

Being Transsexual: self, identity and embodied subjectivity

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Abstract

In this research I employ an interdisciplinary approach in order to theorize the experience of *Being Transsexual* and to reflect upon current debates in critical social psychology about such notions as 'self', 'identity' and 'embodied subjectivity'. Seven male-to-female and seven female-to-male individuals who identified as either transsexual or transgendered took part in three in-depth interviews that explored their experiences of gender transition. A pluralistic methodological approach, drawing upon the principles of discourse analysis and phenomenology, was used to analyse the interviews. I argue that whilst Cartesian dualist constructions of transsexualism regulate the binary gender system they fail to account for the complex process of identifications which the transsexual subject has to negotiate. Transsexual subjects are never completely free from their past experiences, past selves, past relationships or previous practices of embodiment. To varying degrees, these all undermine any new-found sense of gender confirmation. Consequently, I argue that *Being Transsexual* entails the ongoing process of *becoming* 'male' or 'female'. In a move towards a theory of embodied subjectivity, it is suggested that any transition in subjective experiences of gender is intrinsically tied to and inseparable from shifts in gendered embodiment. Finally, I argue that affiliations between transgendered and gay and lesbian communities should be strengthened in order to challenge the regulatory practices of heterosexual normativity, thus enabling individuals to live more ambiguous modes of gendered subjectivity.

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Being Transsexual: self, identity and embodied subjectivity

Table of Contents

1 Introductory Overview	1
.1 Transsexualism: A sign of the times	3
.2 Methodological considerations	8
.3 Beyond discourse: theorizing transsexual embodied subjectivity	8
2 Clinical Perspectives: Critical reflections on the conception and treatment of transsexualism	15
.1 Setting the scene: The early sexologists	16
.2 The emergence of transsexual identity	19
.3 Diagnostic contentions	25
.4 Exit the transsexual	33
3 Socio-Cultural Perspectives: From Gender to Transgender	40
.1 A sex/gender distinction?	41
.2 Queer Theory and its critiques	44
.3 From Queer to Transgender Studies	53
.4 Transgender studies: theorizing transsexual embodied subjectivity	62
.5 Feminists' engagement with transsexualism: A promising start	69
.6 Feminist Contentions: the disengagement from transsexualism	72
.7 Empirical studies	76
4 Methodology and Method	80
.1 Theoretical framework for studying identity	81
.2 Conceptual assumptions of poststructuralism	83
.3 What <i>is</i> discourse analysis?	85
.4 Beyond Discourse: criticisms and developments	91

.5 The turn to embodiment	92
.6 Poststructuralism meets phenomenology	93
.7 Mobilizing key concepts	100
(i) Identity	100
(ii) Identification	101
(iii) Discourse	101
(iv) Discursive construct	101
(v) Discursive position	101
(vi) Embodied subjectivity	101
.8 Method	102
(i) Participants	103
(ii) Male-to-Female Respondents	104
(iii) Female-to-Male Respondents	105
(iv) Pilot Interview	106
(v) Interviews	107
.9 Analysis of Interviews	109
(i) Initial confusions	109
(ii) Shifting Approaches	110
.10 Ethical considerations	112
(i) Recruitment	112
(ii) Interviews and commitment to respondents	113
(iii) Analysis restrictions	115
5 Being transsexual: beyond Cartesian dualist constructions	116
.1 What does it mean to be transsexual?	117
(i) Cartesian dualism V's biological reductionism	117
(ii) Biological fate or psychological choice	119
(iii) Deploying psychoanalytic discourses	122
(iv) Transsexualism as spiritual quest	127
.2 Negotiating processes of transsexual identification	128
(i) Resisting transsexual identification	129

(ii) Insisting upon transsexual identification	131
.3 Transgender identifications	133
(i) Identifying as transgendered	133
(ii) Resisting transgender identity	134
(iii) Alternative conceptions of transgender	139
.4 Multiple identities	141
.5 Beyond Cartesian dualism	143
6 Changing sex, changing self: transitions in embodied subjectivity	145
.1 Accounting for shifts in self-identity	147
(i) Being the <i>same</i> person	148
(ii) Being a <i>new</i> person	149
.2 Seeing me differently: Affirmation and disavowal of gender identity through social relationships	152
.3 Becoming a <i>different</i> kind of a guy	156
.4 Who would want to be a man anyway?	158
.5 The defended subject and the impact of intersubjective gender relations within the interview setting	160
(i) Being me	160
.6 Accounting for shifts in gendered embodiment	163
(i) Bodies in transition	164
(ii) Cultural practices of gendered embodiment	165
(iii) Body as trace	166
(iv) Cultural practices of embodiment as trace	169
7 Transsexualism and Sexual Orientation: Exploring the relationship between gender and sexuality	172
.1 Gender as separate from sexuality	174
.2 Heterosexuality and Male-to-Female Transsexuality	178
.3 Lesbianism and Male-to-Female Transsexuality	182
(i) Is a lesbian a woman?	184

.4 Gay Identity and Female-to-Male Sexual Orientation	188
.5 Heterosexuality and Female-to-Male Transsexualism	190
.6 Sexual orientation identifications and practice - fixed or fluid	193
.7 Fragmented identities -- Frustrated Politics	197
(i) Borderline identity battles	201
8 Conclusions, critical reflections and developments	208
.1 Implications for political practice	216
.2 Concluding overview	220
References	222
Appendices	240
1 Recruitment materials	240
(a) Recruitment Leaflet distributed at 2nd International Transgender Film Festival	240
(b) Advertisement slip in FM newsletter, <i>Boys Own</i>	241
(c) Advert in <i>The Pink Paper</i>	241
2 Semi-structured interview schedules	242
(a) Interview 1: Media and Legal representations	242
(b) Interview 2: Changing Identities – MtF participants	244
(c) Interview 2: Changing Identities – FtM participants	247
(d) Interview 3: Autobiography: telling your story	250
3 Transcription notes	254
4 Coding frames	255
(a) MtF participants	255
(b) FtM participants	258

5 Ethical approval	261
6 Glossary	263

1

Introductory Overview

A movement for change lives in feelings, actions and words

Adrienne Rich, *The Politics of Location*, (1986: 223).

