".
> L, MTF, age 33

> All the people that don't know me think I'm a boy when we first meet. And I like that.
> A, FTM, age 15

> I have been chatted up by this taxi driver on the way back from this boat trip. A little guy wanted to take me home and I thought that was interesting.
> J, MTF, age 62

These pleasures at passing successfully are, however, tempered by the consequences of being discovered. For example, L illustrates the violence incurred when the norm of heteronormativity is exposed as a performance and someone is "fooled" by performed gendered appearances:

> Reality television has helped. It was about someone that was transsexual and they didn't let anyone know until end of programme and they had been setting her up on dates with these guys who wined and dined her. It ended up some of the guys went to court for being deceived. They went to court over it because they had been fooled […] but all it done was generate more interest in the programme. But again it's the homophobia in society. I can't be gay — how can I be attracted to this person because they were born a man. But now she's not, she's a woman and maybe she's still got the bits down there but an operation can change that but they were fooled as she looked like a gorgeous woman.
>
> L, MTF, age 33

The negative impacts of passing can be seen in the above example and L highlights a profound fear that emerges when the gender binary is subverted and exposes the social punishments that follow transgressions of gender and sexuality.

Noticeably, K adopts the contemporary category of "trans" which reflects his own belief that he is a particular kind of man. K is the only respondent who entertains the possibility of self-revealing his trans status, but only in the name of challenging negative stereotypes and educating the public about discrimination. This is a calculated choice K makes in terms of risking his own personal safety:

> I do training with young people in organisations on trans issues, and depending on how the session goes I'll out myself because I think its important to give a human face to transgenderism and I know when I tell them I'm trans eyebrows are flying up and the jaws are hitting the floor and its like…you can't be and I say I am. And I like doing that, I like blasting

peoples misconceptions but it also opens me up to god knows what. But I
think I'm a pretty good judge of stuff and I'll only out myself if I feel totally
safe in doing so. If there's a hint that I might be putting my own personal
safety at risk then I won't do it.

K, FTM, age 32

K is not worried about passing or overly concerned that people will not accept him.
He is claiming his unique identity as trans man — a particular kind of man. Through
deploying the term "trans" as a prefix, K negotiates and destabilises the heterosexual
matrix social system of recognition. At the same time, because his identity is trans, it
is more stable.

For D, who describes passing as a compromise, there was also an acknowledgement
of the danger:

Passing is important to me on the street but in my own queer community I
don't want to pass, I want to be seen as what I am — a chimera, a hybrid, a
herm. I am a hybrid.

D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

K and D, despite their desire to challenge the notion of passing, are aware of the
potential problems of societal rejection and the value and safety of being accepted by
the mainstream. Depending on the context, K and J challenge the assumptions that
make "passing" the only acceptable option for transgendered people. However, just
as the participants share a real pleasure in passing successfully, it is paralleled by a
fear of the threats inherent in the attempt to pass; namely the threat which has the
capacity to destroy a sense of self. The participants provided several examples of this
experience and none was more powerful than those which occurred in the arena of
public toilets.

Toilets are a key site of gender identification and represent a key challenge
for transgendered people. Passing in toilets brings a sense of achievement and is a
rite of passage for those trying to pass as the opposite gender. In the moment that
transsexuals successfully pass, they "become" that which they aspire to be.

Halberstam (1998) illustrates how toilets serve to maintain cultural binarism by drawing attention to how the categories of male and female that are used to signify toilets, continue to enforce gender conformity, whilst ignoring the field of gender variation that exists. She goes on to argue that when ambiguous gender does appear, it is transformed into deviance, thirdness, or a blurred version of either male or female. Gender policing takes the form of women and men being required to measure up to expectations of femininity and masculinity, and if they fail to do so, they are questioned about being in the wrong bathroom. We learn to read gender by learning which traits are assigned to each gender and, despite the fact that a wide range of gender presentations exist, the cultural rule of two genders is fixed.

For transgendered people, toilets become a limitation to moving around in public spaces and become a space where they may be held accountable for whatever gender they are presenting. This inherently "threatens" self-identification — they identify as x when they go into a toilet but this is totally rejected if their right to be there is questioned or they are asked to leave. Public toilets are an arena where appearance and gender/sex must stay congruent in order to be accepted into one of the binary genders. The experiences of my participants are consistent with Butler's (1999, 178) comment that, "[we] regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right". K illustrates a particular fear of being found out as a masculine girl by both men and women, albeit for different reasons:

> The most unsafe I've felt was in the early stages of transition going into the guys' toilets where I was known. I had big issues about going into toilets in pubs and stuff, drunken men and shit what they are going to do to me, rape me, I don't know. That's when I felt the unsafest. But even on the back of that I've always had more hassle in female toilets than the guys' toilets ever. Whenever I was in the female toilets I always had — what are you doing in here this is not the men's ? I started going to the guys' toilets and I've had no hassle in there ever.
> K, FTM, age 32

Two different sources of fear emerge in this quotation. The first is the fear of violence from the men and the second is the fear of ostracisation by the women. The reality now is that he experiences safety in the men's toilets. This illustrates the point that Devor (1989) raises when she says that men can move around in public spaces safely, therefore a "masculine" woman can also enjoy this freedom. A similar issue is raised by J when she attempts to use the ladies toilets:

> Toilets are a problem. People get hung up if there's a man in the toilet. Well technically speaking re the NHS I'm a transsexual woman and so I can argue the 'get out of jail free card' but you don't want that hassle and I find that fascinating because most ladies toilets are cubicled — you don't sit in full public view whereas men do stand in full public view. The problem is that toilets are a problem in pubs or anywhere. You'll get some woman complaining that you've got a problem. Women in general are a little more understanding about people dressing maybe and they might talk to you about liking your top or whatever, but toilets are a problem.
> J, MTF, age 62

Transgendered people's experience of public toilets draws attention to the link between culturally validated gender identities and the definition of public space. J cannot see the problem as the ladies toilets are cubicled, but comes up with the solution of unisex toilets:

> In USA and the continent a lot of the toilets are unisex, so I mean you don't have separate toilets at home do you? What's the big deal? You're in a locked cubicle.
> J, MTF, age 62

R produces a very different account of his experiences of toilets, having discovered that "moving up market" tends to provide a safety and certainty that he will not be directly confronted:

I'm very relaxed and I use the ladies loos now. The last time I was in the
ladies loos was in an upmarket store and this woman came in, an older lady
and she started chatting away to me and I thought she must be blind if she
thinks I'm a woman. I'm a foot taller than she was. I modify my voice a little.
I just make it much lighter. I think appearances are everything and people's
first impressions are most important […] the staff might well notice but
they'll snigger in the kitchen. If you go down market you can get that, you'll
get a bit of stick. So I always go up market, eat in the best places, always pee
in the best places.
R, Transvestite, age 61

Other areas of general threat occurred when passing in public as a pre-requisite for
medical treatment:

This policeman says, "what are you up to sir?" I said "excuse me but I'm not
a sir, I'm a lady". So he says "what are you in this getup for?" I said "I'm
transsexual" and then he called me "sir" and I said "excuse me I'm a lady"
[…] So then they said "have you been drinking SIR?" And I said "look I'm a
lady, the only drink I had in there was diet coke, that's all I drink when I
drive". […] "That's alright then" he said, "on your way SIR", again. I should
have reported that incident. I didn't realise that at the time. We now have a
community policeman and I could have reported it as harassment.
G, MTF, age 69

Some participants, despite the threat imposed on them, are insistent about retaining
their new identity, and in M's case it was part of the transitioning process criteria:

I've lost jobs because of my insistence that I identify specifically as a woman.
I approached employers as a woman and on occasion I've been told if I don't
do things the way they want me to do things they'd rather not have me at all.
At the time [when] there wasn't legislation to stop this or the legislation was

there but how to enforce it was another problem […] I needed to work because part of the transitioning was that I had to be in full time work.

M, MTF, age 42

M's dilemma illustrates how she is situated between a rock and a hard place by the heteronormative demands of dominant society in that she is required to "fit in" in order to pass, and at the same time is not allowed to do so. Needless to say, this also has potentially destabilising effects on a sense of self-identification that is central to transitioning and can produce a strategy of compromise in public presentation of self. For example, T, J, L and R all try to negotiate a safe enough dress code, without giving in completely to external pressures. T describes as follows:

I could just about get away with a cravat […] I push it to some degree but going out is like being like a commando. I feel right you have to go now and so there's a level of anxiety. There's also the make up situation thing and it's all falling off me and looking silly at the end of it so I've tended to modify that way of going out and being in the world to something that's a bit more in-between that feels a bit safer and less anxiety provoking. So that makes some difference.

T, MTF, age 48

J also negotiates what she can get away with:

It depends on where I'm going as to what I put on. I'm sort of semi dressed today I suppose. I put trousers on today mainly cos it's easier to deal with some cab drivers. Some of them are fine - you get all sorts of comments.

J, MTF, age 62

L and R sum up this negotiating process as they talk about the thin line between passing and not:

A lot of transsexuals tend to try and hide everything including the masculine. They try to be completely feminine and they forget the masculine traits they might need to get on in life. If you study women in general they'll have masculine traits, a lot of times it's what I try and keep that helps me to pass that bit more which is kind of funny. I don't go over the score and try and be a girl.

L, MTF, age 33

It's a very thin line between […] acceptability and non-acceptability. You can cross it by an action or wearing the wrong thing, it's extremely fine.

R, Transvestite, age 61

While visible displays of femininity and masculinity are the basis of gender attributions, the participants' descriptions seem to suggest that to "pass" as a man or woman requires a combination of feminine and masculine features and behaviours — otherwise the result is a caricatured stereotype. Clearly, the participants' public gender identities are negotiated in particular settings and can be a strategic process of providing a space for challenging social policing of gender identity. How they do this is context-driven and dependent on issues of safety as being visibly transgendered could be potentially dangerous. Transitioning is not simply a process of constructing a shift in identity, but is dependent on cultural and socioeconomic possibilities. The complexities of transitioning involve exploring the interactions among social expectations, the individuals' attempts to be credible, and the structural limitations on intelligible gender identifications (Davis 2009). In other words, the participants illustrate the complexities of everyday practices and experiences involved in passing within the contextual regulation of gender identity. The next subsection explores the key aspect of passing — body modification, associated with hormones and surgery, to enable the participants to be more recognisable to themselves and to other people as their true gender identity.

<u>6.4 Body modification</u>

The participants express a general belief that their physical bodies do not represent an internal sense of who they feel that they are, and this is the main principle that justifies their decision to transition. Here again, the participants show how self-identification is intrinsic to the process of body modification which influences passing. As shown in chapter four, the body is a very real experience and expression of transgendered people and, for most, their gender is experienced through their body and is intertwined with subjectivity. The following excerpts illustrate the awareness that transgendered people have of society's gender binary rules and the process required to align their inner subjective identity with an external social identity.

Hormone therapy is frequently where the transitioning begins as the changes brought about by the hormones are significant in the attribution of secondary sex characteristics. This element of passing enables transgendered people to begin living in the opposite sex before undertaking any surgery and is important to their social identity as their chosen gender. For K it comes as a great relief when his relationship to his body changes through hormone treatment:

> After I started the transition, particularly after starting hormones and stuff I had a greater acceptance and greater liking for my own body.
> K, FTM, age 32

K's experience reflects the importance of the visibility of the gender attribution process *(which is connected to self-identification),* and the need to alter his body. FTMs are born as female-bodied and they change their sex using a variety of methods including testosterone injections and "top" and "bottom" surgeries. Testosterone is central in altering the gender attribution process as it visibly changes their external appearance, making FTMs more culturally recognisable as men. Historically in scholarship, FTMs are subsumed under the general category of transsexualism, reducible to a mirror-image of male-to-female transsexualism (Rubin 2003). As the literature review showed, there are now more transsexual men (female-to-male transsexual who is born female-bodied and is now living as a man) telling

the story of their own lives than there were in the past (Rubin 2003; Green 1999, 2004; Cromwell 1999; Devor & Matte 2004; Prosser 1998). This enables a better understanding of the FTM identity as distinct from male-to-female transsexualism. Rubin's (2003) research into FTMs reveals that hormone treatment plays a much more significant part in their lives than surgery due to the limited effectiveness of both "top" and "bottom" surgeries.

While acknowledging the theoretical work by Wilchins (1997), Namaste (2000), Stone (1991) and Stryker (1994), Whittle (2006b) considers the reasons for the differences between FTM and MTF identity visibility. For example, Whittle (2006b) reflects on some reasons why trans men have published more in-depth empirical and sociological analyses than trans women: (a) supporting a prior family may make it difficult financially to pursue a research career and (b) passing is easier for trans men in the academy. *Hence, prior identity, as externally defined, also influences the ability to assert a new solid self-identification.* The participants concur with Whittle's comments about trans men having more difficulty in passing and L offers an explanation for this:

> It was mainly the guys didn't know how to take it. The girls did. With the guys it was like an attack on their masculinity so they really don't know how to deal with it.
> L, MTF, age 33

L highlights the fear induced in men when a man wears women's clothes and R analyses a possible cause for this when he refers to the traditional hierarchy of patriarchal roles in western society:

> Men will never be allowed to be womanly in my opinion in our society not in as far ahead as I can see. It might be because women are still regarded as inferior. So if a man wants to be a woman it seems to be a crazy thing to do because you'd want to be inferior […] so therefore if you want to be a woman you must be a bit silly.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

The participants illustrate the importance of passing as a man or a woman in order to feel safe in society. T illustrates the dilemma inherent in wearing women's clothes when her secondary "male" characteristics do not match the western gendered system's expectations. She describes the difficulty with being visible in public if her clothing and sex characteristics are not congruent: this can be viewed as partially her fear, but also a trade-off between how others identify her and how she identifies herself. In this way, fear tempers expression of her "true" self:

> So if I go out and people see my size and the fact that I haven't had electrolysis, I mean, I don't feel I can risk certain aspects like dressing how I might want to dress because how I might be perceived by others and how they might react to that, so that means I hold myself back and there's a general flatness.
> T, MTF, age 48

T is anxious that male characteristics such as facial hair will make her more visible and would rather not risk going out dressed as a woman. On the other hand, S has positive experiences when her body fits better with self-identification. S clearly links the biological effects of the hormones with being a woman and this enables her to experience a social comfort that is more appropriate to her gender identity:

> Once I started taking the hormones there was this desire to be a woman. I was so competitive I just love it, it's creative, and it's a beautiful feeling. Being yourself and creating a world and an identity for yourself as you is such a pleasure when you haven't had it.
> S, MTF, age 35

S believes that hormones help create her identity as a woman which she clearly experiences as pleasurable. T, S and L all believe that correcting their physical body through hormones and surgery can help to repair the fracture — the dissonance — between the mental and physical aspects of themselves. L explains:

I feel like a girl but I'm the hairiest transsexual on the planet, that's the way I feel. Over the course of a couple of years the hormones will help. I'm only on 1.25 mg just now. They can only give you small doses to start and work it up. They've got to monitor how your body deals with it. It just takes time for it to build up in your system — it'll take 3 or 4 years for my breasts to fully develop […] I've got to work on my speech and get speech therapy and I'm still getting laser to get rid of my beard.

L, MTF, age 33

Transitioning is a multi-stage process that takes place over a period of years and is often consolidated in making choices about surgery. Lev (2004, 29) points out that, historically, the medical establishment has been reluctant to offer surgical treatment unless the client was labelled transsexual by the same establishment. The theoretical medical model of mental illness still underpins contemporary treatment of transsexuals which views gender variance as "disordered" and surgical reassignment as a "cure". Most of the participants illustrate the transsexual trajectory often culminating in genital surgery, yet this decision is generally made on the basis of knowing how it will affect them sexually. It is more common for FTMs to resist genital surgery in order to be able to go on having sex, due to the still inadequate and risky surgical procedure of constructing a penis. I explore how the participants re-figure sex and desire in chapter seven.

Body modification is not taken up by all transgendered people and historically, it was mostly self-defined transsexuals who followed the medical route and who were considered eligible for hormone or surgical treatments. This is now changing and it is becoming more obvious that there are other forms of gender variance that can respond well to medical treatments other than transsexualism (Lev 2004). However, for the participants, the main aim is to change their external appearances so that they become more recognisable as men and women. The notion of passing helps to develop and build more confidence in their new identity as a man or woman. This process clearly illustrates the interdependence of self-identity with external identification where the participants become more recognisable to

themselves and to others. They manage their identities to gain external recognition of an internally felt self. Some of the participants start to take hormones as a way of achieving this new public identity, with the experience of passing having an effect on their new self-identification. The participants report that hormones change their external appearances and reflect their self-identities making them more culturally recognisable as men and women. This presentation of clear gender cues is part of the process of "passing". Whether to gain acceptance of an internal felt sense of identity, or to protect themselves from social threat, generally, the participants do not typically play with ambiguity in public places.

Yet, to suggest that the participants are adhering to normative presentations of identity that reinforce the status quo is overly simplistic. The participants are opening up the realm of gender intelligibility through negotiating their identities and revealing the constructed nature of the binary gender order. Particular settings and social pressures need to be taken into consideration when considering analysis of the participants' experiences which reveal the interconnections between individual transition choices and the structural context in which they occur. In this way, passing is a process involving both the participants' self-identities and others' gender attributions. The next section explores the key area of dress in which this process takes place.

6.5 Dress

> […] clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity — that in articulating the body, it simultaneously articulates the psyche (Wilson 1990, 69).

The realm of dress raises the relationship between bodies and clothing as well as issues about the extent to which clothing is experienced as part of the body. Clothing is a marker of a normative societal structure which is taken for granted. It is one of the main ways that people interact with the world and is often an indicator of membership of particular groups and sub-cultures. Suthrell (2004) explores the key areas in ongoing discourses on sexuality and gender through the lens of transvestism, particularly the cultural response to cross dressing in the UK. Male to female

transvestism seldom receives cultural approval, except as fun, highlighting how prevailing ideologies of what is "natural" and "normal" are reflected through attitudes towards clothing. As T and J illustrate:

> I was attracted to the femininity aspect of things but I couldn't really acknowledge that as it was too unacceptable to myself and to others […] there was a period where I was dressed in a particular feminine way but I found that I was attacked a few times and I found that kind of stressful so I tend to dress down.
> T, MTF, age 48

> If females can wear men's clothing why can't men wear female's clothing if they want?
> J, MTF, age 62

Clothing positions people into the gendered space they occupy and, unless it crosses into the space of blurred genders, it is seldom questioned. Clearly, gender is more than an extension of the biological body and requires managing bodily gestures and behaviour so as to fit in with being a man or a woman. The very idea of cross dressing relies on the notion of a gender based code. Garber's (1992) exploration of cross-dressing within a western historical context demonstrates the concept of cultural binarism. She celebrates the subversive possibilities in cross-dressing and proposes that gender boundaries are blurred social concepts and can be transcended by the cross dresser. Suthrell (2004, 17) considers the term "transvestism" which would appear to mean "'trans' = a/cross and 'vest' = 'dress' " suggesting there must be some movement across. Whether it is transcending or crossing over boundaries, clothes are part of the creation of an image and identity, and cross-dressing could be seen as a way of exploring fantasy identities. R illustrates how clothing is a way of creating an illusion and sees cross dressing as a potentially erotic space for playing with his identity and self image — a space for creating fantasies:

> But I find a lot of trannies create this person in the mirror that

you fancy — it's not you — you know it's you of course but there is
something about the mirror. After a while you don't believe it's you, you
think it's this person you fancy. A lot of self-delusion is involved in being
transvestite […] you create this person in the mirror who you fancy.

R, Transvestite, age 61

R's experience differs from the experiences of self-defined transsexuals who view
cross dressing as an instrumental strategy in passing as the opposite sex on their
journey to their transitioning identity. Historically, gender clinics would not approve
people for transition if they were not able to pass, and this meant conforming to
appropriate cultural gender presentation (Lev 2004). This can be problematic if pre-
operative transsexuals do not conform to the gender stereotype expected by the
gender clinics. M explains this as follows:

> […] I keep my head down and hopefully sooner or later I'll get the operation
> although I'm expected to dress most of the time wearing a skirt and a blouse
> or a dress and I tend to differ. What I wear isn't about what my body position
> is — it's not about appearance or gender expression, its more about gender
> identity and those two things are very different things.
> M, MTF, age 42

M draws attention to what happens when self-identity simply does not conform to
any expectations of how this should be. She describes for her, the difference in
gender expression and gender identity and how society demands congruence between
gender expression (behaviour) and gender identity:

> The difference for me between gender identity and gender expression is that
> the expression is about the way you want to appear on a daily basis maybe
> dress wise — but gender identity goes slightly deeper than that […] it's about
> your body to you, rather than to the outside world. And the outside world
> tend to see, they might see you and say that is supposed to be a man but
> through history there have been situations where these assumptions don't

quite work but society will make up its own rules. One thing I've found very difficult at first is owning my own gender identity as mine and not as theirs.

M, MTF, age 42

M illustrates the problems that emerge when self-identity is separate from external identity. Western society demands that women dress in feminine ways to "match" being female and "passing" traditionally buys into this cultural mandate reproducing feminine and masculine stereotypes.

The notion of passing challenges assumptions and assertions about the "reality" and "naturalness" of gender, particularly the performative aspect of learning how to dress and behave as the opposite sex. Clothing has the power to construct and deconstruct gender in the private and public gaze and, cross-dressing at least, challenges the notions of binary categories of female and male. In the main, for the participants, cross-dressing becomes a way of appearing "real" as R explains, "I think appearances are everything and people's first impressions are most important", and this influences their sense of self. This also brings self-identification into some kind of alignment with identification by others. On the other hand, the exception is D who introduces a new phrase of "criss-cross dressing" to challenge and unsettle the status quo:

> We both dress up and we both do what we call criss-cross dressing in that the object of a criss-cross dresser is not to pass as anything, it's to successfully not pass, it is to obscure the idea or call into question the idea of a true gender.
>
> D, FTM, age 48

D shows another, less common way of bringing self-identification into society and in this way, passing becomes a way of expressing a fluid identity instead of a fixed one.

6.6 Summary

The participants' experiences reveal that social validation of gender identity depends on the congruence of the sexed body and the performance of gendered behaviour by the participants, according to the heterosexual matrix formula. Passing implicates normal and abnormal identity (Herdt 1994a), so, to some extent in western society, passing is central to the participants' emotional well-being and safety, general integration into society and to the development of self-identity. In this way, the participants are forced to adopt normative gender roles, avoiding direct challenges to the dominant ideology. Passing draws attention to the gendered nature of both private and public spaces that work towards promoting the gender binary between men and women. The aim of passing is to hide transgendered identities and to pass as "nontransgendered". Ironically, in the process, external expectations become unwitting instruments in the realisation of an "unnatural" self-identification.

There are significant differences and similarities among transgender identities and these depend on the kind of identity changes undertaken in relation to bodily modification. This diversity is, in itself, a source of complexity in the intersections of passing and self-identification. In the main, however, transsexuality is seen by some of the participants as a transitory identity category on the way to their chosen binary gender category and associated identity. Sex reassignment surgery is seen as a key turning point in the medical narrative of the transsexual where there is a fixed instant of sex change. In contrast, transvestites are looking for safe opportunities to cross dress and be recognised as the opposite sex, with no intention of altering their body. There is more cultural tolerance for women cross-dressing and perhaps because of this, the category "transvestite" is not used in relation to women. Nevertheless for women seeking a sex change, cross-dressing and being recognised as a man is just as important as for male transvestites. With both transsexuals and transvestites there is a strong desire to pass as the opposite sex and this is key to gaining self-confidence in developing a new identity or sustaining an existing identity. Here again, the profound intersections of body, self-identity and external recognition cannot be overstated.

As much as there are differences between the participants, they all emphasise how the body is the site of gender determination and their gendered subjectivity is

linked to two key processes: the first is medically produced changes such as hormone treatment, and the second is surgical modification. At least one of these processes is employed by all those who identify as transgender, and it is common for all of them to be worked through, in turn, as accumulative processes. I will now go on to explore the second aspect of transitioning that is self-identification which occurs, in practice, and as I have intimated above, simultaneously with passing.

Chapter 7   Identifications and Desires

> […] the strange, the incoherent, that which falls "outside" gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categories as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently (Butler 1999, 140).

7.1 Introduction

Chapter six introduced the two mutually reinforcing processes involved in transitioning — passing and self-identification, with a particular focus on the physical changes involved in passing. This chapter explores the process of participants choosing and beginning to form an identity. It focuses on two key points: first, I attempt to move beyond a singular and supposedly inclusive understanding of the category of "transgender" by relying on the participants' self-definitions, while drawing attention to the impact of social and cultural discourses on how they form their identities; second, I do this by charting the diverse ways that the participants talk about their gender identity which then leads on to decisions that they make about their physical bodies. In the main, while the participants' self-identifications are not consistently used, categories can overlap and contradict one another depending on stages of transition. They are consistent in using the categories of "men" and "women" to refer to themselves and I echo this usage. The participants describe forming identities around who they felt they were or wished to be, and these self-constructions form the basis for the category "transgender".

Section 7.2 explores the process of self-identification, looking at how the participants describe their experiences and how this is influenced by the categories available for them to draw on to bring meaning to their lives. These categories subdivide transgender into discrete and separate strands. I draw on Hansbury's (2005) three broad subgroups of woodworkers, transmen, and genderqueer, derived from his study of the transmasculine community at a conference, in an attempt to simplify the complex web of identities which are known collectively as "transgender". Finally, Section 7.3 explores how the participants re-figure desire

during and post-transitioning, illustrating the limitations of language that relies on the binary structure of the heterosexual matrix.

7.2 Self-identification categories

Mills' (1959) "sociological imagination" is useful when considering how transgendered people negotiate and form new identities; in particular, how personal experiences are discursively produced depending on contextual influences such as class, location, and economic status. Hansbury's (2005) paper illustrates the theoretical shifts in particular ways of thinking about gender diversity that inform changing ideas of transsexuality and transgenderism, and how these vary according to discourses available at the time. Hansbury (2005) moves away from a single trans identity with a fixed ontology to naming three broad subgroups within the category of transgender, starting with essentialist and moving along to the most constructionist. The most essentialist are woodworkers who tend to "blend into the woodwork" with the aim of eventually passing from transsexual status to being identified as the opposite sex, and they tend to be working class and in their late 30s and upwards; transmen, the second group, are in their middle 20s and early 30s and use the modifier "trans" to claim a new category. Finally, genderqueer are at the constructionist end of the spectrum and are the youngest and tend to be white and middle-class. I use these three subgroups loosely as analytic tools to analyse the data and, even then, not all of the participants fit neatly into these subgroups. Employing these ideas, this chapter begins to chart the diverse ways that participants describe changing their gender identity and how they make decisions about their physical bodies. The participants illustrate how self-identification is bound up with the discourse and language that is available. I use this evidence to argue that the hegemonic discourse of the heterosexual matrix constrains self-identification and the possibility of legitimising desires, other than gender preference, as grounds for constructing alternative identities (Seidman 1993).

At the time of the interviews, five of the participants were non-operative. Of these five, one defined as transvestite and clearly had no intention of changing his biological sex; one had just begun attending a gender clinic; one was 15 years old

and had made no moves towards the medical establishment yet; one was exploring her gender; and one was currently taking hormones and had recently decided that she did not want surgery. Three of the participants (MTF) described themselves as pre-operative. All were on hormones with the intention of having surgery in the future. Two (FTM) were post-operative, one having had full surgery and the other having had chest surgery but having decided not to have phalloplasty due to the complexity of the operation. One of them considered himself in perpetual transition. As discussed previously, transitioning consists of several processes and each of the participants makes individual transition choices. For some, beginning to transition was a clear and systematic process mapped out by the medical profession, while for others it was more complex (Appendix 3).

7.2.1 Transvestite

First I explore how and why the participants deploy the category of "transvestite" in two different ways. The first of these is as a distinct and fixed category separate from the medical transitioning process, while the second is as a temporary category used as part of a discovery process leading to the category of "transsexual". R defines the difference between transvestites and transsexuals, and in the process, illustrates a certainty regarding his own self-identity:

> I am an outgoing transvestite. I don't really dress at home so that's who I am. I like to think that I'm a classy transvestite. I'm not a lady. I'm a man. I'm not transsexual, I'm a transvestite. I'm a man. I don't suppose I'd like to be a woman, nothing against women. I'm a man and I like to dress.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

This is reminiscent of Prince's (1967/2005a, 2) preferred term for transvestite, "femmiphile —love of the feminine" to describe the male heterosexual transvestite who wants to change gender without having to change biological sex . Prince's (1978/2005b, 33) work was pioneering in its time and even now, in the twenty first century, western culture still has difficulty in accepting that it's "perfectly possible to

be a woman without having sex surgery". Instead, the last fifty years have seen the emergence of the medicalisation of gender through the development of the transsexual discourse and sex reassignment surgery. In this context, Prince draws attention to how the majority confuse sex and gender, and how this can lead to people seeking a sex change when all they might need is a culture that can accommodate men cross-dressing. R describes this for himself as follows:

> The prejudice against transvestism is straight sexism, that's all it is [...] because women can do anything they like and it would be actually sexist to say to a woman — you've got these awful trainers and jeans and a scarf on, that's not feminine — that would be a sexist thing to say. But you can say that to a man — I don't like the high heels you're wearing or the skirt — but it's the same thing, its sexist. But if you said that to a member of the public they wouldn't know what you are talking about.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

R expresses his frustration with society's rules on dress in ways that are paralleled strongly in Prince's (1967/2005a) description of the plight of the male in her paper, *The Expression of Femininity in the Male.* Here, Prince (1967/2005a, 24) describes how "the human male is in a cultural cage, although many of them don't know it". Using the correct terminology is important for R because he distances himself from the category of "transsexual", and is firmly rooted in the category of "transvestite". R views transvestism, as not only an unchanging category, but also as something that might be thought of as a third category.

> I think there's three sexes — man, woman and transvestite. And transvestites are glamorous. And the rest aren't. That's the size of it. Maybe that's a development — there might be men and women but there might be a group in the middle that want to be glamorous and the rest don't.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

R appears to conflate the categories of "sex" and "gender" and "identity". Although he introduces a third category of "transvestite", R's belief in the binary system is clear. What is not clear however is whether he is referring to transvestites as a sexed or a gendered category. Garber (1992) states that transvestism destabilises all binaries and in that radical sense is a "third". The notion of "thirdness" still relies on the gender binary, reinforcing ideas of dichotomous systems of sex and gender. Instead of troubling the understandings of masculine and feminine, "thirdness" is placed outside them, leaving them intact. Despite its inevitable reliance on binary gender to define it, Towle and Morgan (2002) draw attention to the usefulness of the term "third gender" in that it promises to unsettle binary thinking and practice around dyadic male/female codes or norms.

For L and J who were born biologically male, the category of "transvestite" becomes redundant as they discover the category of "transsexual" which tells a different kind of story, one which reflects their experiences more accurately. They had previously identified as transvestites due to cross-dressing, but the emergence of more contemporary categories has given them a better way of understanding their experiences. The following example illustrates the importance of language to the understanding of experience when I ask J how she would have described herself twenty years ago:

> [...] still probably a transvestite but that was the general term used in those days, there were a few called transsexual, but generally everything was lumped under the same banner - a tranny [...] I'm now going to the Gender Clinic. This will be my second visit mainly because I decided after changes were happening to me that I should go and check it out. And also my wife said you should go and get that checked out. And I came back and said well I'm not a transvestite, I'm actually transsexual.
> J, MTF, age 62

J's experience illustrates Plummer's (1995) exploration of the use of language in story telling, and how we can only understand the meaning of someone's story through paying attention to the cultural contexts that help to create the story.

Plummer (1995) cites Black science fiction writer Delaney's (1986) experiences of coming out in a therapy group; how, after the group, he felt that the language he had used had betrayed his experience of being gay. As a teenager, Delaney had read the book, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Cauldwell 1949a), in an attempt to find out more about homosexuality which had, of course, influenced the way he then thought about himself. The way that cross-dressing was understood and thought of twenty years ago influenced the way J described herself, and she is currently redefining herself again as she begins to attend the gender clinic and discovers new language. The consequences of having new terminology and language open up possibilities for new kinds of identities.

Similarly, a changing linguistic and social context allowed L to begin to see herself differently, and to make connections with other transsexuals' stories. I used the following quotation in chapter five to illustrate a significant turning point in L "coming out" from her inner private identity to an external public identity. It is worthwhile repeating here to illustrate the way in which changing discourse and terminology helped to broaden L's way of thinking about her identity as more than "a guy in a frock" and enabled her to "come out" into a more public social world:

> So it was then I tried to develop — who was this feminine side of myself, because it had never been explored. There were so many things to get tore into. But it got to the point where I was just like a transvestite as it was. It was one night when I got home and I was getting changed and getting ready to go to bed and it was like, it's not the clothes, it's my body. I just looked in the mirror and it was funny as it was a stranger that started looking back at me and, it was that's not me, that's not who I am. That's when I started looking at the other stories. I'd read stories from other transsexuals, way back I was identifying with their stories but I was just like, that's a bit much, I'd never had surgery in my life and I thought I didn't want to go there. I still had my self termed as a guy in a frock the same as society did.
> L, MTF, age 33

L's experience illustrates the limited ability of the category of "transvestite" to adequately capture her experience and illustrates how her self-identity begins to change when she learns more about the category of "transsexual" which reflects her experiences more accurately. L's experience points to Benjamin's (1954/2006) diagnostic continuum of male-to-female transsexualism and male transvestism: "while the male transvestite *enacts* the role of a woman, the transsexual wants to *be* one and *function* as one, wishing to assume as many of her characteristics as possible, physical, mental and sexual". Benjamin (1954/2006) firmly suggests that the desire for physical changes is the critical factor that separates transvestism and transsexualism and this seems to be reflected in the participants' stories.

 All of the preceding extracts make it clear that the respondents' descriptions of how they identify themselves are conflated with the discourse and language that is available at any given time; influencing both how they *experience* themselves and how they *describe* their experiences. In other words, discourse and language operate to consolidate and maintain the heterosexual matrix as the main context for the participants describing their lived experiences; as Wittgenstein (1922) notes "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world". Society puts limits on the ways that an individual can make sense of his or her life, and part of this process is the creation of hegemonic categories of identity like "transsexual", "homosexual", "man", "woman". Although powerful in any given context, these categories do change over time and, therefore, they are historically contingent and not transhistorical and universal.

 Bolin (1994) draws attention to the link between how the context of a person's life is essential in determining how cross-dressing is expressed, and this needs to be considered when exploring the participants' use of categories and whether they choose to pass or not. Bolin's (1994) point illustrates the influence of discourse on *how* the participants experience their sexed and gendered identities. An example of this is G who was married for 43 years and cross-dressed throughout his/her marriage until her wife died 2 years ago, and she discovered the category of "transsexual".

I didn't know I was transsexual until I saw an advert in one of the papers […] and the person told me about the transgender clinic and transsexualism […] and I came out at 67 years old.

G, MTF, age 69

Through her research, Bolin (1994) discovered that, for some transvestites, life context was regarded as the feature that distinguished the two gender variant identities. The material provided by my participants constitutes evidence of a process whereby the participants change their self-definitions according to the transitional time and location span. The participants illustrate the impact of social and cultural discourses on how transgender identities are constructed and discursively produced. As language constructs the socially available categories of identification, the participants' experiences also show how the limitations of language directly affect the possibilities of gender diversity.

7.2.2 Transsexual — woodworker

The traditional transsexual narrative emerges within a particular cultural discourse which promotes the prevailing binary gender paradigm that subscribes to masculine and feminine stereotypes. The term "transsexual" relies on a social context that promotes the two distinct categories of "man" and "woman" as essential truths. When the term "transsexual" is used, it can imply quite different things and is deployed in several ways; for example, where L says that, "I'd define myself as a transsexual woman". S uses the term "transsexual" interchangeably with the category of "woman":

I probably am transsexual. I consider myself a woman; I won't give in to other people's biases. I don't see why anyone should class me as transsexual and different. I'm no different to anyone else. […] I would have been a woman and gone my own way if I'd been left alone and now people probably wouldn't know the difference anyway.

S, MTF, age 35

The term "transsexual" is problematic for S as it makes her "different" and more visible and she is keen to fit in with the category of "woman". In a similar way, G insists that:

> I'm a lady. I am transsexual. I'll be transgendered until my operation then I'll be a woman. I don't want a sign on my back saying I'm a transgendered woman.
>
> G, MTF, age 69

Like G, many people view the category of "transsexual" as a transitional state on the way to "becoming" a woman or a man and use it interchangeably with the category "transgender". Using the term "transsexual" indicates the acceptance of the medicalisation of gender which L, S and G relied on for treatment through transitioning. They claim gendered status as women based on "knowing" themselves as women. The strong correlation between self-identification and medical discourse underscores the importance of language — including binary categories — to the experience and description of self. In other words, heteronormative discourse offers some of the participants a comfortable identity position.

Unlike G above, some of participants also acknowledge that being born into one kind of body and subsequently becoming an "other" through surgical intervention does mark them as "different" from those born into the sex these participants become. Hird (2000) suggests that de Beauvoir's signature statement that "one is not born, but becomes a woman" (1949/1987) seems to anticipate transsexual claims, while Prosser (1995) claims that it is not clear what is meant anymore by such "becoming" or indeed if one who becomes a woman is necessarily female. Nevertheless, the participants and other transsexuals disrupt the assumptions that sex maps directly onto gender; an assumption which has long laid the foundations for excluding anyone who is not born a biological man or woman.

7.2.3 Trans — trans man and trans woman

The trans identified participants celebrate their trans status by acknowledging their life history, in contrast with the self-identified transsexuals who attempt to hide their original biological sex and subsequent transitioning process. K and M, who went through a transitioning process including surgery, choose the more contemporary term "trans" to define themselves. K expresses this as follows:

> I have to acknowledge that I'm not a "proper man" because I haven't been born biologically male; I haven't been brought up and conditioned as male. I have had 23 years — the most formative years of my life, being bombarded with all this female stuff and that is a big part of who I am, and I am trans so I'm quite happy calling myself a trans man because I'm not a "proper man", even though — what is a proper man ?
> K, FTM, age 32

Cromwell (2006) describes how trans men often deploy socially normative concepts of manhood which become "queered" by the context they are using. K calls into question the heteronormative definition of "man" and reconstructs the cultural boundaries to include his subjective language, making the notion of a trans man identity an active and ongoing process.

The subject of female transsexuals and female cross-dressers has been historically invisible and it is only recently that FTM writers have begun to contribute to a growing FTM body of life-history interviews and historical documents. The literature chapter explores two of those writers: Rubin (2003), who offers an insightful analysis of men-born-females in his text, *Self-Made Men,* that is based on interviews with female-to-male transsexuals; and Green (2001, 62) who describes how he is committed to creating a space for "men with female histories". They have made it possible for transmen such as K and transwomen such as M to have a new transsexual identity that includes their own historical roots and supports them in coming out of the traditional "woodwork".