Theoretical accounts in the field of transsexualism can be broadly classified into two major categories. The first is clinical in its approach, encompassing medical, psychiatric and psychological research that perceives transsexualism as a syndrome, subject to treatment and observation. The second approach has a more socio-cultural outlook, in that it is principally concerned with the relationship transsexualism has to the culture at large (Bolin, 1988). However, whether focusing on the etiology (Stoller, 1975), or analyzing transsexualism in a quest to understand how gender is socially constructed (Kessler & McKenna, 1985), transsexuals have been increasingly theorized and studied in an effort to understand the broader categories of sex and gender.

Traditionally gender has been used to distinguish psychological, social and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness (Kessler & McKenna, 1985). Within this context, it is now widely agreed that there are two sexes, defined in terms of the anatomical body - male and female - and two genders, defined in terms of personality traits and behaviours - masculine or feminine - which are often seen as socially constructed. Yet, in most attempts to distinguish between 'sex' and 'gender', there is an assumption that 'sex' is somehow prior to gender - the biological bedrock upon which gender differences are

constructed (Kitzinger, 1994). Alternative perspectives are provided however, particularly from those working within a poststructuralist or Foucauldian framework. These studies challenge the ‘truth’ of the Western belief that there are two, and only two, biological sexes, suggesting that the ‘reality effect’ of this belief has been produced by powerful medical and scientific discourses (see Butler, 1990; Laqueur 1990).

Harry Benjamin first coined the term ‘Transsexualism’ in 1953. It is unusual because it names the method of treatment and rehabilitation rather than the syndrome - a syndrome for which there is no known cause. Without a known cause, transsexualism is open to self-definition through personal suffering. Physicians, however, have constructed their own criteria of symptoms that an individual must fulfill before they will accept their self-defined condition. From an extensive literature review, Roberto (1983) concluded that symptoms required for a clinical definition of transsexualism included:

...the belief that one is a member of the opposite sex...dressing and behaving in the opposite gender role...perceiving oneself as heterosexual although sexual partners are anatomically identical...repugnance for one’s own genitals and the wish to transform them...and a persistent desire for conversion surgery (Roberto, 1983: 446-447).

In fact, the demand for surgery is often regarded as inherent in the clinical definition of transsexualism (Hoenig, 1982). Thus, the clinical literature may attempt to provide a classification system or an etiologic basis for transsexualism, but at the same time it also creates ‘meanings’ or ‘stories’ that constitute the transsexual experience (Plummer, 1995). Influenced by Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1981), Chapter Two provides a historical overview of psychiatric and medical accounts of homosexuality and transvestism that pre-empted the emergence of a transsexual subject. The subsequent tensions between transsexual individuals and the clinical establishment over diagnostic criteria and access to surgery are then discussed in the light of the influence of transgender politics.

However, this is not the only field where this creation of ‘meanings’ or ‘stories’ takes place. A transsexual identity is also constructed by the discourses that evolve from others who have gone through the same reassignment process. As transsexual individuals’ own accounts become more available, whether through autobiography, newspaper articles or television documentaries, transsexual subjectivity has emerged as an increasingly

recognized site for the meeting of various discourses. Here, the term subjectivity is used in the same sense outlined by the authors of *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*:

We use 'subjectivity' to refer to individuality and self-awareness - the condition of being a subject - but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to discourses and practices and produced by these - the condition of being a subject (Henriques et al., 1984: 3).

Thus, media coverage provides a fertile culturally located site where discourses concerning the nature and status of transsexualism can circulate between academic literature, transsexual individuals' subjective accounts and lay interpretations.

1.1 Transsexualism: A sign of the times

The historical timing for the presentation of this thesis is of considerable importance. Writing at the beginning of the new millennium, in the aftermath of the stylized apocalyptic angst that peaked during the final few years of the last century, we can begin to engage with some of the questions that were raised about the changing nature of sex, gender, and embodiment. From Baudrillard's lamentation that "we are all transsexuals" (1992: 20) to the warm welcoming of the same notion by some queer theorists (e.g. Halberstam, 1994), it is suggested that transsexualism is a sign of the times. Yet, given that the number of transsexuals in the UK is currently estimated at only somewhere between two and three thousand (Press for Change, 2000), the exponential interest in the phenomenon is somewhat surprising. Transsexuals are the stalwarts of day time chat shows. From the tame UK based versions such as *Tricia*, to the nightmarish freak show style of *The Jerry Springer Show*, whilst 18 million viewers tuned in to watch the much loved Hayley of *Coronation Street* attempt to marry her beau, Roy. It seems that we are endlessly fascinated by the phenomenon transsexualism whilst we also abhor it. Why are some transsexuals, like the character Hayley, seemingly so accepted, whilst others, like many of the guests on *The Jerry Springer Show*, rejected as freaks? Perhaps the different readings have something to do with the overall harmony with, or disruption of, the familiar cultural and symbolic markers of gender. Hayley presents no threat to the socio-cultural references imbued in femininity: she works in a café, she wants to be married,

she wants to have children and, crucially, she looks like a woman. Hayley conforms to the hegemony of heteronormativity. She can only be read as a heterosexual, feminine woman. Unlike the plight of many male-to-female transsexuals, Hayley is never misread, her physical appearance never undoes the cultural practices of a female embodiment - the character is, after all, *played by a woman*.