M also includes her history, acknowledging the different socialisation processes that men and women go through. M draws attention to the fact that she feels herself to be a different kind of woman due to her history and the fact that she was born male:

> I can refer to myself as a lesbian but I'm not going to say at any point that my history doesn't exist. I have a history, yes I have transitioned but the fact that I am calling myself a lesbian straight out to people's ears or minds might suggest that I'm just seen as a lesbian just like every other lesbian — as if my history is the same as every other woman's.
> M, MTF, age 42

Both K and M work with the current categories and simultaneously challenge the heteronormative cultural matrix and its reliance on the binary division of sex and gender, producing asymmetrical oppositional categories such as "man/woman", "male/female" and "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality". As discussed in chapter two, the Gender Recognition Act (2004) has changed the legal definition of male and female, in that men can have vaginas and women can have penises, as the legal definition is not based on the body or biology. While Whittle & Turner (2007) describe how the Act has demobilised the sex/gender distinction, using the terms interchangeably, they note that the Act still only recognises there are two sexes.

As K and M illustrate, trans identity is now emerging as a new category that has possibilities that go beyond the binary structure of sex and gender. The assertion of a "transsituated identity" (Cromwell 2006, 515) paves the way for transgendered people to be more visible and to take charge of building their own trans theory, instead of relying on the medical model of mental illness. The transgender model does not necessarily require the individual to pass as the opposite sex or gender because it attempts to open up a middle ground within the established gender binary. While this middle ground still reinforces the gender binary, it offers a broader space within which to explore and play with different identities.

As discussed in Chapter two, there are an increasing number of trans writers who are making use of this broader space in their attempts to give validity to the

great range of difference within the transgender model. Hansbury's (2005, 244) exploration of transmasculinities offers the notion of a spectrum that "describes the profusion of identities that is subsumed under the overarching label of trans". Hansbury (2005, 271) illustrates how the categorisation of language creates a space "between who I feel myself to be and the category by which I am named". Hansbury highlights this gap when he describes how labelling himself a man is not enough — he uses the prefix "trans" as a modifier which can include his history. Green's (2004) educational and political work regarding transgender issues underlines the need for transsexual visibility and the acceptance of a transsexual status as a way of challenging the prevailing binary gender paradigm. K illustrates this contemporary position as a trans man when he rejects the language of the medicalised model:

> I don't like the term (a) transsexuality and (b) homosexuality as it's very medicalised. Even though by definition I am a transsexual, I don't like to describe myself as that. Its just one of these words that gives me the shivers and I kind of hesitate to say this.
> K, FTM, age 32

Although he rejects the term "transsexual", it is only by its connection to the medical model. By claiming an identity as a man who is also trans, K is asserting his right to modify his body and form his identity. K's experience reflects the inability of language to describe the transgendered identity throughout time, illustrating the limits of society's idea of gendered acceptability. He goes on to differentiate between the social expression of gender and the biological description of sex:

> I've not changed my gender as gender is how you feel about yourself. I've changed my outward appearance of gender but, sex — its like — it depends how you define sex, is it by — what was it Judge Ormond said — is it your gonads, your chromosomes? I've not changed my chromosomes so can you physically change sex? I don't think so. But I've obviously changed

something. I'm not quite sure what it is. I think I've just changed my outward appearance of gender and how I express my gender perhaps.

K, FTM, age 32

Here K refers to the first case in the U.K. to deal with the determination of a transsexual sex/gender status. The marriage of a biological man married to a post operative male-to-female transsexual was annulled on the basis that Judge Ormond (1971) ruled that there are four criteria for assessing the sex of an individual; chromosal factors, gonadal factors, genital factors and psychological factors. Judge Ormond declared that the biological sexed institution of an individual is fixed at birth (http://www.pfc.org.uk/legal/c-v-c.htm).

The western assumption that there are only two sexes dictates that there can only be two genders, and for people to be "normal", their gender must be binary and fit their genital sex. The materiality of biological sex is represented by a social gender identity whereby gender is seen as bodily sex. K views chromosomes and gonads as constituting sex, therefore questioning whether changing sex is possible. This raises several questions: such as what it means to consider sex as the basis of systems of gender difference; the difference between the meaning of gender and sex, and how this affects people's description of themselves. K is clear that you cannot change gender as he refers to it as a felt sense of who he is — an internal identity. He defines sex as a biological and physiological fact that cannot be changed. This is surely reflective of the discourse of dichotomy that is prevalent in western culture which attributes biology — genes and hormones — to nature, and views cultural influences as nurture. Interestingly, nature is attributed with being fixed and unchangeable. Yet from the participants' stories, it can be seen that cultural factors and beliefs regarding gender binaries are quite institutionalised and ingrained, whereas technology can easily manipulate biological facts. Certainly for K, it seems as if he is saying that neither sex nor gender can be changed; what had changed for him was his gender role (outward appearance and behaviour) which made him feel more congruent with his sense of who he felt himself to be, and which included changing a biological aspect of his sex difference. In other words, K is typical of

most of the participants in that he is clear about his gender identity and that his biological identity is not congruent with this.

The two categories of "sex" and "gender" are used interchangeably by the participants; the collapsing of one term into another causes linguistic confusion and indicates slippage between the categories of "sex", "gender", and "sexuality" in talk and practice. Some participants feel they are changing their sex, others their gender. K explains:

> gender and sexuality do get confused. I think it's partly the way it's dealt with. On forms for example, one minute you can be asked what your sex is and on another form asked what your gender is — as if they are the same thing which they are not.
>
> K, FTM, age 32

As an analytic tool, the sex/gender distinction has been valuable in considering the differences between men and women, yet the notion of biology as separate from the social is a western one "[…] the separation of the biological from the social […] is thus likely to be insufficient for coming to grips with local notions of embodiment" (Moore 1993, 208). The data and current trans literature are challenging this distinction by deviating from the psychological and social divisions brought about by the relationship between bodily sex and subjective gender identity. This represents a move away from the essentialist/constructionist debates, and focuses on *how* people's bodies extend into available spaces and form sexed and gendered identities. This thesis shows how the participants negotiate their identities within the confines of a heteronormative matrix which does not allow for diverse identifications and contradictions. It also shows how some of the participants respond to these constraints by "queering" categories such as "man" and "woman".

7.2.4 Transgender — genderqueer

This section highlights the different ways the participants use the term "transgender", and the following interview excerpts draw attention to the overlapping of categories,

illustrating the inclusive use of the term. The term "trans" is an updated version of the umbrella term of "transgender" with the purpose of being as inclusive as possible when negotiating equality legislation (Whittle 2006a). Califia (2005) describes the term "transgender" as having at least two main uses that are potentially confusing. First, transgender is used within the overall category of "trans" referring to people who "do gender" in non-normative ways, subverting the men/women binary. Second, "transgender" is used as a generic term for the whole field of gender identity transgressions. The difference between these two uses could be seen as the first group referring to transgender as *beyond gender,* and the second group referring to transgender as *between genders.* D positions himself within the first group that contests gender binaries when he uses the term "trans" in the original conceptual meaning of the word — going beyond. He uses several terms which could be due to the fact that, in the main, he does not want to pass as either male or female and does not use these terms in his various self-definitions:

> Hermaphrodyke is the term I used in the beginning, abandoned, and then I came back to. So there's has been a bit of a journey. In my day to day I pass, sometimes as male sometimes as female but both passings are compromise. I guess for 10 years now my identification is — I would say a tranny boy. I mean trans as in beyond is applicable to me.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D attempts to reinvent himself and exist outside the current system of gender and he sees passing as settling for less than who he is. He is choosing to customise himself in a way that suits his own self-definition and attempts to articulate himself outside the binary construction of gender. D's position posed problems for me when I attempted to code the data as the categories I picked constantly seemed to fall apart. One aspect of this which is relevant to my discussion of transgender categories is the obvious and unfailing imposition of the heterosexual matrix on the participants' understanding of their experiences. For example, in trying to place D in an unproblematic category, I discovered that I was getting caught up in conforming to fixed and unchanging categories. The turning point came when I was able to allow

my own experience of feeling confused and frustrated and could then reflect on what that might be telling me about the content of the data. It provided me with a way of loosening the power of the heterosexual matrix by way of exposing the contradictions in the participants' description of their identities and subversions that were taking place. For example, D's usage of terminology is unstable when he uses categories interchangeably such as "hermaphrodyke, tranny boy, trans". D's narrative illustrates the challenge inherent in the term "transgender" — that opening new doors does not necessarily mean shutting the old doors. In this way, identity categories are not subsumed under new subversive terms but they can be expanded and complicated by them.

The participants' accounts point to changing identities over a period of time according to how the participants positioned themselves within the discourses available to them. D's experiences place him in the genderqueer category subgroup when he acknowledges how he has the privilege of earning money *because* he places himself outside the mainstream. Hansbury's (2005) observations of the majority of the subgroup of genderqueer are that they are white, college educated and middle class. Hansbury (2005) comments on how this demographic reflects the position of class and economic status in how transgendered people identify themselves. D highlights his privilege:

> For me it's only possible I think because I have a queer bubble built around me, I'm an artist, I can get away with it, as my girlfriend's mother says — I admire D because he has turned what could have been a life's tragedy into a life's success. And that's something that's possible for me by virtue of who I am, by virtue of my personality, my strength and all of those things most people have beaten out of them in one way or another. There are a lot of resources out there and also I think because of who I am, in terms of my name, it gives me access to everybody. So I not only get to read the books but get to meet talk and usually become friends with these people [the authors].
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

This suggests that the choice to step into the margins of society is made easier when one is not relying on the mainstream for necessities such as regular financial support, health insurance and emotional support. However this does not mean there is a correlation between socio-economic status and how transgender people construct their experiences as my sample is not representative of all transgender experience. For D, the genderqueer position challenges the act of transitioning and this comes through clearly in D's position on transitioning.

First, D describes himself as in "perpetual transition":

> This idea that transition is something to get done with as quickly as possible so people like me that stay in this perpetual transitory state make people feel uncomfortable[…] I just see myself as going. I don't have a destination. I'm not transitioning, in fact I'm relatively hostile to the word transition, I'm hostile to the term opposite sex, hostile might be too strong but I find them very problematic.
> D, FTM, age 48

D attempts to find a position that does not rely on the binary system and struggles to find the language to describe himself without getting into using binary terms. He is committed to opening up a conceptual space outside or beyond the naturalised binary language:

> I mean I find a hard time using these terms as I don't want to use them, I don't want the concept to be a linear narrative and say the middle ground or say the grey zone as if everything else is crystal clear so I have a really hard time with the language and that's part of the problem, we don't have the language to talk about it.
> D, FTM, age 48

D underlines how the current binary language is inadequate for expressing the complexities of his lived experiences. D argues for different ways of organising and

expressing sexed and gendered identities that are outside the psychological and linguistic restrictions of the heterosexual matrix.

R also contests the idea of transitioning but for different reasons. R draws attention to the importance of using the correct terminology and clearly draws a distinction between the categories of "transsexual" and "transvestite". At the same time, R hints at the idea that if it were not for society's taboo on men wearing women's clothes, there would be no such thing as transsexuals. In other words, R contends that transsexualism is a condition that society has invented:

> Transsexuals are totally different people from transvestites […] I don't think you have to have surgery to dress the way you wish. […] It's acceptability. Transsexuals should be stopped tomorrow.
> R, Transvestite, age 61

Despite their different reasons for doing so, both R and D challenge how the gender binary has forced transgendered people to polarise their experiences and behaviours into either being a man or a woman. Even when identification as either a man or a woman is resisted, it is virtually impossible to assert alternative identities without reference to them. The hegemonic gender binary structures both the experience of gender and sex and the ability to talk about it.

Most of the participants consider transition to be part of their trajectory. As explored in chapter two, the last century has seen medical discourse emerge as the dominant way of trying to understand conflict between one's gender assignment (made at birth on the basis of one's anatomy) and one's sense of gender identity. This has compelled individuals to identify themselves within a two sex/gender system with the category of "transsexualism" being created as a transitioning category, as illustrated by G when she says:

> You are either one or the other. Either male or female — and you can be transgender until your final operation
> G, MTF, age 69

Noticeably she introduces a third category of "transgender" suggesting that this is a temporary state that lies between the binary categories of "male" and "female". G could be positioned within the second group mentioned earlier, who use the term "transgender" more generically: she uses transgender as a space *between* binaries, as opposed to a space *beyond* binaries. R illustrates this binary division when he comments on the clear demarcation between what men and women are allowed to wear:

> Society only allows two genders. You've either got to be male or female or look like male or female and if you are in the middle you are not really well regarded at all [...]
> R, Transvestite, age 61

T, J and C continue to illustrate the second group as they use the term "transgender" as a descriptive umbrella category, as a way of defining themselves without having to pin themselves down. So for example, T says:

> I'm transgendered really […] when I first went along to the clinic I thought I should have a sex change but now I'm not so sure. It's still a large part of me but I don't think the surgery - ostensibly there's a lot of feelings of doubt and what's the point anyway, it doesn't really matter. […] But in some ways I've kind of moved into a different situation where I'm more accepting of where I am in a way and I'm thinking so how can I be and how can I operate with people who don't necessarily approve of what I'm doing.
> T, MTF, age 48

T uses the term "transgender" in a way where she does not have to bracket herself into being defined as a man or woman and can still identify as transgender whether she has surgery or not. T also links her decision not to have surgery with a level of self-acceptance about who she is.

J uses the term in a similar generic way for the whole field of gender identity transgressions:

The real problem is labels, I don't really like labels because once you label someone you pigeonhole them, segregate them and so I tend not to like labels. But I suppose if you say I'm transgendered that covers a whole range and it can cover anything […] I don't think LGBT centre is a good word. If you are going to label it why not call it 'diverse gender centre' because then it covers everybody. And it covers orientation and everything without labelling people in same way. [...] I'm me, a human being and a lot of the time gender is irrelevant, it doesn't matter. We're great at labelling people. Does it really matter what gender you are?

J, MTF, age 62

Like T, J can claim the term "transgender" without making further decisions about which label she fits into, and this buys them both time in terms of not feeling forced into surgical reassignment. What emerges here is the term "transgender" being used as a descriptive adjective, rather than a definitive identity. This is different from how the category of "transsexual" is used often as a subjective identity by the participants. C chooses not to call herself transsexual or transgender "at the moment" and goes on to say that surgery is the defining difference between the categories of "transsexual" and "transgender":

Transgender maybe means someone that's not completely comfortable in their own gender or wants to change it but maybe not through surgery or something. And I think transsexual is by more surgical means. I think someone had once said if you're transgendered you can associate with being male without changing your body.

C, Lesbian and exploring gender options, age 24

C and T and J differentiate between transsexual and transgender by ascribing surgery to the category of "transsexual", with "transgender" being a more generic and undifferentiated category. The term "transgender" includes transsexuality but is not reduced to it.

Clearly, some of the participants do not agree with the term "transgender" as R complains:

I think transgender is probably an American word. They have ridiculous words for ordinary things. I'm alright with it but it doesn't describe me. It's a catch-all term.
R, Transvestite, age 61

The participants' expressed views illustrate how the term "transgender" risks homogenising differences within the community. This suits some of the participants but not them all as D makes clear.

Transgender is an almost useless term now, except as an umbrella term [...] In terms of bisexuality and hermaphrodism or intersex there are a lot of overlaps which I'm interested in and also with transgender [...] it's like with bisexuality, people say, c'mon choose you can't be one or the other you can't be both.
D, FTM, age 48

D argues for multiple identities and is interested in movement beyond different categories with no particular destination.

As these participants suggest, the current language is inadequate for expressing the lived complexity of gender and, if anything, the term "transgender" opens up a conceptual space for the participants' experiences to find a gender space to hang their identities on. Gagne et al. (1997, 490) argue that "while new identities are emergent, they are created within the constraints of current understandings". I suggest that the category of "transgender" serves as an all inclusive term while these new identities are emerging and, while for D and R it is a meaningless term, the category of "transgender" serves a holding function for others exploring their gender identity. Stryker (2006) explains that for all its limitations, the category "transgender" is the current term of choice for a wide range of phenomena that is far more complex and varied that can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary

sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity. The notion of shared identities for the politics of recognition (Fish 2007) has helped to identify the social category of "transgender" — however there are many individuals within the transgender community struggling to demarcate and define their chosen identity which has led to a diverse array of labels, all being used in different ways. M's account summarises the participants' diverse descriptions of the term "transgender" when she says, "One immediate difference is that transgenderism is an umbrella term for people that are gender ambiguous". Hence, it could be argued, the different ways that participants negotiate their identities can expand insights into the tensions of identifications and the regulatory heterosexual binary regime.

Probyn's (1996, 9) use of the terms "specificity" and "singularity" in her examination of relations and belongings is helpful in considering the various categories subsumed under the category of "transgender". She describes "specificity" as the necessary zone of belonging, and "singularity" as the way in which the general becomes realised by individuals. This model can be deployed when thinking of the process by which the "specific" category of "transgender" is lived out individually and "singularly", and instead of the participants being subsumed under the rules of one particular identity category, their desires propel them into diverse forms of living and relating. In other words, the process of moving from "specificity" to "singularity" can be seen as a way of individualising the transgender category by continually breaking down and crossing boundaries, creating categories such as "transvestite", "trans man", "trans lesbian" and so on. Probyn's (1996, 21) inquiry into the nature of belonging cites Bhabha's (1994, 160) phrase which "adds to" without "adding up" and guides me in steering clear of the homogenisation of the participants' experience. In this way, their narratives "add to" the category of "transgender" without "adding up" and creating a hegemonic category where all differences are obscured.

Transgenderism provides a framework for the participants to step outside of the sex and gender binary and allows other possibilities; this need not be limited to transitioning from the sex of birth to the gender of experience. The diversity of transgender identity positions is reflected in the various ways in which the participants define themselves. Hansbury's (2005) spectrum of the three subgroups

of woodworkers, trans men/trans women and genderqueer begins to attempt to illustrate the diversity of experiences within the category of "transgender". The woodworker population points to the centrality of the medical model where the main aim is to pass as the opposite sex with the help of hormones and surgery. Trans men/trans women also use the medical model as a way of gaining access to hormones or/and surgery, but they embrace their "transness" and tend to view their gender as more fluid. Genderqueer is the most fluid and shifting category and, those within it may or may not use surgery and hormones. In the main, it is those in the categories of "trans men" and "genderqueer" who object to the medicalisation and psychiatric classification, although trans men/trans women nevertheless choose to "play the game" of gender dysphoria in order to use hormones and surgery as ways of modifying their bodies to suit them personally.

In my analysis, it is not my intention to create a hierarchy between the essentialist and constructionist ideas of identity, but to understand how different positions are taken up. As I have argued consistently, this depends on the framework of gender stories available for the participants to make sense of their lives. Historically, the transsexual narrative has been privileged as the main narrative, yet the data illustrates that this is changing and that social and political conditions are producing new gender stories. Drawing on Plummer's (1995) historical exploration of gay identity and culture helps to view the biographical history of a transgender identity and the social history of transgender culture as parallel developments. Transgender identity and transgender culture proceed in tandem, feeding off each other: the culture helps to define a reality that makes transgender identity tighter, and this in turn strengthens the culture and the politics. However this relationship depends on the visibility of identity categories and I draw on Namaste's (2003) response when asked about the political differences between transsexual and transgendered people:

> While the term "transgender" is currently one of the most popular, it needs to be pointed out at this point in history that increasingly transsexuals object to being included under a catch-all phrase of "transgender".[…] health care and

social service needs of transsexuals are quite specific and this specificity is lost when people use a vague "transgender".

Namaste (2003) draws attention to the significance of language and how it can create alliances and a sense of community, whilst at the same time, overlook the human and legal rights of transsexuals who depend on medical services for transitioning. Paradoxically they need the transsexual identity, albeit temporarily, in order then to get rid of it and progress to a male or female identity. The transsexual narrative is currently fighting for its life within postmodern discourses, whilst at the same time, being seen as more radical and trendy (Roen, 2001); offering a wider range of possibilities outwith the restraints of the heterosexual matrix. In other words, while transsexuals may not seek to destabilise sex and gender binary categories, they do challenge assumptions about the supposedly fixed and immutable relationship of sex and gender identity (Elliot 2009).

So far, the analysis of the participants' stories has explored how sex and gender are organised within the heterosexual matrix and how this then informs the telling of the transgender narratives as the participants have tried to make sense of their developing gender identities. The heterosexual matrix becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and, to a certain extent, validates itself by shaping bodies, desires and identities according to its laws. In this way, the participants' descriptions illustrate how the heterosexual matrix not only influences how experiences are described, but also what is experienced. Despite this, it is also evident that transgender identities challenge society's deeply entrenched belief system: that men and women are distinct and mutually exclusive categories, and that sex/gender determines sexuality (Eliason & Schope 2007).

The transitioning process, which consists of passing and self-identification, raised questions for some participants concerning their sexual orientation. Indeed, Coleman et al. (1993) as quoted in Eliason & Schope's (2007,13) study of transgender identity formation, report from their study of female-to-male transsexuals, suggesting that transgender individuals go through two developmental stage processes; first for gender identity and then for sexual identity. The final section will explore the second stage of how the participants re-figured the

heterosexual conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation, and how this affected the way they lived their erotic lives.

7.3 Re-figuring desire.

The analysis so far shows how the organisation of sexed and gendered identity in western discourse relies on the heterosexual matrix; in that a coherent gender identity consists of congruence between biological sex, gender and desire/sexuality. Sex is assumed to cause both gender and desire, meaning that a man has to categorise himself as belonging to the male sex that was ascribed at birth; he has to identify with being a masculine man, and his sexual preference has to be heterosexual. The heterosexual matrix assumes that biological sex, gender, and sexuality condition each other and, according to this principle, claims that sexual orientation requires assigning people to categories based on the sex of the participants. It is worthwhile at this point to contextualise my use of the term "orientation" as referred to in chapter three. I draw on Ahmed's (2006, 115) concept of orientation as "the thing we are oriented toward is what we face, or what is available to us within our field of vision". In other words, Ahmed (2006) highlights how the heterosexual matrix regulates how bodies extend into space, whereby certain objects are available to us, and the notion of "orientation" allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others. In this way, the heterosexual matrix influences how we arrive at the places that we do. The following excerpts illustrate the "disorientation" of sexual desire when the binary categories of sex and gender are disrupted.

Cromwell (2006) explores the beliefs and distortions that surround the part that sexual desire plays in transgendered people's lives. He argues that medico-psychological practitioners believe that because MTF and FTM transsexuals hate their genitals, they consider sexual acts equally hateful. This has resulted in a desexualisation of transpeople. In contrast, the information provided by my participants strongly suggests that decisions about whether or not to have surgery rest mainly on how it will affect them sexually. For K:

I had my chest surgery, and that's basically where I've got to with surgery […] I thought about genital surgery for a long time but I've never been entirely happy or convinced about what they can do. The risks are huge, the operation is not just one but several over a long time. The risk of having this dead lump of flesh in my pants is no better than the lump of plastic I've got in there now. I don't want to lose sexual function.

K, FTM, age 32

For many FTMs, phalloplasty (phallic reconstruction) is considered an inadequate procedure causing numerous sexual and urinary problems. K expresses these concerns when he says: "I don't want to lose my ability to pee and I don't want to be catheterised for the rest of my life".

Since the effectiveness of genital surgery is limited for FTMs, testosterone and chest surgery are their primary ways of transitioning from female to male. The MTF transsexual participants generally support the western binary gender paradigm that biology causes gender, and this continues to underpin the stereotypical self-identifications that underpin the heteronormative cultural matrix. S is having increasing difficulty with the incongruence of being a woman with a male genital:

I need surgery badly now. The reason I need it is because I'm a woman and I have a 10" cock and it's impossible.

S, MTF, age 35

S's position is clearly limited by the western binary of body equals sex equals gender equals identity, where femaleness is reduced to specific genitalia. In other words, social woman is equated with genital woman (Bolin 1994). She goes onto express her fear of the surgery as follows:

I am a bit worried that someone's going to make a great hole in me and got to stick this thing in me to give me a vagina but I think, 2 weeks after the operation if I make it that far, then I'll be alright. I want it to work. I've got

everything else. It all works perfectly, it's just making the link between my brain and a new vagina.

S, MTF, age 35

S's description is somewhat mechanical and she is confident that surgery will repair the fracture between her mind and her body.

While some of the participants show concern about their potential sex life post surgery, others clearly see endless possibilities. For instance, G clearly expresses her desire for sexual encounter when she says, albeit jokingly:

It opens up a brand new world. I was always saying that once I had the operation I'd advertise on the internet — 69 year old virgin for sale.

G, MTF, age 69

G's account of her life suggests that far from being desexualised, her transitioning opens up new opportunities sexually. As she goes onto explain:

I was a virgin for 32 years. I never had sex for 32 yrs

G, MTF, age 69

I did not question what she meant by her use of the term "virgin", hence left with my own interpretation that she is referring to the fact that as a "woman" she considers herself a "virgin" as she has not yet experienced post-operative heterosexual penetrative sex. In fact, pre-transitioning is characterised by a noticeable absence of sexual desire and satisfaction for G. In contrast, L clearly illustrates the desire for sex despite early transitioning stage:

Although to be honest just now I'm trying to avoid getting into relationships until I have completed my transition, quite unsuccessfully I might add.

L, MTF, age 35

Again I did not question if she equated relationships with sex.

Overall, the participants' experiences point to an active interest in sexual pleasure, disputing medico-practitioners claims such as Stoller (1975) who writes, "disgusted by their genitals, transsexuals masturbate rarely and indulge less in sexual relations with others" (1975, 173).

7.3.1 Sexual desire

The norms of conformity that the heterosexual matrix dictate obscure the diverse gender and sexual identities within the psyche, and the limitations of language force categorisations that level out the complexities of the participants' nonlinear experiences (Bassin, 2002). My question, "How would you describe your sexual orientation?" (Appendix 2) is reproducing this system where desire is labelled and shaped by identity categories. On reflection, in a bid to open up the categories, I might have asked participants to describe their desire, at the same time, exposing contradictions and subversions produced by self-identities. The following excerpts illustrate the conceptual limits of the heterosexual system of recognition. M struggles to find a category that fits, and sexual orientation was the most available language at the time:

> I had sexual relationships mainly with women to begin with. I kept saying there was something about my relationships with women that wasn't right as I was then, but I couldn't get my head round it. One of my girlfriends started referring to me as a homosexual boy and for a while I didn't know how to talk about this.
> M, MTF, age 42

M's experience illustrates the common tendency to conflate issues of homosexuality and gender in contemporary discourse, as is also seen in S's struggle to place herself:

> I started sleeping with gay men. I thought they are pathetic I couldn't be doing with this. I realised I liked men to react to me as a woman. I was too

feminine for gay men they couldn't handle it. I didn't know what I was going to do. I saw this ad in Loot and I thought oh transsexual.

S, MTF, age 35

When S describes herself as too feminine for gay men, she correlates feminine with being a woman and goes on to assume she must then be a woman. Again, we see evidence of the heterosexual matrix organising desire and intimate relationships.

Even D, who sees himself in perpetual transition, feels limited by how he categorises himself in terms of sexual orientation, yet is compelled to self-define into some kind of binary opposition:

[…] I think my idea of this binary opposition — if what I am attracted to is butch then I must be femme, and also when I did my little butch excursions I wasn't attracted to butch women and so it was only by doing a hyper feminine performance that I was able to get the butch women I was interested in, even though I could out-butch any of them.

D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

Western culture and the subcultures within this, such as the gay community, traditionally draw on a binary social world made up of men and women, butch and femme, homosexuality and heterosexuality, feminine and masculine. There is no language available in western culture for anything outside binary thinking and normative gender stereotypes defend against any deviation from the heterosexual matrix. As a result, the participants are "forced" to situate themselves in relation to a gender binary that is based on biological sex and this biological difference influences behaviour, sexuality, perceptions and so on.

The participants' stories describe how their sexual orientation changes during and after transitioning. Perhaps this is to be expected when people embark on such a journey — that they discover their identity changes in so many ways. No one is in their pre-transition relationship — except C and A who are not in transition as defined in this chapter and are much younger, and R who is a married transvestite and is one of the few participants whose sexual orientation is not changing.

Interestingly, C, A and R are the only three that do not define themselves in terms of transition, and their sexual orientation has not changed. R clearly expresses this when he says:

> I'm completely heterosexual. I'm a male that likes women. As far as I'm aware I have no homosexual feelings at all.
>
> R, Transvestite, age 61

R sees no link between his cross-dressing and his sexual orientation. In western culture there has been, and still is, a conflation between transvestism and homosexuality which reflects western culture's assumptions about normative sex and gender roles. I address the historical intersecting of these two categories in chapter two, but for the purpose of this chapter, it is enough to say that transvestism has the potential to subvert the gender binaries of male and female, and the binaries of sex and gender.

C describes her sexual orientation as a lesbian in a different category to the category of "woman". This is reminiscent of Wittig's (1992/1998) controversial proposal that lesbians are not women as they live outside the heterosexual contract. C explains:

> Yes, in a way sometimes being a lesbian almost gives you the backdoor out of being a woman — the role of a woman. I just feel being a lesbian no one is going to question my gender role and that's more comfortable. There's less expectation - its not that you don't want to do good for yourself but its like saying you don't need to do everything you're expected to do, you don't need to wear skirts [...] If I decided I was transgendered and I changed and I was still with the same partner, well I would be straight, I wouldn't be a lesbian so it does affect your sexuality.
>
> C, Lesbian, age 24

The category of "woman" is a complex one, encompassing many subjectivities. C conflates the category of "woman" with "gender" so that being a woman equals

being feminine (wearing a skirt). Not all women want to wear skirts. C relies on the gender binary distinction and views her sexual orientation linked with her gender identity. Here again, participants' experiences point to them using the discourses available in order to make sense of their identities.

Overall, the participants' sexual orientation is influenced by the stage of transition. Traditionally, transgendered bodies are forced to make sense of their experiences within a heteronormative paradigm. To what extent does the category of "gender" control and regulate the choices people have in expressing their desire? As much as there are opportunities to disrupt the binaries of feminine and masculine, most of the data confirm a strong desire to fit into the culturally normative ideas of male and female. L sees herself in a bisexual position at the moment as her body is neither male nor female and so she experiences herself as being in neither binary. She explains:

> As I'm down my transition I see myself turning into a heterosexual woman.
> As it is now with physicalities, I tend to go with both.
> L, MTF, age 33

Despite the fluidity that her current situation enables her to experience, she sees her goal as staying within the sex and gender binary. L sees that the possibility of failing to fit in with the ontological assumptions that structure the binary categories of "man" and "woman", "heterosexual" and "homosexual" is temporary. Valentine (2006) addresses the inadequacy of contemporary ideas of desire and identification, with desire-beyond-sexual identity receiving little attention. He draws on Kulick's (1998) proposal that a focus on desire instead of sexual identity will trouble and complicate understandings of what sexuality is, in the hope that desire will no longer be constrained by identity categories. Central to this idea is the examination of how essentialised categories of identity avoid the interrelationship between social experience and identification. As L points out:

> Society wants to categorise people as man and woman but there's a whole
> sliding scale in between and it's dead easy to break that scale up. Eight

obvious categories are masculine man and feminine man who are heterosexual, and then you get the masculine gay man and the feminine gay man — that's split the male side into four categories. And same on feminine side — butch and femme women both straight and gay and you could sub divide it even further, everyone's an individual. It's a sliding scale.

L, MTF age 33

Society predicts, on the basis of sexed body, what kind of gender identity a person will have and what direction their desire will pursue. L takes the categories of "man" and "woman" and illustrates ways of further breaking up these categories, placing them on a sliding scale demonstrating more fluidity. Even if people could agree about what feminine and masculine traits are, it would not follow that the feminine is attracted to the masculine. This would only work if we follow the heterosexual matrix to understand desire where it is presumed that opposites attract. That matrix would also not fit some queer crossings in heterosexuality, for example if a feminine heterosexual man wants a feminine heterosexual woman or a butch lesbian being attracted to a butch lesbian. Yet in the main, the participants illustrate how the dominant heteronormative paradigm is strongly influencing the choices that people are "allowed" to have regarding their objects of sexual desire. S claims a sexual identity in accordance with her gender identity:

I'm straight. That's why I can't do it properly because they all go for the cock, all men like a bit of dick. They get so aroused by it [...] I'll meet a man — I'm a pretty woman. I know what men want and I'll meet a man and fall in love and be happy [...] I like sex. I like attracting men, that's what turns me on. I want to love a man and that what turns me on. I don't want any kinky sex things or anything like that.

S, MTF, age 35

Clearly here, S claims a heteronormative identity where her biological sex determines the meaning of her desire in her sexuality, and her sexual orientation identity is taken to depend on genitals. The participants' descriptions point to the

relativity of sexual orientation, illustrating how, as well as it being based on object choice, it is also influenced by the gendered meanings created in sexual interaction. Society puts limits on the multitude of ways that someone can make sense of their experiences of desire and, because trans bodies and identities are different, their desires defy the binaries of sexual orientation as understood within the heteronormative framework. Cromwell (1999) reports on how medico-psychological practitioners automatically assume that FTMs desire heterosexual feminine women and MTFs desire heterosexual masculine men. It is no surprise that K identified as heterosexual because, pre-transitioning, this is a logical way of framing his desire for men:

> Previous to transitioning I was basically having sex with men and then I was going through the transition and I still wanted sex with men and people were saying why are you changing sex if you still want sex with men. It is not about my sexuality, it's about my gender
> K, FTM, age 32

K illustrates how for him, his gender is the problem, not his sexuality. Heterosexuality is a problem for K, not because of object choice but because of the gendered meaning created in sexual interaction that situates him as a woman. The sexual arena only reinforces his social and sexual position as a woman and this conflicts with his gender identity.

K's sexual orientation stays the same throughout transitioning, but now he identifies as gay, not heterosexual. In other words, K is consistently attracted to men but crosses over from "other" to same sex attraction:

> I then discovered this wonderful world of gay sex. It did just open up a new world because it was like I can actually have sex with a guy and enjoy it! Even though I was the same physical being, mentally I was a whole lot different as I wasn't fighting something I wasn't, I was going with something that I was. I identified with being a guy, I am a guy, and I want to have sex

with gay guys and off it went. It's been great since then.

K, FTM, age 32

The significance of identifying as a man allows him to identify with other men and learn about the social world of men. Sexual interactions with men now validate K's gender identity and maintain his gay identity despite the fact that his genitals are female. He describes his experience with this:

> The big question is when is it right to tell someone because if you end up in bed with someone they are going to find out [...] But I have to say the folks I have ended up having sex with and telling them. I'd say 80 to 90% say that's fine, no problem. And of course you'll get people that'll say I can't deal with that and I say ok that's your choice but you're missing out.
>
> K, FTM, age 32

K's reference to his lack of penis suggests that he has gained confidence through his sexual curiosity and activity with other men and that his biological body is secondary to his phenomenological experience of his body.

M's sexual orientation also stays the same throughout transitioning, but she has more difficulty with this as she is struggling to find a space to validate her new sexual identity:

> Gender identity is one situation that I was dealing with in my own way but I needed to communicate that I was a trans lesbian […] At the outcome of my transition I'll be a trans lesbian but I discovered all along the line the radical separatist lesbians were very resistant to the coinage trans lesbian.
>
> M, MTF, age 42

As well as having a new gender identity and sexual identity, she is using a new category which she feels describes her experiences as a woman. M refers to a lesbian group she joins that is not sympathetic to her transitioning status. She goes on to explain:

Now I face another problem in one way in that some of the first few lesbians I actually met were — they told me politely they happened to be radical separatist lesbians[…] I'm faced with separatist lesbians. How do I deal with this situation? I hadn't had my operation. I was so terrified of the outcome — being outed constantly by these women and I felt really I'm going to have to leave this organisation and just do things on my own and see where I get with that.

M, MTF, age 42

M is once again left on her own as there is no group that can contain and accept her new identity. M's experience illustrates how the term "trans" can be problematic. For M, the term "lesbian" is inadequate to describe her trans experience as her history is different to "women born women" (Whittle 2006a, xiv). She risks transphobia within the gay community in her bid to articulate her position as a different kind of lesbian and woman. M is able to think of herself as a different kind of woman as a consequence of the development of transgender literature and discourses that did not exist fifty years ago.

D also struggles with the fixed meaning of the category "lesbian", and describes how he has tried to expand its definition:

So I'm living happily as a dyke — as a radical queer sex positive dyke who occasionally every 10 years has sex with men. Trying to expand the definition of what a lesbian could be.

D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D is suggesting here that there are many more ways than one to be a lesbian, yet this is problematic given the enforced restrictions on sexual orientation categories implied by notions of both heterosexual and homosexual. D illustrates the difficulty in categorising his sexual orientation now with the categories available:

I am pansexual as in omni — I mean I don't discriminate on the basis of gender in term of who my partners are, then I realised but I do. I am more attracted to female body people […] I am very happy if there is an MTF orientated person that I connect with. I don't have a lot of trans women friends. I know a lot of trans women but there is some discomfort I have that I haven't fully explored in that I feel a bit bad about. I think it is residual lesbian separatism. I'm most comfortable with MTFs that can say I am a different kind of woman, just as I am FTM saying I do see myself as a man but another kind of man — qualifiers are important to me in some way because an MTF does not have a female socialisation, and to me that's more important.

D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D describes the importance of "qualifiers" which address and include historical background, creating new categories. He warns against assuming that, because people share a social location by way of gender or sexual orientation, they will also share an identical social and historical experience. His acknowledgement of the socialisation process of various sub-groups refers to his own continuing allegiance to feminism and how his new privileged status as a man has actually reinforced his identity as a feminist.

I'd say that feminist part never left. It actually got stronger as I realised I was benefiting from masculine privilege, it would piss me off. I cannot begin to tell you the insight I have got into the real world of men because men tell other men a lot of things that are quite shocking about how they view women, so yes it has done nothing but reinforce my feminism.

D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D overrides any unitary identity and speaks of his strong identification with lesbian feminists. This is significant in that, although he contests the self-limiting and regulatory functions of identifications, in acknowledging the importance of the category of "lesbian feminist" he is also paying tribute to the identity politics of the

1980s which challenged mainstream heterosexual thinking, affirming alternative forms of personal and social life:

> I'm still on the Lesbian Artist Network […] I realised how much sadness I'd had from being an outcast from lesbians. I mean I didn't go anywhere, I didn't ask to be excluded so when I am included it means a lot to me, because my primary social group — I wouldn't say they're all lesbians in the sense of how we were thinking what a lesbian is from the 80s to mid 90s or so — but I'd say they are people that are feminists, to me feminism is very important and lesbians are still my favourite people.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

Foucault's (1984) genealogical approach to identities is concerned with how such identities are created in response to specific cultural needs and demands. Aspects of D's identity developed within the context of the gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements which were grounded in identity politics and revolved around the notion of identity as a unitary phenomenon, regardless of whether it was produced by nature or nurture. The idea of a unitary gay identity has been central to evolving gay communities in the 1980s and D acknowledges the political significance of these categories as social markers. At the same time, D moves between the different and sometimes opposing sub-groups of lesbian feminists and transgender communities. This lacks coherence only within the dichotomous heterosexual /homosexual, sex/gender system and opens up the possibility of having more than one identification.