Transsexualism opens up the possibility of change: a flight of fantasy into a newly embodied self; the temptation of eradicating a past sense of self; becoming someone you were not (Foucault, 1988); 'being a new person' (see Chapter Six). In postmodern accounts of gender mutation, it is argued that medical advances in intricate surgical procedures have produced new 'technologies of self' which emphasizes the plasticity of bodies. We need no longer to be sexed, we are cyborgs, monsters, transsexuals (Haraway, 1990). But, in this thesis it will be argued that we are still very much gendered beings, both overly attached to and ambivalent about our gendered selves, and that our bodies are not always malleable to our desired presentation.

With the fin de siècle in mind, Rita Felski (1996: 27) posed two questions: 'What is the connection between discourses of the end of history and the end of sex?' and 'How do our cultural imaginings of historical time relate to changing perceptions of the meaning and nature of gender difference?' She attempts to address these questions by contrasting 'transsexual' as metaphor in the work of Jean Baudrillard (1993) and 'transgender' as metaphor in Donna Haraway's (1990) hybrid symbol 'the cyborg'.

Certainly, the terms 'transsexual' and 'transgender' have a complex relationship with one another. Transgender is more recent in conception than transsexual, and one that is historically free from the medical pathologizing of a perverse sexual identity. However, at times they are used interchangeably, although some theorists may attempt to define transgender as distinct from transsexual, or as an umbrella term that may include transsexual. Richard Ekins and Dave King (1999) provide perhaps the most detailed explanation of the complex ways in which the term 'transgender' is employed. They discerned four positions:

Virginia Prince pioneered the term 'transgenderist' and 'transgenderal' (Prince, 1976: 145) to refer to people who lived full-time in the gender opposite to their biological sex, but did not seek sex/gender re-assignment

surgery. Richard Ekins established the Trans-Gender Archive, at the University of Ulster, in 1986 (Ekins, 1988). The term was chosen to provide an umbrella concept which avoided such medical categories as transsexual and transvestite; which included the widest possible range of transgender phenomena; and which took the sociological view that aspects of sex, sexuality and gender (not just gender), including the binary divide, all have socially constructed components. Not long afterwards, the 'transgender community' came to be used as an umbrella term to include transsexuals, transvestites, transgenderists, drag queens and so on, as well as (in some uses) to include their partners and friends and professional providers. Most recently, the term came to presuppose a radical edge - to refer to the transgressive nature of transgenering, as in Boswell's (1997:54) view that '[T]ransgender has to do with reinventing and realising oneself more fully outside of the current systems of gender' (1999: 581)

Given the sheer scope of this concept it must be acknowledged that when theorists, or individuals, refer to transgender identity they may be meaning different things and, unfortunately, the subtlety they may be alluding to is not always made apparent. However, Ekins and King take a more flexible and inclusive stance where "transgenering refers BOTH to the idea of moving across (transferring) from one pre-existing gender category to the other (either temporarily or permanently), AND to the idea of transcending or living 'beyond gender' altogether" (1999: 581-582).

For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on and primarily employ the term 'transsexual'. I do this because when I began the research I embarked on an enquiry into transsexual subjectivity, working within a stricter definition of 'transsexualism' influenced by the clinical accounts that defined 'transsexual' in terms of having begun, or completed, transition to live full-time in the other gender (Bockting & Coleman, 1992). However, I was interested in sexual orientation identifications other than heterosexual (see Roberto, 1983). Thus, I simply set my criterion as having started hormone replacement therapy (see Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion). It was only later in the research process that I discovered how difficult it was to draw a clear distinction between the two 'trans' identities, particularly when thirteen of the fourteen participants fitted neatly into my definition of 'transsexual' and yet many strongly resisted using this term to describe themselves. Instead, some preferred to identify as 'transgendered', which challenged my previous conception of that term as merely a gender performance that did not involve hormonal or surgical intervention. Hence, the relationship between the participants deployment of 'transsexual' and 'transgender' identifications along with the processes of negotiating other gendered identities will be addressed in Chapter Five. This is not to

suggest that any conclusions can be drawn in an attempt to distinguish between their occasions of use. But, the ways in which the participants interchangeably draw upon and resist these identities will be explored to illustrate their complex relationship to each other and lack of mutual exclusivity.

Rita Felski, however, attempts to investigate the relationship between historical specificity and the recent proliferation of images of transsexualism and transgender within some postmodern and poststructuralist thought. Felski sees “the figure of transsexuality or transgenderism as the site of deeply invested and symbolically charged rewritings of history and time” (1996: 346). She provides evidence for this by juxtaposing Jean Baudillard’s nightmarish vision of an epidemic of signification with Donna Haraway’s celebration and welcoming of the promise of a transgender metaphor. Baudrillard ponders “what fascinates us in the apparition of the transsexual; it is the fading out...of sexual difference” (1992: 13). Furthermore, he suggests that in the aftermath of the sexual revolution:

...the liberation of sex will have had the effect of sending everybody on a quest for their “gender,” their generic and sexual identity, with fewer and fewer possible answers given the circulation of signs and the multiplicity of pleasures. It is thus that we suddenly became transsexuals (1992: 21).