In the main, until the participants discovered the language of transsexualism and transgenderism, they relied on the heteronormative discourse which left them feeling isolated and alone. Even though through transitioning the participants appear to adhere to the binary heteronormative discourse, there are many examples throughout this thesis where gendered and heteronormative constructs collapse against the participants' lived experiences. The participants position themselves in various contradictory discourses where their experiences point to multiple ways of being identified, embodied and having sexual relationships. Yet despite trying to

move away from the binary positioning of gender, D is forced to use binary language due to severe limitations in the ways of being identified and being sexual:

> My sexual orientation? Bisexuality — it's semiotically problematic because it reinforces the binary notion. Trisexuality is too trite and it's also a numerical thing so there isn't a word that describes my sexuality but I would say I'm primarily attracted to people who are assigned female at birth.
> D, FTM, Hermaphrodyke, age 48

D becomes quite deliberate in his naming of what he precisely means and chooses his own self definition. He is attempting to find words that can capture his experience, which is difficult in a language that divides everything into two. J defines herself as lesbian by describing herself as identifying with women, and now as a transitioning woman:

> I suppose I would have to say if anything I'd be a lesbian as I'm still drawn to females or other girls rather than men. I think that stems from an experience when I was younger when I was dressed, going back a few years, and I got a lot of grief from very macho gay men. The feminine gay men were fine as they didn't understand why I wanted to be a woman but they were ok, but the macho men were awful. Maybe that put me off.
> J, MTF, age 62

The participants' experiences point to shifting categories which undermine the idea that gender identity is a predictor of sexual orientation. In fact, sometimes it is these crossings that people find erotic and desirous. As a pre-op transsexual woman, G's sexual orientation seems to be in transition as well as her gender:

> I've never been interested in men, I'm not gay. I've never had any encounters with men at all […] It's getting complicated now. I have a sexual orientation towards women at the moment.
> G, MTF, age 69

239

When asked if she would now define herself as a lesbian because of her recent experience, G replies, "at the moment because I've never had a male". When G identified as a man she says she was not gay as she is not interested in men, yet currently, due to recent a sexual encounter with a woman, defines herself as a lesbian. G's experience is similar to the others because her object choice remains consistent. The data illustrates how sometimes a cross gendered life/ transitioning will involve a change of object choice and sometimes not. Sometimes people change their sexual orientation in response to just falling in love. As the following quotations make clear, T relies on the available contemporary categories to describe her sexual orientation:

> It's pretty confused really I think. I don't really have a sexual relationship so I couldn't really say. I'm with someone and she identifies as being lesbian, she sees me as being like her so we're in a lesbian relationship but I define myself as bisexual.
>
> T, MTF, age 48

Neither G nor T seem convinced by the categories they find themselves in, which points to how influential the binary understanding of sexuality and desire is in the participants' descriptions of their sexual desire and orientation.

In the interviews, my own dependence on using sexual identity categories as a way of asking about desire could be seen as privileging gender to define sexual identity. However, despite this, as these excerpts show, the participants' resistance to normative categories can be seen to create "desire lines" (chapter three) that contest heteronormative assumptions of "straight lines". In this way, the participants' phenomenological lived experiences expose the notion of "orientation" as a way of illustrating the conceptual limits of the heterosexual matrix as a model of identity. K illustrates his struggles with categories and terms in trying to find an identity that fits him:

Because of the way I dressed and presented myself a lot of people assumed I was a lesbian and I hung around with lesbians, so guilty by association anyway. But I'd heard it so many times I started to believe it myself. Plus I couldn't identify with being straight, I could identify with the gay aspect of being a lesbian but I couldn't identify with having a sexual relationship with another woman. So some parts of that lesbian identity I could identify with but not all. So it was bit of a mind fuck I suppose.

K, FTM, age 32

K illustrates the discursive constraints of heteronormativity in describing his experience and the lack of standard definitions of FTM transsexualism at that time. Yet new possibilities were beginning to emerge from the 1970s — thanks to the consolidation of a lesbian-feminist identity — when male-identified female bodies began to differentiate from women-identified bodies (Rubin 2003). This distinction consolidated the emergence of a female-to-male transsexual identity and a new way of conceptualising K's experience:

I didn't know where I was, what I was, just a lot of information and pressure from outside forces that was really influencing who I thought I was and I just didn't know. And it wasn't any clearer until light bulbs went on in my own head and it was like — gay trans man — yes I can identify with that!

K, FTM, age 32

Dozier (2005) reports how many FTMs change sexual orientation after transitioning and that there is an increase in the number of FTMs who, after transitioning, are sexually attracted to gay men. K does not strictly fit into this as he was never attracted to women before transitioning. This raises a confusing point regarding how one describes one's sexual orientation — even if the object choice remains the same after transitioning, the term used to describe it changes. As I have described K's view elsewhere: "It's not about my sexuality, it's about my gender." Here, K finds that gender identity and sexual orientation are entangled as he struggles to define his identity. In order to understand his and the other participants' subjectivities, it is

necessary to explore the conceptual framework that they draw on in their efforts to make sense of and organise their desires, their bodies and their social roles. Normative gender identities are tied to dominant notions of heterosexuality; the categories of "sexuality" and "gender" are problematic if we step outside the heterosexual matrix, particularly when K cannot identify with being a woman, lesbian, or heterosexual. The gendered meaning associated with sexual relationships inevitably situates him as a woman, emphasising the centrality of gender in describing sexual orientation. K illustrates the correlation that society makes between gender role (behaviour, dress) and sexual orientation, and how as the only available way he had of thinking about his experience, this was clearly unsatisfactory.

Perhaps the point only remains unsatisfactory as long as we are using the heteronormative paradigm of thinking about desire. The normalization and naturalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward "the other sex" can be described as following a straight line, with alternative orientations as "acting out of line". In this way, current classification systems are not able to adequately describe the subjective experience of non-heterosexual transgendered desire. This raises the question of whether it is possible to legitimize desires, other than using gender preference, as a basis for constructing alternative identities, communities, and politics (Seidman 1993). It seems that the production of new sexuality and gender identity categories is limited within the binary structures of heterosexual discourse. The complexities of transgendered identification and desire call into question the usefulness of a system that classifies sexual orientation based on anatomy, reflecting society's inability to "imagine" the sexual. This has major implications for transgendered identities, whose sense of self is profoundly undermined if they do not fit into a recognisable category within the social world. Sexual identity in relationships provides a space for creating and validating sex and gender identity because "when we desire someone and it is reciprocated, the positive nature of continuing interaction reaffirms and, possibly for some, confirms their gender identity" (Lewins 1995, 38). Trans people and people with non-heterosexual identities queer the western binaries of body-equals-sex-equals-gender-equals identity (Cromwell 2006).

At the same time as the participants experience physical changes, they make decisions about their identity. Although transsexual and transvestite seem to be the main identities available, the participants' experiences show different identities trying to emerge that are challenging the hegemonic boundaries. Dominant western heteronormative discourse dictates how four aspects of identity — biological body, gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation — should interact with each other, when in fact there is a multitude of possibilities for sexed and gendered identities. Lev (2004) underlines how it is difficult to be something that has no name, while naming calls identity into being. Historical, social and political parameters have restricted what is possible. Although the dominance of the heterosexual matrix is evident in how the participants constitute identity possibilities, these identities can also be seen as strategic in avoiding invisibility and disempowerment. Hence, while their experiences can appear to reinforce heteronormative gender rules, they are also challenging the inclusivity of sex and gender binary categories. In many ways, the participants' experiences tell a story of resistance against heteronormativity through re-figuring the dominant categories of identification shaped through the notion of biological body, gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation. Hansbury's attempt at mapping new identities pushes those parameters, contributing towards the interruption and subversion of the binary gender created by heteronormativity's particular arrangement of Lev's (2004) four aspects of identity.

The participants highlight the importance of context in understanding identity negotiations, namely the interrelationships between cultural, social and economic resources, and how they influence and shape possibilities for transgender living in the U.K. in the early twenty-first century. Through transitioning, the participants struggle to fit into a heteronormative identity that constructs gender as the principal organiser of erotic experience and creates mutually exclusive categories for understanding sexuality. The binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality impose a commonality on the participants' diverse lived experiences. Even "traditional" transsexuals find themselves expanding definitions that depend on biology equals gender equals desire, and rely on their phenomenological lived experience for their

sense of subjectivity. As I have shown here, these subversive identities, although framed by the dominant heteronormative discourse, may contribute to new stories being able to be told and to the construction of new identities. In other words, transgenderism has the potential to deconstruct these four aspects of identity, illustrating the complexity and diverse configurations of identity that are possible when sex and gender are not assumed to be binary opposites. The category of "transgender" affirms the permeability of gendered boundaries and in doing so, it highlights the contextualised and constructed nature of feminine and masculine. I save the last words of these substantive chapters to one of my participants:

> I've often been asked If we didn't live in a western society would I have done what I done and gone through gender reassignment. I really don't know. If we were brought up with more of an open outlook on gender and not just having binary definitions, male and female and that's all there is — there are other societies that have many more names and gender categories than we do. I really don't know. I can't answer that question because it's the society that we're brought up in — you're either male or female, if you don't fit into one, you fit into the other. Now that has probably influenced my decision, but if I lived somewhere else I might not have gone though the mental health problems that I had been caused by society that forced me in a way to do this. I don't know. Folks that opt out, good on them. I don't see why we should have to — I suppose I feel a bit of a hypocrite in saying this — I am in a way adhering to these binary definitions of gender because of what I've done. But folks that reject that, that say I'm not male, not female and a mix of both, then good on you. I wish we had that freedom to do that. Maybe I didn't have the confidence.
> K, FTM, age 32

Chapter 8   Within and Beyond Heteronormativity

8.1 Introduction

This thesis explores how transgender identities are constructed and discursively produced in the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century. In so doing it addresses the relationship between experience and discourse. As this suggests, I explore the use of narrative as a way of constructing experience, emphasising how narratives are linked to particular socio-historical conditions which regulate how sexual and gendered identities are produced. My interest lies in examining the wider cultural conditions that shape and inform the participants' understanding of their sexed body, gender identity and erotic relationships. In this chapter, I build from the analysis presented in the preceding chapters and focus on one of these conditions: namely how heterosexuality has become an organising principle for understanding and experiencing sexual and gendered identities.

In acknowledging the relationship between experience and discourse, the participants' narratives highlight the tension between the genealogical and the phenomenological methods of exploring the term "transgender". The participants highlight how here is little room for thinking about the complexities of sex, gender and sexuality beyond the constraints of the current heterosexual classification systems. This chapter draws on this evidence to illustrate how heteronormative categories and perspectives both influence, and create dissonance in transgendered people. I illustrate the limited conceptual space of heterosexual discourse that depends on binary sexed and gender categories for exploring and understanding relationships for most people, not just transgendered people. In so doing, I challenge the presumed naturalness of heterosexuality and the largely unquestioning acceptance of this category. My interpretation of the data is also an interpretation of the sexed and gendered categories through which the participants have created their identities. In this way, I use their experiences to connect experience and discourse, and demonstrate how for some participants, their experiences have become essentialised and conflated with identity.

Ahmed's (2006, 2) focus on phenomenology as a way of mapping how "we arrive in the places we do" lends itself well to examining how the participants' bodies are sexualised and gendered by how they extend into a heteronormative space. In foregrounding the concept of orientation, Ahmed (2006) draws attention to how bodies get directed in specific ways and how certain lines are drawn that divide and create space. This chapter uses the concept of lines to illustrate how lines are both created by being followed, and are followed by being created (Ahmed 2006, 16).

8.2 Straight lines

In Chapter four, I described Lev's (2004) separation of the four components of human identity in order to describe a particular traditional gender arrangement based on the western sex/gender model — one based on difference, particularly the physical difference between sexes; then gender is mapped onto this. This binary division is built on a series of assumptions and it places sex and gender identity into a heterosexual male/female structure that is deemed "normal" (Lev 2004). In the 1990s, the theoretical concept of heteronormativity became established within gender/feminist/queer studies (Rosenberg 2008), and became known as the term that is used to describe the social norm of heterosexuality which has become embodied and is lived without question.

8.2.1 "Felt" gender

Chapter four explored situations where participants' personal experience of biological sex, gender identity and gender role is not congruent with dominant heteronormative categories and assumptions. The data was organised into three main areas where dissonance is experienced between gender identity and biological sexed body, uncertainty regarding biological body, and between gender role and identity. In sum, the participants' stories support the notion that gender is an internal phenomenological "felt" experience in their lives. In particular, the notion of an embodied gender begins to emerge, which the literature explores as a significant contribution to contemporary trans theory — a discourse which promotes the

phenomenological lived experience as a way of returning subjectivity to transgendered people. "Felt" gender is not to be confused with assuming gender is an essential reality that is a "given" and cannot be changed.

Penrose (1995) explores the implications of promoting certain categories as essential to human beings. She argues that while the processes of constructing categories may be essential, the categories themselves are not. This important distinction means that no categories — including those that have been constructed as natural — are indispensable or fixed. Gender is one of the most important categories to be theorised in the twentieth century specifically relating to the social aspects of sexed identity, and is now a major designator of social status. Gender has become a way of marking and defining sexed human life and as long as gender continues to be perceived as essential to humans, people will continue to behave in ways that seem to "prove" that gender is essential. Once people believe that some things are natural, it is easy to find evidence that seems to provide unequivocal support for this belief through every day observation and experience. For instance, "biological, psychological and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders. Seeing two genders leads to the 'discovery' of biological, psychological and social differences" (Kessler & McKenna 1978, 163). In other words we can become selective in seeking out information that confirms naturalness, tending to "see what we believe", denying gender patterns that may be different from our own cultural experience (Helliwell 2007, 100). When the category of "gender" is assumed to be an essential reality, we fail to see how it has been created, how it becomes "natural", and how these qualities are constantly reified. This is clearly highlighted in the sexual and gender discourse of heterosexuality which is constructed and perceived *as* essential to human beings and to the organisation of society. In sum, claiming that gender *feels* natural is not the same as claiming it *is* natural (Salamon 2006).

Having said this, it is important to stress that my thesis is not concerned with engaging in the essentialist/constructionist debate on whether sex and gender are innate or sociological categories. Instead my aim is to illustrate the significance and influence of cultural and collective processes on *how* the participants understand and experience their identity. Identity categories are constructed within discourse that is created differently in different socio-historical contexts. Fuss (1989, 109) underlines

that the greatest contribution social constructionists have made to the theory of homosexuality is their collective subversion of the traditional, legal and sociological approaches to gay identities which begin with the question: "is homosexuality innate or acquired?" Their redirection away from this question has enabled sexuality and gender studies to move out from the realm of ontology and into the realm of discursive formations, asking different questions, such as how identities are produced.

A major source of contention within theories of transgender identity is summed up by an important tension between postmodern and relational psychoanalytic theories of identity over whether there is anything "core" about identity. This tension is epitomised by the differences between two major gender theorists: first there is Stoller's (1968) idea that there is an innate and immutable core gender identity established by the age of 18 months; then there is Butler's (1999) work which contests the traditional categories of identities of sex, sexuality and gender by asking questions about how they were created and how they have come to be seen as core and natural. Layton (2002) expresses concern at the extent to which postmodern theories of identity question the very categories that structure "identity", categories that serve as psychological and relational anchors. Whilst acknowledging the hierarchical and limiting nature of identity categories, Layton (2002, 304) argues that "core" need not mean "innate", but "something internal that recognisably persists even while it may continuously and subtly alter". Far from being an essentialist concept, this core identity can be seen to be produced by western psychoanalytic theories and practices. The relational theorists, Chodorow (1995), Frosh (1994), and Benjamin (1997) underline that relational and postmodern theories need not be mutually exclusive: the cultural is psychologically constructed, and the psychological is cultural. In other words, as Dimen & Goldner (2002, xviii) point out, "a paradox of gender is that while it is not an identity or essence to be found at the core of the person, it still constitutes a core experience of identity". In this way, gender can be conceptualised as a socially and psychologically meaningful term that produces a "gender-identity experience" (Dimen 2002, 57) as opposed to placing it in either essentialism or constructionism.

My own position on the notion of identity is informed by my background as a psychotherapist that bears witness to the need for an understanding of ourselves as stable subjects with a coherent sense of self in our particular cultural context. The thought of not having a stable gender identity is a frightening thought for many, as being categorised as a man or a woman is a central point of reference. I find Layton's (2002) notion that "core" need not mean "innate" is a helpful one, since it supports the reality that for the participants, gender appears to be a core experience that grounds their identities without naturalising or fixing them. Equally helpful, is Benjamin's (2002) distinction between identity and identification. While she critiques the reification of identity as a thing, Benjamin (2002, 183) argues for the usefulness of identification in theorizing gender describing "identification as an internal psychic process […] that is organised by discursive systems rather than by innate, presocial imperatives of the psyche".

As I listened to what appeared to be mainly essentialist narratives, I reflected on the discursive nature of "experience", and the cultural matrix that produces sex and gender as essential and innate experiences. It does seem then that the study of experience must call into question its originary status in historical explanation (Scott 1992, 37). The following section explains the participants' experiences in the context of the heterosexual matrix.

8.2.2 Heteronormativity

The identity categories of "sex", "gender" and "sexual orientation" are central to people's description of their identity. The early sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century studied sexual and gender diversity which laid the groundwork in establishing normative opposing gender and sexed distinctions based on a dualistically opposed sex/gender system. These historical and cultural conditions had a profound and long lasting impact on how heterosexuality emerged as a dominant discourse for how people organised their sexual and gendered identities. Katz's (1995) exploration of the concept of heterosexuality as a twentieth century creation describes how Freud's (1905) theory of the oedipal complex both relies on and creates the institution of heterosexuality. It is this particular

matrix — with its arrangement of gender, sex and desire — that influences the way people experience and think about their sexual and gendered identities.

The oedipal complex resides in different-sex desire, subsequently leading to a heteronormative theory of dichotomous gender development; it is a cornerstone of twentieth century psychological theories. Freud theorised that gender identity emerges when children identify with their same sex parent. So, for example, as a woman I must identify with my mother and desire my father. My healthy gender development depends, according to Freud, on me disidentifying from the "other gender" which then helps me develop a normative heterosexual identity. This is described as heteronormative, where difference or otherness is a condition of sexual desire. The oedipal complex is seen to structure the direction of identification and desire, in that identification is what one would *like to be*, and desire is what one would *like to have*, but one cannot identify with and desire the same object. In this way, the concepts of identification and desire are gendered and heterosexualised (Fuss 1993). The two genders are seen as naturalised and linked to biological sex. In western society, sex is seen to cause gender which is seen to cause desire. This means that belonging to the "female sex" dictates that one identifies a "feminine" woman as a woman who desires men. This heterosexual matrix is unconsciously lived out to the extent that it is seen as the "natural" way to see and be in the world (Rubin 1975).

The oedipal complex has been hugely influential in developing an associated heteronormative theory of sex and gender development where difference or otherness is a condition of sexual desire. Richardson (1996, 3) underlines how the privileging of heterosexual relations as the bedrock of social relations has reinforced the idea that "heterosexuality is the original blueprint for interpersonal relations". As such, heterosexual identities remain unremarkable, escaping critical scrutiny (Yep 2003, 29). Society uncritically incorporates and maintains "heterosexuality" as an unchanging, unquestioning, ahistorical idea, instead of seeing it as it actually is — one particular arrangement of the sexes and their pleasure. In this way, heterosexuality is re-produced as natural, rather than normative.

Ahmed's (2006) notion of orientation highlights how most of the participants tried to "straighten" any lived experiences that did not fit into the heteronormative

organisation of sexed and gendered categories. The participants' internal dissonance clearly illustrates a deviation from the straight line they feel they are "naturally" meant to follow; their "felt" experience of gender is incongruent with the external identity that society has assigned them. Cross-dressing, in particular, provides the participants with a way to "be" and "express" who they really are. Cross-dressing helps them to relax and gain confidence, even though most of them cross-dress in secret as they risk threat and ridicule. Some of the participants express the unfairness of this, aware of the socialisation processes at work to bring biological body, gender identity and gender role into alignment. Nevertheless, achieving social validation is important to most of the participants and identities are negotiated. In order to produce a credible gender identity they work on "matching up" gender identity with gender role. Although they do not necessarily name these societal expectations as heteronormative, their struggles with dissonance point to them challenging the binary boundaries even though they try to operate within them. The data show how the focus on lived experiences exposes the "straight lines" of the heterosexual matrix as well as how the participants twist and expand the lines.