We are all transsexuals. Felski argues that Baudrillard’s pessimism is exacerbated by what he sees as feminists’ attempts to accelerate this confusion by contesting what was once viewed as an inescapable biological destiny of being male or female in terms of rights and preferences. Consequently, “we have become ‘indifferent and undifferentiated beings, androgynous and hermaphroditic’ (*TE* 25), creatures without gender and hence without sex” (Felski, 1996: 339). In contrast, Donna Haraway, whilst agreeing with Baudrillard that there has been a radical transformation of social relations precipitated by cybernetics, biotechnological innovations, and the omnipresent dissemination of media networks, envisages new and inconceivable possibilities in hybrid gender identities. As Felski states, Haraway:

...argues that old oppositions of masculine and feminine, along with their corollary distinctions of private versus public, mind versus body, culture versus nature, no longer hold in the new world system (1996: 340).

Felski suggests that the type of questioning of sexual difference offered by Haraway may

aid the “generation of new feminist stories of possible futures, fueling imaginative projections and new worlds and alternative genealogies” (1996: 346). But, as Felski quite rightly points out, the universalizing conception that “we are all transsexuals” homogenizes differences that have political consequences. Namely, “the differences between men and women, the difference between those who occasionally play with the trope of transsexuality and those others for whom it is a matter of life or death” (Felski, 1996: 347).

Thus, since the early 1990’s transsexualism has remained a hotly contested site of cultural inscription (Stone, 1991). Certainly, in the stances provided by Baudrillard and Haraway there are widely diverging views as to whether the proliferation of images of the transsexual/transgender subject should be mourned or celebrated. And yet, central to these interpretations is the question of why now. In Chapter Three, I trace the emergence of interest in transsexualism from a socio-cultural perspective. I follow the shifts in gender theory from a feminist critique of the sex/gender distinction (e.g. Gatens, 1983; Martin, 1991) to the emergence of queer theory, epitomized in the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993). Following Jay Prosser (1998: 5), it is argued that ‘queer studies has *made* the transgendered subject’. It is the level of investment in transgender, in gender ambiguity, that has produced such a widespread interest in the transgendered and transsexual subject. Felski (1996) outlines one example of the metaphorical signification ‘transgender’ can hold in the accounts of feminists and cultural theorists. Others have investigated more broadly the differing questions which ‘transgender’ poses for gender relations, considering whether or not ‘transgender’ reinstates or transgresses a binary gender system (e.g. Raymond, 1994; Wilton, 2000). Yet, within these theoretical debates, the embodied subjectivity and individual experiences of those who identify as transsexual or transgendered are often lost (Ruben, 1998). More recently, we have seen the beginnings of a new discipline, ‘trans-studies’, which attempts to rectify this anomaly and where investments are heightened as many of those who engage are themselves transgendered. This study forms part of that process. Thus, I hope to build upon and enrich some of these theoretical compositions by conducting an empirical study that focuses on the qualitative accounts of those whose lived experience is as transsexual.

1.2 Methodological considerations

In the style of Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1985), a further aim of this research is to engage with theoretical conceptions of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ through an analytical account of the social and cultural aspects of transsexualism. This endeavour should also enable the thesis to make original contributions to the recent and growing debate on new ways to study notions such as ‘self’, ‘identity’ and ‘embodiment’. This second facet is underpinned by an increasingly voiced need to move beyond a discourse analytic methodology which fails to fully account for subjectivity (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987), and fails to address the “inherently embodied nature of discourse itself” (Sampson, 1998: 24). Extracting the multiple and contradictory discourses that a transsexual individual draws upon and positions their experience within will provide an interesting insight into the cultural discourses that are available to make sense of the social world at this particular moment in time. It will not, however, tell us *why* these individuals position themselves within the discourses that constitute a transsexual identity. Of course, the question of why is outside the remit of the current project, maybe even a lifetime’s work. But, the thesis will contribute to methodological developments that take discourse analysis beyond the presentation of a snapshot of transsexual experience and the evidencing of the socially constructed nature of gender. This is achieved by approaching the project from an ‘embodied standpoint’ (Csordas, 1999), drawing upon phenomenological perspectives alongside a poststructuralist informed analysis. In addition, Hollway & Jefferson’s (2000) notion of the defended subject is utilized to offer an explanation for why some participants may hold on ferociously to particular subject positions in order to fend off anxiety and sustain their sense of gendered being. Thus, the methodology incorporates an eclectic and hopefully rich range of perspectives. These issues are addressed in Chapter Four.

1.3 Beyond discourse: theorizing transsexual embodied subjectivity

In the initial stages of this research project a wide scale collection of media accounts of transsexualism was conducted. The aim was critically to evaluate media based accounts of transsexualism, documenting how they represent and construct some of the versions of transsexual experience that are explored in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Here, the term ‘media’ is used in a very broad sense to group together textual and visual materials that

circulate in the public sphere. I specifically drew upon: newspaper articles taken from the mainstream and gay press; transsexuals political group *Press for Change*'s campaign material; alongside a detailed analysis of a television documentary, *Heart of the Matter: More Sexes Please* (1997). These were analyzed using the principles of discourse analysis (see Chapter Four) and the findings were presented in several conference papers (Johnson, 1998; 1999; 2000). However, during the course of the research a shift in emphasis away from simply isolating and documenting instances of particular discourses to creating a more nuanced account of transsexual embodied subjectivity necessitated a re-focusing of the thesis and its layout. Thus, a taster of the types of representations of transsexualism found in media accounts are provided here as a backdrop to the central research aims subsequently formulated, rather than appearing as a main tenet of the dissertation itself.

Norman Fairclough (1995) argues that analysis of media language should be recognized as a weighty component of any research on contemporary processes of social and cultural change. Certainly, the power of the media to create specific versions of a 'truth' should not be underestimated. As he states:

The wider social impact of the media is not just to do with how they selectively represent the world, though that is a vitally important issue; it is also to do with what sorts of social identities, what versions of 'self', they project and what cultural values (be it consumerism, individualism or a cult of personality) these entail (1995: 17).

In the case of transsexualism media representations tend to be sensationalist, rather than informative about a complex phenomenon or a marginalized group. For example, this is not an unusual headline for stories featuring transsexuals:

Prisoners to have sex swaps on the NHS (Geraint Smith, *Evening Standard*, 12 March 1999).

Taken from the *Evening Standard*, with its right-wing editorial, this front-page headline is underpinned by a moral code that both suggests reassignment surgery is a waste of NHS funds and that 'criminals' are even more unworthy of these resources. However, this type of headline is always over-shadowed by the crassness of those that predominantly appear in *The Sun*. Here, with the obligatory and basic rhyme in place, is just one of many examples:

Blonde Was Once A Balding Fella: Tory turncoat Shaun Woodward's sister used to be a mister (Victor Chapple, *The Sun*, 20 December, 1999).

Yet, the most familiar representation of transsexualism is the Cartesian dualist notion of 'being born in the wrong body'. The pervasiveness of this aphorism in transsexuals' narrative accounts is illustrated in Chapter Five. However, within media based stories this construction of transsexualism tends to be headlined in its more sensationalist form of being 'trapped in the wrong body'. For example:

Trapped! Trucker must wait two years for sex change op (Andrew Wright, *Swanage Advertiser*, 29 July 1999).

'Born in the wrong body' can be found in almost all media accounts, but it tends to appear further into the text once the reader's attention has been caught, often in quotes, when the subject of the article is being cited. For example, in an interview with Jackie from the docu-soap *Paddington Green*, she was cited lamenting:

I was cheated by mother nature. *I was in the wrong body*, unhappy, and throughout my teens there seemed no way out...All those years I just imagined I was trapped like that for the rest of my life (Michael Burke, *The Mail on Sunday*, 10 January 1999).

In this thesis it is argued that whilst a Cartesian dualist explanation for the experience of being transsexual may reflect the disembodied feelings of those who identify as transsexual (Prosser, 1998 see Chapter Five), it also has the effect of regulating a binary gender system, reinforcing and reinstating a polarized two gender system. This argument is not new. In fact, 'the medical construction of transsexualism' is frequently charged with this type of complaint by many who engage conceptually with the phenomenon (e.g. Billings & Urban, 1995; Hausman, 1995). For example, Judith Lorber argues: "Transvestites and transsexuals do not challenge the social construction of gender. Their goal is to be masculine men and feminine women" (1995: 20-21). However, more significantly, I also argued that whilst the deployment of a Cartesian dualist discourse attempts to validate the transsexual subject's claim to be 'man' or 'woman', it does not provide a comprehensive account able to explain the complex web of gender identifications the transsexual has to negotiate during the formation of transsexual embodied subjectivity (see Chapter Five).

Despite the dependency upon the construction ‘born in the wrong body’ within media sources we can, however, occasionally find within them more complex accounts of transsexual subjectivity. As the media becomes increasingly ‘conversationalized’ (Fairclough, 1995: 9), more nuanced representations of transsexual experience are beginning to emerge. For example, we saw Jackie from Paddington Green describing herself as being ‘born in the wrong body’, but in a second and more detailed interview that also appeared in *The Mail on Sunday*, Jackie expanded upon this explanation. The somewhat unsympathetic interviewer, Marianne MacDonald, wrote:

But when I asked if she had thought that she had been born in the wrong body, she said it wasn’t that simple. ‘As time has gone on, I’ve realised, yes, I was born in the wrong body, but I was born in this body, this little boy’s body. And I had to take that on board. I can’t blank that out.

‘So I can’t really go round saying I’m a fully-fledged woman because, for one I’d be lying to myself, and secondly, I wouldn’t be dealing with the way it’s all worked out. So I’ve really tried to incorporate my past, this person that I use to be, this young lad. And I have to keep looking back and thinking: this person existed and, yes, he was a little boy and he was very unhappy, but Jackie’s here and it’s better now.’

This sounds a bit scary -- like *Psycho* -- but she says it isn’t, ‘because it’s basically coming to terms with your past’ (*The Mail on Sunday*, 16 May 1999).

Unfortunately, the interviewer cannot resist an easy quip. This ‘pathologizing’ reference to *Psycho* repositions the transsexual subject as ‘freak’, ‘mad’, ‘weird’ and all the other connotations that can be wrung out from such a remark. Yet, to me, Jackie’s attempt to grapple with her past history that was spent as a boy seems far more understandable than suggesting that her pre-formed gendered self was somehow spirited into the wrong physical shell. But, perhaps, in a culture dominated by heterosexist and heteronormative hegemonies, where everyone is expected to physically manifest and adhere to the appropriate signifying system for one, and only one, gender in a two gender model, the notion that a transsexual woman could admit to having, at one time, *been* male may be too disturbing.