8.2.3 Abject bodies

Chapter four described different decisions that are taken when bodily identities challenge the heteronormative sex/gender binary. Two different narratives emerge that illustrate the opposing discourses — traditional medical transsexual and postmodern queer — whereby the former seeks a "true" self, and the latter wishes to stay with uncertainty and confusion. Participants' stories are also stories of time and location within different cultures that expose them to different narratives. The older self-identified transsexual participants are transitioning towards gender stability; those who are younger and more familiar with trans scholarship, create new identity categories; one in particular, is content to situate himself in "perpetual transition".

Butler (2001) discusses how certain bodies matter less than others by not conforming to the regulatory norms of society and are often exiled to the margins of society. Butler (2001) describes this as a discursive process that provides an "outside" against which to constitute normative bodies. This then strengthens the

parameters of the normative heterosexual matrix, defining those within it as intelligible human beings. Warner (1993, xxvi) emphasises the profound effects of this process of normalisation which he calls "the site of violence", not just for transgendered people but for people inside and outside its boundaries. Societal insistence that bodies conform to the male/female paradigm is clearly demonstrated in the data as some participants describe their experiences of atypical sexed bodies. The transgendered body and intersexed body are bodies that do not receive the cultural affirmation that normative bodies do, and noticeably, these distinctions are made within a matrix of power.

Butler (1993) highlights how the materiality of the body is controlled by normalising practices such as heteronormativity, and how this leads to some bodies not being constituted as valuable. Certainly the body has become more significant in contemporary culture as a result of changes in medical technology, and this has raised major philosophical and ethical issues about normative conditions of what constitutes a human being in the social world. The body cannot be separated from historical and sociological accounts of sexed and gendered identity which illustrate how the individual is both created by society, and creates society. Volcano (2009) argues that the key issues facing humanity are fear of difference, compulsory heterosexuality and gendered normativity, with membership in top tiers of society determined by how well you perform gender, sexuality, class, able-bodiedness and race. Transgendered and intersexed people certainly complicate and challenge essentialist notions of fixed bodies, and transgendered people have become political sites of cultural struggle. Phenomenology's emphasis on "lived experience" has gained momentum in the transgender movement as it returns agency to transgendered subjects and legitimises trans bodies. The participants point to a different understanding of what bodies mean, confounding simplistic ideas of biological determinism and destabilising the categories of "gender" and "sex". In this way, the experiential body can become a locus of resistance to normalising discourse because it is the possibility of an unpredictable event (Oksala 2004).

8.3 Story lines

It is understandable that the main narratives that most of the participants learn to tell are those that facilitate clear-cut gender divisions, reflecting the social and political conditions of the twentieth and early twenty-first century. Although the participants' experiences tell different stories about cultural norms, mental health, community representation, the political and the psychological, they are discursive productions of knowledge of the self (Scott 1992). In this way, experience and discourse cannot be separated. This is reflected in the data as the participants describe their struggle with their personal dissonance according to the binary heteronormative discourse. Chapter five described their search for professional help and support with their experiences of dissonance; and how they are met with the hegemonic power of heteronormativity and its understanding of identity and desire as the doctors and counsellors struggle to understand their experiences. For most of the participants, these social conditions are experienced as oppressive cultural norms. They clearly state that mental health issues arise from these norms, as opposed to stemming from their gender identity.

The theme of self esteem is central to how participants develop identities and this depends to a large extent on how open and visible they can become in society. This is illustrated in how they manage to move out from their inner secret world into the external world. Some of them gain enormous support from self-help groups where they can acknowledge their history within the trans community. In fact, there is clear evidence of how the subcultural norms of some self-help groups regulate transgendered identities, with normative narratives emerging in order to belong. McWhorter (1999) underlines how the most persistent disagreements between essentialists and constructionists are highlighted around the relationship between community and identity. In the main, identity comes first for essentialists and serves as a basis in forming community. For many constructionists, community comes first and serves as a basis in forming identity. The participants tell stories that are both essentialist and constructionist and, in particular, illustrate how new trans identities prove to be challenging for traditional essentialist identity groups based on the hetero/homo, man/woman binary. This underlines how heteronormative binary sex

and gendered categories remain dominant social forces in constructing alternative identities.

8.3.1 Who can I become?

This section points to the limitations of heterosexual discourse in creating new kinds of citizenship, and acknowledges gradual legislative changes that are taking place in the U.K. One of the questions that began to emerge for me in the course of my work on trans identities and experiences was one posited by Butler (2004a, 58) when she cited the laws of intelligibility by which a human being emerges: "Who can I become in such a world where the meanings and the limits of the subject are set out in advance for me?". Butler (2004a) raises important points as to what counts as a person and what the conditions and norms are that enable someone to qualify as a coherent and real citizen. It can be argued that heterosexuality is almost seen as a prerequisite for the traditional model of citizenship, if we view this concept as linked to political, civil and social rights. In the UK, homosexuality and deviant sexualities are seen as threatening to the nuclear heterosexual family which has been constructed as a unifying principle and focal point for holding together a sense of social order. This has huge implications for how psyches are structured and the subsequent myths and norms that have been accepted unconsciously. These normalisation processes result in written laws and moral codes whereby, in some countries and cultures, it is explicitly against the law to be anything other than heterosexual.

Undoubtedly, changes have been taking place in the UK in that there have been significant shifts in relation to the citizenship rights of sexual minorities. Concannon (2008) examines evolving models of citizenship that are working towards redressing current social policies based on normative discourses. In the early 1970s, the gay liberation movement and the feminist movement raised significant questions about social policies based on heterosexual construction of citizenship. The 1990s saw sexual orientation being included in debates on citizenship and social policy, with changes in legislation taking place in the twenty-first century. Changes include the military ban on homosexuality being lifted in 2000; in 2001 the Sexual Offences Act revised the age of consent; in 2002 the Adoption and Children Act was

passed that allows same-sex couples to adopt jointly in England and Wales; in 2003 Section 28 was repealed; in 2004 the Civil Partnership Act gave same-sex couples the rights and responsibilities similar to those granted by civil marriage; in 2004 the Gender Recognition Act meant that transsexual people can obtain a birth certificate in their acquired gender, marry in their acquired gender, and obtain state benefits and pensions in their acquired gender. These legislative changes are paving the way for new sexual and gender stories to be told, stories that work towards constructing different kinds of citizenship.

There has been increasing recognition that existing models of citizenship are based on heterosexist principles. A considerable body of work is emerging which explores the relationship between different models of citizenship and the intersection of gender and sexuality (Lister 1990; Philips 1991; Walby 1994: Young 1989; Weeks 1998; Phelan 2001; Bell & Binnie 2000; Langdridge 2006). Plummer (1995, 17) coins the phrase "intimate citizenship" to describe a field of stories and communities that produce new kinds of sexual and gendered identities, raising concerns over the rights to choose what we do with our bodies, feelings and relationships. Langdridge (2006) identifies the new stories of sadomasochism as a way of demarcating current and future boundaries for citizenship, drawing on the political philosophy of Ricoeur (1986) and Weeks' (1998) work on sexual citizenship as a way of engaging dialectically with citizenship and transgression. Nevertheless, as much as these emerging stories raise questions regarding the different formations of citizenship in different political and social conditions, my research makes it clear that transgendered people struggle to become intelligible and recognisable human beings within the current theoretical and political discourse of heteronormativity, and within the laws of desire that operate within this discourse. The participants need to be able to put their existence into words and this is difficult in a world that already has the groundwork of heteronormativity well constructed, such that possible categories are already constituted. The social organisation of bodies into two "sexes" is seen as two inflexible categories of "man" and "woman". As I have shown, this division is grounded in the naturalised belief that women are anatomically female and men are anatomically male, and these meanings are deeply entrenched in everyday thinking and talking. In this way, the binary framework of sex and gender

categories systematically and structurally creates two distinct and complimentary categories that are known as heterosexuality.

The participants' descriptions show that the categories of "man" and "woman" do not represent the diversity of the participants' experiences and that there is potential for the categories to be widened, to have different kinds of men and women, or people who are neither. However at the moment, current hegemonic conceptions state that if one is to exist at all, one must be a man or a woman. The formation of an individual's identity requires recognition that the individual exists and, in this way, people are dependent on what is outside of them to reflect back a sense of being. The participants' stories show that the right to claim membership in socially recognised collective identity categories is particularly essential for transgendered people in order to construct sustainable ways of living. The accounts presented in chapter five could be seen to support the more linear narrative in seeking a stable identity and, in the process, giving up a uniqueness of the individual in order to belong to a collective transgender identity. At the very least, the essentialising stories told by the participants help to unite the past and the present into a stable identity which brings a clarity and understanding as to why they have suffered mental and emotional health issues. The need for collective identity should never be underestimated since it is the territory that delivers such things as self-confidence and citizenship that go towards making a "livable life" (Butler 2004a, 8). Many of the participants, having been saddled with feeling uncomfortably different and abnormal, long to belong to a collective of people with similar experiences. In fact, often the more heterogeneous the collective discourse, the more confident their identity becomes. Being part of an established and recognised group in society is an important aspect of developing self-esteem and an identity, but the development of possible new sex and gender identities is limited by the historical, social and political parameters of the heterosexual paradigm. Heterosexuality is a potent sign and it influences how we live our lives, how we learn and how we see desire, and this is why it is so difficult to destabilise. This process of heterosexuality becoming *the* standard for legitimate social, cultural and sexual arrangements is known as heteronormativity (Yep 2003). The normalisation of heterosexuality has created a natural and given category, unmarked as a ubiquitous and invisible force permeating

all aspects of social life (Warner 2002). In other words, heterosexuality has become a social phenomenon and the norm by which all identities and practices are defined against.

We rarely study the norm or the social process of normalisation — it is easier to probe and study the abnormal and the deviant, hence the many studies and research projects on transvestites, transsexuals, gays and lesbians. Yet due to the relational nature of the homo/heterosexual binary, heterosexuality as a stable category depends on those very deviants to uphold its superiority and dominance. As such, heterosexuality is not an independent and fixed category but rather, a subservient and unstable construct dependent on constant affirmation (Yep 2003). Theoretically, the notion of destabilising the binary structure of heterosexuality is exciting. In my lived experience, as noted in the data chapters, I struggled with stepping out of the binary categories.

8.3.2 Identifications

Chapters six and seven explored the transitioning process of passing and self-identification that the participants undertake in constructing new identities. Gender transitions reveal various norms of recognition that produce and sustain our viability as human (Butler 2004a). This process illustrates how we make judgements based on how we read the embodiment of others. The participants worry about being visible as transgendered in public places, particularly toilets, where visibility could be dangerous. Being visible as a man or woman is a safety issue for most of the participants and, in toilets, the policing of gender boundaries reinforces limitations on visible diversity. Having said this, some of the participants negotiate their visibility and choose to educate the public, but this depends on different social contexts and how involved they may be with the transgendered community. Passing as non-transgendered is a goal for most of the participants, particularly passing "through" transsexual identity to a passing "as" the opposite sex. It could be argued that in trying to align their bodies to their internal identities, transgendered people are buying into this hegemonic link between bodies and gender. At the same time, it can be argued that it is difficult to discuss the notion of passing without

recourse to the only viable categories of the time — "man" and "woman" — and in order to achieve intersubjective recognition, it is necessary to be seen as belonging to either one or the other. Nevertheless, the participants' experiences suggest that passing is neither a reifying of gender norms nor a subversive act, but both, as well as a survival strategy.

Notwithstanding the ethical questions that are raised concerning the power of normative conditions on the meaning of personhood, a recent email discussion with Judith Halberstam led me to reflect on the more positive and creative aspects of oppression. Halberstam (2009) challenges Butler's (2004a) term "unlivable" and argues that there seems to be a presumption that oppression always makes lives "unlivable", when, in fact, people craft all kinds of alternatives. Elliot (2009) cites Halberstam's (2006) argument that remaining "unintelligible" is a way to resist incorporation by the hegemonic gender order.

The participants' resourcefulness and their ability to create new identities are evident in their stories, as well as the challenge to the historical legacy of particular hegemonic categories. The participants' stories illustrate how it is the human mind, not nature, which creates categories (Herdt 1994a). The literature traces the shifts in 1970s from feminist identity politics to the influence of postmodernism on feminist theorising with its emphasis on the destabilisation of sexual and gender categories. This shift opens up new ways of thinking about identities and practices outwith binary sex and gender ideology, with some people advocating gender diversity as a part of human social life, instead of being seen as pathology. This created the conditions for the emergence of the identity category of "transgender" in the late twentieth century that opened up a middle ground, previously inaccessible within the medically-based transsexual model, making available a range of transgender identities. As Giddens (1991, 76) points out in his discussion on the reflexivity of the self "we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves".

The data show how the participants' self-identities developed against the backdrop of changing circumstances of social life and culture where new categories were being created. This is evident in some of the contemporary self-identities that the participants use such as trans man, trans woman, trans lesbian, genderqueer, and in their different choices about what to do with their bodies and identities. Salamon

(2005) draws attention to how Hansbury's (2005) subgroups of woodworkers, trans men, and genderqueers gain their meaning and coherence only in relation to each other, relying on the notion of a spectrum of identities and raising questions about how identity is constructed. Hansbury (2005) acknowledges the dangers of such categories which can presume that there is such a thing as "identity", yet he argues for those same categories as a way of making transgendered people visible. Hansbury (2005) uses the idea of woodworkers, transmen and genderqueers loosely, providing a way of thinking about and understanding the essentialised constructions of self. The participants are witness to the fact that the categories are not used consistently and synonymously with Hansbury's (2005) division of age and class, but more to do with life context. I do not intend to make generalisations regarding the correlation between age, socio-economic status and transgender experience as they do not account for the variation in the different transition choices that the participants make. For example, chapter seven underlined how the participants' descriptions of how they identified themselves were conflated with the discourse and language available at that time, and their identities changed according to time and location span. In this way, neither emphasis on stability nor fluidity can completely account for the ongoing experiences and practices of transgender identity construction (Davis 2009).

8.4 Queering desires

The participants' stories suggest that the desires of transgendered people to be a different sex or gender force them to move beyond categorised notions of being, and to move forward into alternative ways of being and belonging. Their longing bypasses the constriction of individualised identities while still relying on the only discourse they know — the hegemonic discourse of the heterosexual matrix. Examples of this are given as the participants create new terminology ("trans") while still being forced to draw on the limited language of the binary categories ("woman"). The participants' experiences expose the struggle that transgendered people have with creating new identities within the normative heterosexual matrix, as they attempt to make sense of their developing identities. Chapter seven described how some of the participants attempt to redefine the binary relationship between

sexuality and gender, and others try to expand current categories ("lesbian" and "woman"). The participants' experiences point to multiple ways of being identified and embodied, with them making different decisions about body modification. These decisions are based on how their sex lives will be affected, whether the participants want to be gender ambiguous, and inadequate surgical procedures.

In particular, it is in the area of sexuality that the participants' experiences problematise the hegemonic assumption that gender preference defines sexual orientation. The heteronormative conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation produces a system where desire is labelled and shaped by identity categories. However, the complexities of transgendered identifications reveal the limitations of the binary structures that form heteronormative categories of "sex" and "gender" in which desire is directed at the "opposite sex". The naturalization of heterosexuality presumes that there is a straight line from one sex to the other sex, and that "this line of desire" is "in line" with one's sex (Ahmed 2006, 71). Engaging with alternative ways of thinking about desire means questioning the predominant heterosexual discourse, and examining the language that we employ to understand the concepts of sex, gender and sexual orientation. The data show that transgender identities illustrate the need for a language that represents the plural identities that are subsumed under the category of "transgender", whilst identifying with the diverse categories within this. To generalise the term "transgender" would to be to miss out on the opportunity it provides to examine how the institution of heterosexuality shapes our thinking about the erotic, and how it polices the boundaries of desire.

It is worth questioning whether Freud's "normal" negotiation of the oedipal complex is ever achieved. The participants testify to how fluid desire is, and how it flows in many directions, breaking up all kinds of imposed moral codes. In Freudian terms, we can — at any point in life — still be at the mercy of the pre-oedipal state of "polymorphous perversity", a time when neither we nor the objects of our desire were defined through sexual difference; a time before our gendered fate was sealed by strong embedded cultural messages. If Freud's theory that all children are polymorphously perverse is to be believed, it is difficult to see how these multitudinous, undifferentiated desires get so narrowly channelled into adult procreative heterosexuality. His theory of identity does not allow for diverse

identifications and contradictions, thus the free play of polymorphous perversities is constrained within the dominant cultural heterosexual matrix. Freud's theory of development suggests that heterosexuals are made, not born, which is, as I have already noted, actually a very subversive idea (Katz 1995). In this way "becoming straight" can be described as a social constructionist view of sexual orientation rather than an essentialist one (Jagose 1996, cited in Ahmed 2006, 79).

The category of "transgender" has the potential to question what is possible in the arena of sexuality and gender, particularly when the body is not seen as a natural and fixed fact. Even the medical transsexual narrative questions the notion that our anatomy is fixed and essentialist. It is possible to argue that the very category of "transgender" in itself queers the heterosexual matrix, resulting in an opportunity to critique gender and sex normativity, which my research undertakes to explore. In other words, transgender has the potential to re-conceptualise the organisation of sexed and gendered knowledge traditionally created by heterosexual discourse. Importantly, this revelatory and liberating capacity of transgender research should not be confused with setting up transgendered people as objects of fascination. Instead, their experiences simply make it easier to think about the limitations of heterosexual ideology and to expose the contradictions and subversions that most human beings experience. Heterosexuality needs to be deconstructed and the discourse reformulated if the lived experiences and aspirations of most people, not only transgendered people, are to be heard and accommodated.

8.4.1 Straying off the lines

> Becoming is what enables a trait, a line, an orientation, an event to be
> released from the system, series, organism, or object which may have the
> effect of transforming the whole, making it no longer function singularly. It is
> an encounter between bodies, which releases something from each, and in the
> process, makes real virtuality, a series of enabling and transforming
> possibilities (Grosz 1995, 134).

The participants' stories demonstrate how heterosexuality is the only premise available for the analysis of sexuality and gender identity. This, more often than not, results in the participants using the normative categorisation of body parts and desires to shape their self-perception. The methodology chapter drew attention to Ahmed's (2006) notion of how perception depends on where we are located, which influences how bodies extend into space and become "orientated" in some ways rather than others. Ahmed (2006, 70) describes how the normalisation and naturalization of heterosexuality as an orientation towards "the other sex" can be redescribed in terms of following a "straight line". Compulsory heterosexuality diminishes the very capacity of bodies to stray off the straight line (Ahmed 2006). In this way, Ahmed's exploration of how bodies are situated in space and time brings into sharp focus how desires are organised and shaped by identity categories.

The research shows how the complexities of transgendered identifications and desires call into question the usefulness of compulsory heterosexuality in understanding transgender experiences. Freud's notion that identification and desire are mutually exclusive, regulates and maintains the social ordering of sexual and gendered identities by keeping them "in line". This dominant mode of heterosexual erotic representation produces an asymmetric internal structure that can be thought of as a series of opposing qualities that are mapped onto male and female (Hardy 2004). Whilst most of the participants tell an essentialist story of the discovery of one's true identity, I argue that all have more complex unstable stories that have been subsumed within the more popular larger narratives. The participants' experiences show how transgendered identifications clearly question the correlation between biological sex, gender identity, gender or sex roles, sexual object choice and sexual identity. It is this system and the denial of any other constructions of gender which is problematic (MacCowan 1992). Some of the participants struggle with constructing new identities when the categories of "sexuality" and "gender" are limited to the binary heterosexual discourse. As I have shown, contradictions are produced by self-identifications, particularly when the participants describe their "sexual orientation" during the process of transitioning. This was illustrated in chapter seven when, particularly as a result of transitioning, the notion of unitary identity collapses,

and the participants problematise the notion of gender identity as a valid predictor of sexual orientation.

The participants' stories show how heterosexual discourse's insistence on organising desires into identity categories does not account for the complexity and fluidity of desires that underpin people's lives. At the same time, my work shows how the insistence on transgendered identifications and desires problematises the relationship between gender and sexuality categories by crossing existing categories. Transgendered identities undermine the dualistic opposition argument of fluidity or stability, and tell a story of hegemony, resistance and subversion. This means also staying alert to the binary divisions of flexibility or rigidity (Halberstam 2005, 21). Although trans theory serves to prove the existence of transsubjectivity, while queer theory works to dismantle all identity categories, they do not contradict one another. Instead, they each emphasise different but related aspects of sexed and gendered reality and, when used together, can create a dialogue and produce different kinds of narratives that read between the straight lines of heteronormativity.

8.4.2 Desire lines

David Valentine (2006), notes how the troubling nature of desire-beyond-identity has received little attention, and argues for a focus on erotic desire as a way of understanding experiences and desires that is not constrained by identity categories. Without getting into the definition of desire, he proposes simply listening to what people have to say about their desires without trying to categorise them. In this way, people's lived experiences can be heard, whilst highlighting how their desires are shaped by the categories and discourses of their time.

Probyn's (1996, 14) exploration of the nature and culture of belongings asks where desire is going, rather than where it comes from and what it means. Probyn (1996) describes desire as a "current that short-circuits the categorical order of things" which is a refreshing change from the psychoanalytic framework of thinking about desire where "…[…] the moment lack is reintroduced into desire, all of desiring production is crushed, reduced to being no more than the production of fantasy…." (Grossberg 1992, 49-51). Probyn (1996, 62) writes of desire as a force

that creates and destroys, that aims to "scramble the subjective, the sexual, the social". Probyn (1996) suggests that desire is a method of doing things and a mode of communication and connection between things which need not always be reduced to the inner symbolic meaning of things. This could be seen as comparable with Ahmed's (2006) metaphor of desire lines as unofficial paths formed by people following their desires.

My own desire took me on a search through architectural web pages, curious for more information regarding desire lines. Building on Ahmed's (2006) notion of desire lines as unofficial paths, the conventional paths laid down by architects and designers can be seen as the heterosexual official path. As I looked at images on the websites, I noticed that desire lines were not straight, and were produced by people who commonly desired and created a better way to reach their destination (Gershbein 2008). According to one interpretation, my participants are following a conventional path in trying to adhere to binary identities. Alternatively, their behaviour can also be interpreted as them creating an unconventional path by not colluding with the heteronormative belief that biology is destiny. In other words, desire lines are being created, not by conventional design, but through the participants' lived experiences that point the way to new pathways/discourses and identities. As this suggests, there is a need for more research on the subject of sexual desire in transgendered people; this should include questions on sexual desire between transgendered people, both those that identify as transgendered and those who do not. This will contribute to new discourses on desire and the complex negotiations undertaken by transgendered people in establishing their sexual subjectivity (Sanger 2008a 2008b; Hines 2006).

In the main, the participants' descriptions demonstrate contradiction: the power of regulatory frameworks is reasserted at the same time as these frameworks are bent and expanded to incorporate new configurations. All our definitions of sex, gender and desire rely on the institution of heterosexuality and this shapes our thinking about eroticism. Stein's (1998, 255) perspective is similar to Probyn's (1996) reflections on eroticism, defying interpretations and theoretical meanings when she describes eroticism as a way "for carrying us beyond the toll of our separate individuality: it undoes us". Similarly, George Bataille (1986) says that eros always involves a transgression of some kind. Moore (1998) reminds us that this

transgression need not be a literal one — it may be more a psychological transgression which entices us into new worlds, breaking through current modes and codes of identities and behaviours.

Instead of following paths that are created through unfolding desires, we often take the paths that are laid out and designed for us and those paths are mediated by the limitations of the design. This thesis has aimed to make more visible both the heteronormative design in western society and the range of desire lines that are currently being created by transgendered people's lived experiences.

Chapter 9 Queer Reflections

This thesis has considered empirically how the socio-historical context of the early twenty-first century shapes and informs transgendered people's experiences and identities. A key focus of my study has been to examine the complex discursive processes by which experiences and identities are produced and resisted, through an analysis of interviews with self-identified transgendered people. The participants' descriptions point to the dominant influence of hegemonic heterosexuality in producing normative accounts of sex, gender and sexuality. The participants' stories showed how the complexities of transgendered identifications and desires call into question the usefulness of compulsory heterosexuality in understanding their experiences. At the same time, the participants' stories showed how transgendered identifications and desires problematise the relationship between categories of "gender" and "sexuality" by crossing existing categories. This thesis both exposes the power of the heterosexual matrix and the impact that this matrix — especially its constitutive binaries— has on transgendered people. This is a manifestation of how naturalised and deeply embedded the heterosexual matrix is. Through analysing the participants' experiences, I have looked at how the heterosexual matrix constructs and reifies sets of binaries (sex, gender, sexuality) that limit the participants' experiences of their bodies, desires and identities.

To build on this argument, the thesis began with a review of the literature which showed what the heterosexual matrix is, how it came to be, and how incredibly recent it is. I did this by tracing the trajectory of its development through medicalised and psychological approaches which explored the historical and cultural conditions within which sexed and gendered identities are constructed. This illustrated how discourses change over time, resulting in significant social and political shifts in the way that sexed and gendered identities are discursively produced. Most theoretical scholarship has underplayed the dominance of the heterosexual matrix as the source of sex and gender categorisation. In contrast, I argued that it is not enough to continue research into sexed and gendered identities without critically questioning the dominant influence of hegemonic heterosexuality in producing normative accounts of sex, gender and sexuality. In the process, I have

demonstrated how the categories of "transsexual" and "transvestite" in particular, have been shaped by the heterosexual matrix. This set the context for the remainder of this thesis.

If I have taken time claiming authority in my thesis, this is partly due to confusions regarding which discipline to be located in. Often feeling homeless, I roamed across disciplines of sociology, anthropology, sexuality and gender studies, trans studies, psychology and psychotherapy. Using this experience as part of my reflexive accounting lends itself to making parallel connections with the lived experiences of transgendered people — wondering where to belong and what I would have to do to fit in. These feelings and experiences have proved invaluable in staying engaged with the phenomenological reflexive process.

In chapter three I described the theoretical and conceptual resources that informed the methodology of this study. Most importantly, I explained why a phenomenological emphasis was of fundamental relevance to my work. This focuses on the body's subjective lived experience of the world and how categories are meaningful only in relation to phenomena and, in this case, heteronormative space. I drew on Ahmed's (2006) work of combining phenomenology and queer studies as a way of thinking about what it means for bodies to be situated in space and time; with a particular focus on the notion of "orientation" as a way of revealing how sexual and gendered identities get "orientated" depending on what is already available to us. In this way, my research methods were designed to explore the ways in which experiences and discourses can be understood as mutually constitutive. I did this by exploring how narratives are linked to socio-historical conditions that regulate how experience is constructed, and by drawing on postmodern thought and psychological knowledge to illustrate the relational and contextual aspect of how knowledge is constructed. A second key element of chapter three was a consideration of issues of reflexivity and positionality in my work. This is particularly important given my professional background and the personal nature of the research for both myself and the participants.

The substantive chapters of this thesis — chapters four to seven — explored the kinds of stories the participants tell, which reflect the discourses available in the wider social world and the various identity possibilities that these discourses permit.

They are stories of both conforming to, and resisting, heteronormative accounts of sex, gender and sexuality; beginning with their early experiences of dissonance through transitioning to their various chosen new identities. Each of these "phases" of experience forms the focus of a separate chapter, but I caution at the outset about mistaking this analytical tool for discrete and separate phases in practice.

Chapter four explored the experiences of dissonance between mind and body which exposed the fundamental problems with the binaries of the heterosexual matrix. The fact that most people attempt to address this dissonance by bringing their mind and body into an accordance that is advocated by the heterosexual matrix is a manifestation of this power. Instead of saying there is something wrong with the matrix, transgendered people tend to assume that there is something wrong with them. This leads to the participants searching for ways of making sense of their experiences and chapter five looked at the range of ways in which they tried to do this through the "storied" narrative which helped the participants create a sense of self and identity. This chapter drew on the process of "coming out" to outline a trajectory of experiences which is by no means linear. This reflects the significance of cultural resources available to the participants finding support for their new identities, which is varied depending on the contextual time and location. Whether it be through the medical profession or self-help groups, the participants found that the main identities available which could help make sense of their experiences were confined to transvestite and transsexual. This is because these categories have been constructed as ways of allowing difference to be reconfigured according to the heterosexual matrix. Yet some of the participants introduced the possibilities for new stories to be told that suggest new ways of thinking of sex and gender identities and desire that go beyond the limiting categories of the past. Hence whilst there are similarities in their stories, there are also significant differences depending on the kind of identities that the participants are constructing. Chapter six explored the notion of transitioning which illustrates the different kinds of body modification that is bound up with changing self-identity. This chapter also described the use of strategic identity which is taken up as the participants negotiate their identities in public spaces. Even the transsexual medical narrative can be seen as a strategic position in order to gain access to the benefits and status achieved. In this way, the

participants' practices of "passing" and disclosure have personal and social implications for them and depend on issues of safety. Their stories highlight the profound fear of social punishment that can follow when the heteronormative binary order is threatened and the norms of recognition are called into question. Their strategic and negotiated identifications can be seen as rooted in attempts to achieve social validation. Chapter seven continued with the process of transitioning which tells a story of both reifying and resisting the inclusivity of heteronormative sex and gender binaries. Whilst the participants generally show subjective attachments to identity and a sexed or gendered location, they are not merely stories of adaptation and normalisation. The participants' stories point to a wider range of diverse stories in the making which expose the limitations of the heteronormative order. I acknowledge that my analysis is culturally located and, consequently, there are transgender experiences and identities that are not represented within the study, and to which my conclusions would not apply. Undoubtedly this might further complicate my analysis and indeed point in different directions.

In conclusion, my research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting how the narratives of transgendered people illustrate how gender and sex identity is a relational process, whereby subjective understandings are developed within social contexts (Hines 2007a). The participants' identities are defined as historically and contextually constructed through discourse with "shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them" (Weedon 1987, 33). The category of "transgender" is deployed as a strategic and conceptual boundary in order to understand the lived experiences of the participants, and illustrates similarities and differences between categories of transgender experience.

The concept of transgender poses a challenge to the heterosexual matrix which ties sex to gender and gender to desire. The heterosexual matrix plays a profound role in the lives of transgendered people and in the intellectual attempts to ease the negative consequences of the dissonance that the matrix produces. As much as my research with transgendered people has highlighted the limitations of current gender and sexual labels, my aim was not to set transgendered people up as being held solely responsible for the work in destabilising the heteronormative binary order. One of the outcomes of my research has been to be able to think about and

conceptualise the limitations of heterosexual ideology for many of us – as has been apparent in my Sexuality and Gender training work with students, and psychotherapeutic work with clients which continually exposes the contradictions and subversions that are taking place in people's experiences. Heteronormativity shapes the production of identities, relationships, cultural expressions and institutional practices and its power has consequences well beyond transgender identities (Ward & Schneider 2009). As long as we are using the heteronormative paradigm of thinking about desire, the dichotomous sexual and gender regime creates exclusive categories of sexual and gender identity, leaving no room to imagine liminal identities.

I am not arguing against the categories themselves as we need them to define and organise how we experience the world. This thesis sets out to challenge the limitations that arise when those categories come to be seen as innate descriptions of experiences rather than tools used to understand experiences. My intent is not to deny the validity of participants' experiences, or indeed abandon binary categories altogether, but can we unravel their main associations and become more aware of how they function within sexual and gender discourses? In this way, conceptualising the emergence of new identities as a discursive event is not to deprive the participants of agency, but to refuse a separation between experience and language (Scott 1992). Unless we examine lived experience within its discursive context, we reproduce rather than contest the heterosexual framework

The literature underlined how the "queering" of disciplines is currently being taken up, for example in sociology (Hines 2006; Valocchi 2005; Hird 2004a), and cultural geographies (Brown & Knopp 2002). However I concur with Langdridge (2007), Moon (2008) and Butler & Byrne (2008) in their criticism of psychology and counselling for their lack of interest in queer psychology. On the basis of my experience as a psychotherapist and trainer in the understanding of sexualities and genders, it seems to me that authors of human sexuality, including medical experts, sexologists and psychotherapists, have been slow to challenge the heterosexist underpinnings of dominant cultural ideologies and practices that pervade their theoretical frameworks and institutions. As my work has shown, there are good reasons for attempting to dismantle heteronormative sexual and gendered identity

construction, and for challenging the institutions that reify and perpetuate the hugely influential mind/body dualism of western thought that propels and compels people to divide themselves into oppositional gender identities. These processes require, in turn, the examination of how heterosexual discourse constitutes a polarity between "being" and "wanting" — Freud's (1905) legacy of splitting identification and desire. Understanding how heterosexual discourse promotes a relationship of opposites which is understood culturally as the "eroticisation of difference" (Frommer 2000, 193), is a pre-requisite to discrediting this discourse and moving beyond it.

The adjective "queering" is a useful way of grounding and bringing to life the reality of how "queer" can be manifested in everyday life. Halperin (2003, 342) makes the point that queer theory, being a theory instead of a discipline, can be incorporated into established disciplines in order to advance the practice of their disciplines by "queering" them. Drawing from his teaching experience, Halperin (2003, 343) draws a distinction between a survey of canonical queer theory and "queering" in its capacity "to startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought about". This means challenging heteronormative assumptions about the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. Queer theorisations do not seek to redefine "open" categories but to contest the existence of such boundaries and divisions (Browne 2008).

So how do we do it? I am aware of how easy it is to suggest change but much harder to figure out ways of making such changes in practice. One of the ways I try to address this change is in my teaching work where there is a large experiential component and an emphasis on phenomenological experience which is examined within its discursive context. In this way, we can "queer" frameworks and discourses, which means recognising how we are physically and socially situated and attached to the process of normalisation; we can therefore employ our own reflexive process and avoid an idealised notion of phenomenological reduction. One way of taking this up, is questioning where and how the rules implicit in the notion of heteronormativity affects each of us personally, and then countering them as they manifest in our work. Langdridge's (2008) use of "a radical hermeneutics of suspicion" as a way of employing queer theory to expand contemporary fixed notions of binary identity is a

realistic and achievable task for psychotherapists and researchers already aware of reflexive practice. In reality, this means a consideration of the clients'/ participants' lived experiences, *and* of the narrative world that both allows and limits their ways of speaking. Drawing on Ricoeur's (1970) notion of hermeneutics of suspicion, Langdridge (2008) foregrounds how we always have a view from somewhere (Ricoeur 1996) and how that view has an impact on our understandings of sexed and gendered identities.

Atkinson & DePalma (2009) present an interesting challenge in arguing for "un-believing" the heterosexual matrix. They discuss the dangers of metaphors, as did Butler (1994), suggesting that through naming and believing that the matrix exists, we reify and resinscribe it. In other words, the matrix only exists through organised consent. This may be so, but in my own psychotherapeutic and teaching work, I find that I am still at the stage of convincing people that the heterosexual matrix exists in the first place, that we are the matrix! This is crucial ground work to be done before deconstructing and subversion can take place. Or need this be the case?

I do not intend to set up queer theory as the idealistic and utopian alternative to the heteronormative framework, but I see it as having a useful function in helping people to think more deeply about the limitations of binary sexed and gendered categories. Queer theory's emphasis on discursive power and on challenging and expanding the definitions of gender does the intellectual work that is required to unearth areas of inquiry that can unlock new possibilities for thinking about sex, gender and sexuality. The paradox inherent in the notion of "queer" is that it is caught up in both contesting and producing knowledge, thus risking becoming just another identity category which would then cease to be queer. My concern/focus would be that queer theory is able to recognise the need for different discourses for a diverse range of transgendered people. It is with this in mind that queer theory needs to be constantly reworked and examined in relation to other categories of knowledge. It needs to continuously question normative ideology and stay alert to not becoming another normative body of knowledge. Instead of refusing normalisation, which is in any case impossible, McWhorter (1999) argues that we need to use and engage with the power of the established disciplines to propel us in new directions. This means

trying new things and creating new desire lines that deviate from the well trodden paths of sexual and gender regimes imposed by heterosexuality.

This kind of challenge makes certain demands of people, including one of the most difficult demands of all — namely that they think differently. This transition raises questions and requires a willingness to live in the anxiety of that questioning without closing it down too quickly (Butler 2004b). For me personally, one of the greatest challenges of this thesis was the need to learn new vocabulary. It was very easy to join popular criticisms of academia as a place that is bereft of ideas and theories for "lay" people. Indeed, one of the criticisms of queer theory is still that it pays more attention to impenetrable texts and language than real life oppression and the reality of people's core identities. Although Butler is someone who is often criticised for her obscure and elitist use of language (Nussbaum 1999), I think her way of denaturalising normative sexuality through her use of language has made a key contribution to the destabilisation of heterosexual discourse. Butler (2004b, 326) draws on Foucault's "politics of discomfort" which is designed to "estrange and upset", and argues that destabilising familiar language is necessary in terms of imagining a new world. Butler (2004b) argues that if we are committed to the examination of the heterosexual ideology, we need to be prepared to question the taken-for-granted foundations of our knowledge and expose them to critical scrutiny. This means questioning how the power of language shapes people's realities and reflecting on the ways that grammar produces and constrains our thinking. It does not mean getting rid of the idea of grammar as a system of communication, but bringing a certain level of awareness to how the familiarity and taken-for-grantedness of our everyday language can restrain our capacity to think and imagine differently.

On the level of developing discourse, we need to frame and organise research questions that are not based on the biological assumptions that are implicit in normative binary categories. We need to move beyond the conventional biological and sociological debates and examine the social regulations and contexts within which we all negotiate our sex and gender identities: namely the regulatory framework of heterosexuality. As I have argued here, engaging with different kinds of questions is the work of "queering", and this helps to disrupt and unravel heteronormative thinking and practice that is embedded and reproduced in the

everyday social fabric of people's sexed and gendered lives. In this way, and as this thesis has shown, queer theory can serve as an analytic tool for studying, and potentially, unseating normative heterosexuality.

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Appendix 1

Flier

<div style="border:1px solid black">

Do you identify as transgender?

If so, would you like to talk to me confidentially
about yourself and your thoughts about
transgenderism?

I am a counselling and psychotherapy trainer
with a longstanding interest in transgender
and transsexual experience.
I am currently studying for a PhD about
transgender identities.

I am interested in how self defined transgender
people think about and experience their identities,
and I want to explore if these identities
vary for people of different ages.

</div>

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

Questions are framed within the context of the participants' life story, starting with their first experiences and memories to the present day. Questions are not necessarily asked in sequence, but mostly focusing on the relationship between their internal and external identity and how this positioned them in society.