Thus, in order to present a complex and compelling account of the experience of *Being Transsexual*, I break away from the more established notion of theorizing transsexualism *conceptually* that tends to dominate most feminists’ and queer theorists’ engagement with the phenomenon (e.g. Raymond, 1980; Lorber, 1995; Hausman, 1995; Wilton, 2000). Of course, medical discourses of transsexualism *do* have the effect of attempting

to regulate the binary gender. However, detailed research into transgender phenomena that is sensitive to the lived experiences of transsexual and transgendered people will reveal that the material grounding of their new gender experiences can also unravel the certainty of particular pervasive discourses. The notion of ‘changing sex’ does help to regulate a binary gender system, but the subsequent state of gender ambiguity in which many transsexuals reside, exemplified through the risk of not ‘passing’, challenges, threatens and undoes gender certainty for us all. However, Tamsin Wilton (2000) prefers to stay within the more conventional realms of discourse. In *Out/Performing Our Selves*, she begins by professing that:

...this article is not ‘about’ transsexual *people*, but about medicalized *discourses* of MTF transsex and, although I recognize that such discourses both produce and are produced by transpeople, it is the discourses themselves and their wider effects on the gendered politics of sexuality that I am interrogating (Wilton, 2000: 237, emphasis in original)

But, we might question the usefulness of isolating a specific set of discourses for understanding ‘the gendered politics of sexuality’, particularly when attention to other discourses and material practices could easily unpick or counteract the claimed effects. Seemingly aware of this, Wilton goes on to note:

It is important to acknowledge that claims of ‘being in the wrong body’ mark only one strand of the many which currently characterize the transsexual/transgender experience. In recent years the performativities of those for whom attributed sex is at odds with their sense of self have proliferated beyond the always-fragile bounds of the medical model of trans-sex, to incorporate gender-transience, blurring and other transitionality. Such strategies...do not concern me here (Wilton, 2000: 238)

Similarly, her “focus also excludes female-to-male trajectories, although FTM accounts complicate the politics of sexuality in intriguing ways” (2000: 238). Thus, the problem with Wilton’s account for those of us who are interested in moving beyond conceptual accounts of transsexualism is obvious. Whilst she acknowledges that transsexual subjectivity is not simply produced by medical discourses, she continually fails to engage with those aspects of ‘trans’ experience that will disturb the professed effects of medical discourses upon the politics of gendered sexuality. It is precisely the complexities and inconsistencies in the narrated accounts of male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals that have the ability to *unsettle* the medical discourses that attempt to

regulate the binary gender system and heteronormativity. Hence, whilst Wilton focuses upon the medical discourses of transsexualism rather than ‘transsexual *people*’, as if they could be anything else, I incorporate aspects found in accounts of transsexual embodied subjectivity that materially ground and often limit gender transgression.

Thus, in this thesis I argue that Cartesian dualist constructions of transsexualism are oversimplistic and fail to account for the processes of identification the transsexual has to negotiate. These discursive constructions promulgate the notion that selfhood is somehow separate from the material body and located only within the structures of the mind. Yet, these participants are transsexual precisely because of the changes that have been made to their physical bodies. To be ‘transsexual’, by definition, necessitates a move from one gendered being to the other. However, Cartesian dualism is generally a more ‘acceptable’ account because it also serves to reinstate and regulate the binary gender system of either male/masculine, or female/feminine, where brain ‘sex’ and body ‘sex’ should match. It also permits a means for circumventing the minefield of discursive positions and identificationary practices the transsexual subject has to surmount (Elliot & Roen, 1998).

Secondly, I begin to engage with the necessary task of theorizing transsexual embodiment. I do this by not *only* attending to the complex identifications and positionings transsexuals have to negotiate when trying to explain their gendered subjectivity, but by also including an account of gendered subjectivity as an integrated process of formation, intrinsically tied to new presentations of corporeality. As such, I argue that radical shifts in gendered subjectivity cannot take place simply through the repositioning of a female identity within the discourses of masculinity, or a male identity within the discourses of femininity. Instead, it entails an embodied transition mediated through varying degrees of hormonal and surgical intervention. Inevitably, it can take many years before the hormones create the desired physical changes and the cultural practices that signify the new gender identity are learnt. Equally, the past, a past sense of self, past physicality and previous cultural practices of gendered embodiment do not always permit a secure attachment to the new gender identity. As Adam Phillips suggests “the past influences everything and dictates nothing” (1999: 29). Hence, I propose that *Being Transsexual* involves an ongoing process of *becoming* male or female.

Finally, after documenting the close theoretical relationship between gender and sexuality in both clinical (see Chapter Two) and socio-cultural accounts (see Chapter Three), the ways in which the participants' sexual orientation and sexual relationships impact upon ambivalence towards and anxiety about their gender identifications are discussed in Chapter Seven. Here, I argue that affiliations between transgendered and gay and lesbian communities based upon mutual rejection of heteronormative hegemonies will prove more politically rewarding than the current battles over identity borderlines which tend to plague already marginalized groups. The final chapter brings together all the strands of the thesis in order to make its concluding points.

2

Clinical Perspectives: Critical reflections on the conception and treatment of transsexualism

Patients whose subjective histories are subsumed under the unifying rhetoric of transsexualism win operations but no language adequate to express the disparate and diverse desires which lead them to body mutilation. These remain private, inchoate, unspeakable

Dwight B. Billings & Thomas Urban, *The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism*, (1995: 112).

It is a well-established premise that the introduction to any psychological report or thesis follows a standard approach that aims to advance the understanding of scientific knowledge. This approach involves an in-depth coverage of existing literature, pointing out weaknesses and gaps in both theoretical and empirical understanding, which the proposed study then attempts to fill (Kitzinger, 1987). Celia Kitzinger offers an alternative approach in her book *The Social Construction of Lesbianism*. Rather than addressing the more traditional enquiry “What does the literature tell us about homosexuality?” she posed the questions “What can we learn from the literature about the construction of social scientific accounts?” and “What can we learn from the literature about attempts to manage and control homosexuality?” (1987:1). In this chapter, this theoretical approach is employed and applied to the study of transsexualism.

So, instead of taking the category ‘transsexual’ as given, I also follow the pioneering work of Ken Plummer who asked “does the ‘category’ mirror or construct the phenomenon?” (1981:75). Thirdly, I draw on the work of Dave King (1981; 1993; 1995), who illustrated the significance of the theoretical and empirical endeavour of establishing the socially constructed nature of transvestism and transsexualism.

1.1 Setting the scene: The early sexologists

The term ‘transsexual’ was reportedly first used in 1949 by D.O. Cauldwell in a paper “Psychopathia transsexualis”, which presented the case of a young girl who wanted to change sex (MacKenzie, 1994). However, a transsexual identity, as it is commonly perceived today, was not conceptualized until the widely publicized case of Christine Jorgensen (1953), and the medical response of Harry Benjamin (1953; 1966), Richard Green and John Money (1969), and Robert Stoller (1975). Notwithstanding, the roots of this identity can be traced back to the work of sexologists at the turn of the last century.

By the close of the 19th Century, there had begun what Michel Foucault described as the ‘medicalisation of the sexually peculiar’ (Foucault, 1979: 44). Central to Foucault’s historical analysis of the genealogy of ‘sexuality’ was the creation of a homosexual identity. As he states: ‘[T]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species’ (1979: 43). Running parallel to this was a growing interest in cross-dressing and cross-gendered behaviour. Pauly (1992), in a historical overview, cites the first description of cross-gender behaviour in the medical literature by Friedreich in 1830. This was followed by subsequent German sexologists using terms like ‘the contrary sexual feeling’ (Westphal, 1869) and ‘metamorphosis sexualis paranoia’ (Krafft-Ebing, 1877). However, it was the work of Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis that pushed the study of cross-gender behaviour into the scientific arena. Whilst Ellis referred to cross-dressing as ‘eonism’, famously named after the 18th Century aristocrat Cavalier d’Eon, it was the term ‘transvestite’, taken from Hirschfeld’s *Die Transvestiten* (1910) that was embraced by the English literature, and widely used to describe cases of cross-gender identity.

Both these sexologists were concerned with separating the idea of transvestism from

homosexuality. Ellis originally employed the term ‘sexo-aesthetic inversion’ to describe an individual who felt like a person of the opposite sex and who, as far as possible, sought to adopt “the tastes, habits and dress of the opposite sex while the direction of the sexual impulse remains normal” (Ellis, 1920: 1-2). He later rejected this term in favour of eonism because he believed it was “too apt to arouse suggestions of homosexuality”. Instead, he argued that “the majority of sexo-aesthetic inverts are not only without any tendency to sexual inversion but they feel a profound repugnance to that anomaly” (Ellis, 1928: 102-3). In a similar vein, Hirschfeld defined ‘transvestism’ as, “the impulse to assume the external garb of a sex which is not apparently that of the subject as indicated by the sexual organs” (quoted by Ellis, 1928: 13). He also drew a distinction between transvestism and homosexuality, criticizing Krafft-Ebing for perceiving transvestism as “nothing but a variant of homosexuality where as today we are in a position to say that transvestism is a condition that occurs independently and must be considered separate from any other sexual anomaly” (Hirschfeld, 1938: 188-9).

Although united in their view that ‘eonism’ and ‘transvestism’ should be a separate category from homosexuality, there was some contention between Ellis and Hirschfeld’s definitions of cross-gender behaviour. Dave King illustrates how Ellis’s definition of the two main types of eonism comes very close to the distinction we have today, between transvestism and transsexualism:

One, the most common kind in which the inversion is mainly confined to the sphere of clothing and another less common *but more complete* in which cross-dressing is regarded with comparative indifference but the subject so identifies himself with those of his physical and psychic traits which recall the opposite sex that he feels really to belong to that sex although he has no delusion regarding his anatomical conformation (Ellis, 1928: 36: quoted in King, 1995: 82, emphasis in King).

Ellis objected to Hirschfeld’s term transvestite because it focused attention solely on cross-dressing behaviour, ignoring the ‘less common’ element of eonism. Similarly, he rejected Hirschfeld’s notion of ‘impulse of disguise’ arguing that, in fact, the opposite was taking place. Rather than seeking disguise through adopting the attire of the opposite sex, the eonist “feels on the contrary that he has thereby become emancipated from a disguise and is at last real himself” (Ellis, 1920: 3). As we will later see, this definition confers closely with contemporary definitions of transsexualism.