1.   How do you define yourself?
2.   Do you remember when you first became aware of your assigned gender?
3.   When did you first hear the words transsexual/transgender?
4.   What resources were available to you – books, media, films, television ?
5.   Did you meet or know anyone you could identify with?
6.   Have there been any particular events in your life that crystallised your sense of being transgender?
7.   Do you think gender is something you are born with or something you learn?
8.   If there wasn't a gender binary system, do you think you would have identified differently – for example third gender?
9.   Are you interested in transgender theory? Do you read it? Is it helpful?
10.   What are your sources of information now?
11.   Where do you feel safest in your current identity? And most threatened?
12.   What changes in society would have the most positive impact on your experience living as transgender?
13.   Has your experience changed over time?
14.   How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Appendix 3

Story 1

 J is a 62 year old self-defined transsexual lady. J has a long history of cross-dressing, having initially identified as a transvestite. She is married and has 3 children and her wife now knows about her cross-dressing which her wife finds difficult. They have never had much of a sex life but she hopes they stay together as friends. She has recently started to see a gender specialist doctor who has diagnosed her as a transsexual. Currently she does not consider herself as male. At the same time, she sees gender as irrelevant and describes her sexual orientation now as lesbian as she is drawn to females.

When she was growing up, she felt very much on her own as there were no role models or groups. A significant event in her life was when she was involved in a car crash and she had to go to neurological hospital due to sight problems. The doctor discovered in carrying out tests that J had female brain patterns – apparently she uses both hemispheres at the same time which is what women do; and this is why they can multitask, whereas men switch on and switch off. This made a lot of sense to J's experience of identifying with women and she is now looking back over her life and analysing it in the light of this new information.

J dislikes her body and will probably have surgery. She thinks that maybe she has sacrificed herself for her family and puts this down to her femininity causing her to think in this way for the greater good of her family. She does not like labels as they pigeon-hole and segregate people but the term transgendered covers a wide range – she does not get caught up in the hierarchy of labels of transsexual or transvestite. She does not feel that LGBT is a good word as many people in the community feel that the T is just tagged on at the end. She prefers the term "diverse gender centre" as it covers everything. She sees that the terms she uses now to describe herself have changed from 20 years ago. She feels there should be more acceptances in society and that if females can wear men's clothing, men should be able to wear females' clothing. Defining her sexual orientation is tricky as when she is in full dress she thinks she would say she was a lesbian as she is drawn to females

rather than men. In terms of transitioning, even the doctor does not know what to call her. The hospital is altering *his* records to *her* records but J is not sure if that makes any difference. She wants to fit in but not conform.

Story 2

A is a 15 year old biological female who self-defines as a transgendered boy.
A is living in Glasgow temporarily due to mother's job. His father is dead and he has no siblings. Since he was 8, he has thought of himself as a boy and likes when people mistake him for a boy, even though his mother and family still think of him as a girl. He has a girlfriend he met on the internet who thinks of him as a boy. They email each other every day and hope to meet each other.

When he was 11 he confided in a friend about his feelings who said his feelings were not true and they would pass. He uses the word transgender to describe himself. No one calls him a boy but when he is alone he is a boy as there is no one else there to say otherwise. He would like to get rid of his breasts but knows he has to wait a few years before he sees a doctor. He said that as well as being a boy, he would like to be younger as he does not want to grow up and have dates. He agreed that he does not want to be a girl teenager as his body is changing, doing things he does not want it to do, and that maybe being a 13 year old boy is easier. Nevertheless, he now has stronger opinions about what he would like to do and who he would like to be, meaning he does not believe he is a girl. He thinks we are born with a gender but sometimes our mind says something very different. In other words, sometimes our body and mind say very different things and not many people understand that. The difference between sex and gender is the difference between mind and body.

Story 3

K is 32 years old, born a biological female, and now self-defines as a gay trans man. K had never felt happy with his physical body and female self before taking hormones. He was brought up in the small rural community. He remembers feeling ashamed of his body at school and more interested in the boys' activities than the girls', describing a big gender divide in terms of subjects you could choose depending on whether you were a boy or a girl - boys did arts and crafts and girls did sewing and knitting. As much as he rebelled against this, he was told he was girl so get on with it.

A significant turning point came in the 1980s, aged 17, he discovered transsexualism by watching a programme on the television called *From George to Julia* and it "hit a nerve". He identified with this and told his friend he thought he was a guy, to which his friend laughed and said he was being stupid. So he put it to the back of his mind until he was 23 when another programme came on television which was called *The Decision* and this was about female to male transsexuals. He identified with everything the transsexuals were saying and was determined to take the next step. Then he booked himself on a *GENDYS* conference in Manchester and that was his first meeting of trans people. On returning home, he found people very supportive and partly this was due to the fact that it was a small community and most people knew him. He changed his name and 2 years later started hormones.

Regarding genital surgery, K remains unsure of the success rate as the risks are huge, losing sexual function and the ability to urinate being amongst them. He is still under the care of a gender specialist but only comes in contact with the medical profession every few months for blood tests, which he is pleased about.

He acknowledges that he is not "a proper man" because he has not been born biologically male and also the first 23 years of his life consisted of being conditioned as a female and that is part of who he is. Hence, he defines himself as a "trans man" because he is not a "proper man", adding what is a proper man anyway? He uses the term transgender when in a more formal setting but with friends and in one area of work, he uses the term trans. He says that he wishes we had more freedom to say we are a mix of both male and female, and maybe he might not have gone through his

mental health problems if society had not forced him to be one or the other. The language and categories that society has constructed has had its limitations for K.

After starting transitioning, he had a greater acceptance for his body and discovered the world of gay sex which allowed him to have sex with a guy and like it. Even though he was the same physical being, mentally he had stopped fighting who he was not, and became who he felt he was. He identified with being a guy, felt he was a guy, wanted to have sex with guys and found a category that fitted who he was — a gay trans man. For K this highlights the separate domains of sexuality and gender in that they are not necessarily connected.

Story 4

R is 61 years old, born biological male, self-defines as an outgoing transvestite and a heterosexual man. R describes himself as "being a tranny" since he was 11years old, wearing his granny's clothes. He cross-dressed on and off until he was 40 when he realised it "wasn't going to go away". He phoned up a help-line and started going to transvestite groups, subsequently joining various clubs and societies. He describes himself as heterosexual, married with grown up children and although his wife knows, she does not approve.

He thinks he started cross dressing because he wanted some femininity, saying he was very drawn to the film stars of the 50's. When he was growing up there were no explicit role models as transvestites all lived in the 'demi monde'.

He says that transvestites and transsexuals should not be 'on the same bit of paper'. He felt strongly that transsexuals have body dysphoria. He complained of society's binary gender system and of the prejudice and sexism against transvestites in that women can cross dress but men cannot. He thinks there are 3 sexes – men, women and transvestites. He sees gender as something that you learn though he cannot rightly remember what would have made him a transvestite. He believes that being a transvestite is about creating a feminine illusion and you have to work at being a woman.

Story 5

G is 69 years old, self-defines as a pre-op transsexual, waiting for surgery where she will be then be a "whole woman". There is a significant question regarding her gender assignment at birth as the doctor could not determine G's sex. Her twin brother was born 5 minutes after her so the doctor asked the mother what she had been expecting and when she replied "twin boys", the doctor decided that she had twin boys. G found out several years ago when she asked to see her medical records that the 'vitamin' pills she had been given so she could be strong and healthy like her brother were male hormones. She took these until she was 12. Recently she has found newspaper clippings about the twins' birth which in 1936 was a record as they were so small — under 8" long and fitted into a size 7 shoebox. Born at 1lb 13oz, they were lucky to survive back then.

Aged 7, she said she knew she was female and started to cross-dress in her sister's clothes, and was always seen as "the weak one". As a young man, she was called up to do National service and was posted to Kenya and she said this hardened her up a bit. But she was still wearing women's underwear. When she got back, aged 27, she met her future wife. After knowing her 9 months, she told her she thought she was a woman — she hadn't heard the term transsexual — to which her wife replied that she loved the person she was. She had 43 years of "fabulous" married life and her wife died 2 years ago.

She did not hear the term transsexual until she saw an advert 2 years ago for the Beaumont Society in London. They give her the LGBT helpline in Glasgow who told her about the Transsexual clinic and transsexualism. When she was 67 years old, she heard the term transsexual and phoned a LGBT help-line. G decided to come out full time after her wife died and has lived fulltime as G for two and a half years now and is very happy in the role. She is waiting for sex reassignment surgery which she sees as making her a "whole woman". Post operation, G will define herself as a woman, as she did not want to be known as a transgendered woman. She clearly sees gender as something you are born with — either male or female — and you can be transgendered until the operation. She is waiting for genital surgery and then the last stage will be breast surgery.

She has never been interested in men sexually and described her sexual orientation as "getting complicated now". On her 69th birthday she had sex with 2 women and it has opened up a brand new world. She now calls herself a lesbian.

Story 6

L is a 33 year old born biological male, now self-defines as a pre-op transsexual woman. L describes her journey starting aged 13 when she started to cross-dress in her sister's and mothers' clothes. She kept this hidden and throughout her teens would outwardly trying to fit into a male role and follow whatever the social life plan of a male was. Throughout this time, she was visiting internet sites trying to learn the correct terminology that could describe her experiences. She learned that visiting gay sex sites was not leading her to the correct information and eventually found some sites. At this point she identified as transvestite. She started attending various transvestite groups where she started to dress again and meet other people. This made a huge difference to her confidence.

One significant experience led her to identify more with the term transsexual. When she got home one night, she looked in the mirror with no clothes on and felt it was a stranger looking back at her. She realised that this was about more than clothes, it was about her body. She explained that the defining difference between transvestites and transsexuals is that transvestites get their balance back to an even keel by dressing up and acting as a girl and feel a release; with a transsexual it is more than that — 'it is about getting up in the morning and not having to shave and not having to stick 10 inches of make up, you just want to wake up and say there is me". In other words, as well as the physical aspect of it, there is also a mental component and both need to match.

She has been taking a low dosage of female hormones for 3 months and this will help generate breast development, improve skin tone and reduce body hair. She sees the surgery as only a small component of transitioning, believing that her mentality will be the same, the operation is on her body. She is more interested in the hormone treatment, speech therapy and laser treatment and continuing to work on her mental health. She is very clear that hiding and dressing secretly was damaging her mental health and that it takes a lot of confidence to dress in public. Being able to dress how she wants is crucial to her mental health.

She described her sexual orientation as bisexual at the moment but sees her change into a heterosexual woman further along the transitioning. Due to her current physical state, she tends to go with both men and women. She describes herself as

more on the feminine side of the scale, yet believes that because she also keeps some of her masculine traits, that is what helps her pass.

Story 7

C is 24 years old, born biological female and self-defines as lesbian. She does not necessarily self-define as transgender at the moment but does attend a transgender group as a result of a gender crisis a few years ago. A significant turning point came when C was working in a predominantly male environment. She experienced the men as disparaging about women and was disturbed at the constant male sexual boasting that went on. She began to question whether women maybe liked this and why didn't she? This led onto her questioning her gender, thinking maybe life would be easier if she was on the male side rather than the female side. She became depressed and convinced herself that perhaps she was in the wrong body and that was why she found the male behaviour so hurtful. This thought did not bring her any relief in that she could not identify with the common transgender experience of discovering her true self. She described her understanding of this as if she had decided she did not like being a girl and being male was better, but she did not want to make the decision to transition. This incident raised her awareness of gender and made her think more about both her sexuality and her gender. She spoke of how she had always been sure of her sexual orientation as a lesbian and how this determined her gender. She did not agree with sexuality and gender being separate and felt that if she was attracted to men and happy with how they spoke then she would be comfortable with her gender. This crisis faded when she left the job.

She did some volunteering work at Stonewall where she met transgendered people. She describes herself as empathising with them on one level but still didn't think she would want to transition. She said that she does not define herself as transgender at the moment as she associates the term with being transsexual which means that someone is not comfortable with their own body and wants to change it through surgery. She is not sure that defining as transgendered just now sums up how she is feeling but there is something that transgender offers her at the moment, that being gay doesn't. She is still trying to work out what that is, but did say that for her, gender is an act or a role that's expressed in what you wear. Her transgender group gives her a sense of safety and of belonging completely which she has not always got from a gay group as she cannot always identify with gay relationships. She relates

more to transgender women and transmen even though they think of her as a trans man who has not yet transitioned.

C describes herself as identifying with both genders and wants to be careful that she does not base her gender choice on feeling inferior. In considering the biological aspect, she felt that being a lesbian was a kind of third place which was separate from men and women's biological function of reproduction, providing a backdoor out of being in the role of a woman. She feels that as a lesbian, no one is going to question her gender role. At the moment, C identifies herself more in terms of her gender than sexuality. Describing herself as moving on a spectrum of male and female which varies daily, is a more meaningful way of describing her identity right now. She ended by saying she had been anxious that most of the people I was interviewing identified as transsexual and she was not.

Story 8

D is 48 years old. She came out aged 16 as bisexual, at 21 as lesbian, at 37 as trans something and now self-defines as a FTM and Hermaphrodyke. She sees her sexual orientation as problematic as the language reinforces the gender binary, but currently is attracted to women who are assigned female at birth —— a bio female. I purposely use pronoun of his/her and she/him interchangeably.

When D was 13, her cousin was born with a condition diagnosed as 46xx true hermaphrodite which meant she had ova testes and both gonads. Only D and her cousin were born with xx. This incident affected D in ways which would become apparent later. At the same time, her body was developing asymmetrically – her right side didn't develop while her left side did and when she was 17, she had a corrective operation. At this time she also discovered that her clitoris was double the size of the average clitoris and she had started plucking hairs on her chin. She said that if she had not plucked them, she would have had a beard by the age of 20.

She sees her gender as fluctuating according to the different relationships she has. She recounted meeting people who were taking hormones and not necessarily calling themselves transsexuals. Initially D was opposed to this as she felt she already had testosterone, and then she got her levels tested. Her levels were very high for a woman and mid/average for a male, with her female hormones levels average. She decided to see what would happen if she privileged the testosterone. She saw a gender specialist and told him that she was not a man but wanted to be more true to her hermaphroditic body and wanted to look more gender ambiguous. She told him she believed that she had an Intersex condition and she wanted to tweak so she had more options. Her GP has now prescribed her testogel for 10 years. After 1 year of taking testosterone, she stopped and attended the Adult Intersex Clinic as she wanted to find out why she had a high testosterone level in the first instance. She had many tests done, blood test showed she had a chromosomal mosaic in a large amount of cells which are xo — this means there are missing chromosomes not usually seen in people under 75 and D was 40. They could not explain this and whether she is medically, technically, diagnosably intersexed is still an open question according to the clinic, depending on the definition

D was careful to point out that some Intersex people are very particular and do not want the transgender movement to usurp Intersex activism for their own reasons. She now calls herself "intersex by design and intentional mutation".

She sees both passing as a male and passing as a female as a compromise, as trans for her, is going beyond the binaries. For D, transsexual is going from a to b, male to female, whereas she see herself as just going. She thinks of gender and sexuality as a colour scale with some people more flamboyant and others more pastel and this can change within day, a year. She does not think she has gender dysphoria as she has no problems with her gender and is happy in her body. The only problems stem from external sources. In his queer community, D8 does not want to pass; he wants to be seen as a hybrid, chimera, and herm. He wants people to come out more and saying they are FTU, unknown, they do not know.

Story 9

S is 35 years old, born biological male, self-defines as a transsexual woman, with the emphasis on woman. Born in a small town in Wales, S cross-dressed in women's clothes as a child and was very unhappy and confused as a child, picked on and bullied because of her femininity. S9 talked of her life as male in the third person throughout the interview. She describes "him" as very miserable as a teenager, scared that he was gay. He joined the army for 5 years, then left and got married as that was "the thing to do". She then realised that her wife did not turn her on — "for me to get sexual satisfaction, it had to be a woman like me". She went on later to say that her male self would have fancied the woman she is now.

She left her wife aged 30 years old, came to London and thought she would "try to be gay", realising that she liked men to react to her as a woman. She began to explore various avenues, answering ads and going to transsexual/transvestite clubs. At this point, she dressed and looked at herself in the mirror and for the first time she liked what she saw and felt happiness. She asked the mirror image what her name was and the reply was S. From then on she started changing and 'grew into being that woman'. She started taking hormones in 2001. She now describes herself as not having to work at being feminine and attracting men — "I do it naturally".

She described her sexual orientation as straight and needs to get her surgery as "men all like a bit of dick". She sees the surgery as helping her "make the link between her brain and a new vagina" and was very confident that she would meet a man and fall in love. She cannot imagine a world without gender as she likes being a woman.

Story 10

M is a 42 years old, self-defined post-operative trans lesbian. Born a biological male, she felt that she was different from her brothers. Aged 4 yrs old, she began to feel that she was not who her parents said she was. This was highlighted in a game where they all measured their penises and M pushed hers backwards and hid it. She remembers her mother saying that one of her children had a sexual problem but did not say who it was. M never spoke to anyone about feeling different and her mother still does not know she has had surgery. M has been one year post-op and is currently writing about her experiences. She feels that gender is imposed on us and its something that culture has given doctors the power to do — "a child's gender becomes something that the doctor sees and names". She referred back to an operation she had when she was a week old which her mother tells her was a hernia, but M has questions around this.

As an adult, M went to see a psychosexual therapist in an attempt to get help as she was not comfortable in her gender role, but the therapist advised her to go back to her friends and form relationships. After this negative experience, M did not speak to anyone else about she felt until 10 years later. Pre-surgery, she went to see a counsellor as part of the transitioning process that was compulsory. This was unsatisfactory as she felt the counsellor was trying to get her to change her mind and again, M was in the position of trying to convince someone that this was something she really had to do. This spurred her on to finding transsexual literature, looking for people that had had similar experiences. She read books and saw one particular film. She was not looking so much for what it might mean but other peoples' experiences.

On attending self-help groups, she had difficulty communicating her experience to them as they were quite fixed in their opinion of the definition of transsexuality and this resulted in them denying M her identity. She chose to move away from groups which focussed on gender identity and joined groups where the focus was on sexual orientation as she also needs to communicate she was a trans lesbian. More difficulties ensued when members were resistant to her defining herself as trans lesbian.

M feels that society needs to be more open to the fluidity of gender and understand that trans people are the same as anyone else - with the difference being

that they need to correct their gender identity. She sees differences between the terms transsexual and transgender - transgender being an umbrella term for people that are gender ambiguous, including transsexuals, and transsexual is a term in itself in that it addresses transsexual experiences.

The process of transitioning has taken 7 years (38 years old). Pre-transitioning, she did not know what her sexual orientation was. She now identifies as a trans lesbian. She says that if a transgendered person is called a tranny, its ok, but a transsexual person would feel that they are being called a transvestite and feels it is an abusive term.

Story 11

T is 48 years old, born biological male, self-defines as transgender and unsure now about having surgery. Aged 10, T developed a secret self where she secretly identified with being female, cross-dressing when possible. Cross dressing started "properly" when she went to art school and was able to stay over at friends. In her 30s she moved back in with her parents and defined herself as "being kind of gay and interested in cross dressing". She says she would still define herself as this along with being transgendered, "but not sure I'd go complete sex change". She has attended the Gender Clinic since 2000 where she is still a patient. When she first attended she thought she "should have a sex change" but is now not so sure. She has taken female hormones since 2002.

  T describes her interest in Buddhism as supporting her own non-dualistic way of seeing the world where gender is not fixed and there is more of a general spectrum. She sees gender and sexuality as a phenomena and its "the being underneath that is not one thing or another that is important". She has read various books and articles as a way of resourcing material. In particular she was interested in reading about a woman who saw herself as gay man which was not how society perceived her. This reflects what seems to be T's own present position as being in a lesbian relationship, and defining herself as bisexual.

  Her experience of being transgendered has changed in the last 20 years in that it has become something that she has had to give some expression to, but still has to modify due to her anxiety over how she is perceived in the outside world. She believes that gender is a combination of being born with it and learning how to perform it. Currently she describes himself as having depression due to being "gender dysphoric".