Despite the authoritative approaches of Ellis and Hirschfeld, their work had little effect on mainstream medical literature, especially the literature available outside the German language. This was compounded by the persecution of the sexologist, Hirschfeld, at the beginning of the Nazi regime. Many files were destroyed, reportedly because they documented the cross-dressing of some leading Nazi officials (Benjamin, 1966), and Berlin, to put it mildly, no longer enjoyed the sexual liberalism that had taken place during the previous decade. Instead, by the Second World War, transvestism had become an established 'perversion', steeped in pathologizing language, at least in the psychiatric field (King, 1995; Pauly, 1965). As has continued to be the case, when it came to establishing an etiological basis for cross-gender behaviour, the early sexologists were unclear and divided. Ellis favoured a biological theory although he was rather vague when it came to the specific mechanisms involved (King, 1995). An alternative explanation came from the psychoanalytic perspective, which both emphasized castration anxiety and the belief that homosexuality and transvestitism were somehow inherently linked by this 'fundamental unconscious mechanism'. Otto Fenichel went on to argue that "the transvestite...has not been able to give up his belief in the phallic nature of women and, in addition, he has identified himself with the woman with a penis" (Fenichel, 1954: 168-169; quoted in King, 1995: 84). Although, there was little understanding of the etiology of this 'perversion', some attempts were made to 'cure' the transvestite - with both psychoanalytic and behaviouristic aversion therapy (Bockting & Coleman, 1992; King, 1981, 1995) - but with little success.

By the 1950's the idea of 'changing sex' was not unknown. In an extensive literature review, Pauly (1965) cites sixteen cases of surgical intervention reported before the publication of the treatment given to Christine Jorgensen in 1953 (Hamburger, Sturup & Dahl-Iversion, 1953). The most frequently cited case of an early transsexual is Lili Elbe (e.g. Benjamin, 1966; Hoyer, 1933). However, this classification is ascribed retrospectively. At the time, Lili Elbe was depicted as a case of 'sexual intermediacy' (Haire, introduction to Hoyer, 1933). In fact Christine Jorgensen, probably the most famous recipient of sex-reassignment treatment, was not diagnosed or described as a transsexual until after the completion of her surgery. This was because the category had not yet been fully conceptualized.

1.2 The emergence of transsexual identity

As already suggested, Cauldwell (1949) first utilized the term 'transsexual' in the paper "Psychopathia transsexualis", although later he employed the term 'sex transmutationist' (1951) in reference to those who had a desire to change sex. Cauldwell was sympathetic towards transvestitism, which he described as a "personality quirk" (1949: 6), or a "harmless pastime of loveable eccentrics" (1949b: 20). His approach to those who actually wanted to change sex was not so embracing. He regarded them as "mentally unhealthy", the result of "an unfavourable childhood environment" and described the use of surgery as treatment as "criminal mutilation" (1949c cited in King, 1995: 86). However, a transsexual identity as it is commonly perceived today was not conceptualized until the widely publicized work of Harry Benjamin (1953; 1966). His work, alongside that of other prominent sexologists (e.g. Green & Money, 1969; Stoller, 1975), had a huge impact upon how a transsexual identity was constructed through clinical and psychoanalytic theorizing.

Harry Benjamin M.D. coined the term 'transsexual' in 1953, and is frequently accredited with the title 'father of transsexualism' (e.g.: Szasz, 1980; MacKenzie, 1994; Califia; 1997). His article was issued in response to the widespread media coverage of Christine Jorgensen's sex reassignment operation in Denmark, as was the report made in the same year by the surgical team involved (Hamburger, Sturup & Dahl-Iverson, 1953). In his paper Benjamin argued for a distinction to be drawn between transvestites and transsexuals, such that:

Transvestism...is the desire of a certain group of men to dress as women or women to dress as men. It can be powerful and over-whelming, even to the point of wanting to belong to the other sex and correct nature's anatomical 'error'. For such cases the term transsexualism seems appropriate (1953: 12).

Despite the sensational publicity that surrounded the Jorgensen case pushing her into the new role of celebrity (Jorgensen, 1967), the coining of a new term did not result in an outburst of research and publications on the subject in the following decade (King, 1995). It was not until after the publications of *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (Benjamin, 1966), and possibly Jorgensen's autobiography a year later, that the concept really became

grounded in the medical domain.

Although the purpose of his book was “to deal with transsexualism”, Benjamin dedicated an extra chapter to transvestism “in order to let the picture of transsexualism emerge more clearly”. Benjamin defined the transsexual male or female as “deeply unhappy as a member of the sex or (gender) to which he or she was assigned by the anatomical structure of the body, particularly the genitals” (1966: 13). As transsexuals find some appeasement to their unhappiness through dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex, Benjamin concluded that they are also transvestites. However, as cross-dressing only provides temporary relief to the transsexual, Benjamin drew a distinction between the ‘true transvestite’, who is content with his morphological sex, and the ‘true transsexual’, who feels:

...they *belong* to the other sex, they want to *be* and *function* as members of the opposite sex, not only to appear as such. For them, their sex organs, the primary (the testes) as well as the secondary (penis and others) are disgusting deformities that must be changed by the surgeons knife (1966: 13; emphasis added).

However, Benjamin did consider both transsexualism and transvestism to be symptomatic of the same underlying psychopathological condition which he defined as “sex or gender role disorientation or indecision” (1966: 17). The distinction lay in the transsexual’s greater degree of sex and gender disorientation coupled with greater emotional disturbances than the transvestite. Moreover, the transsexual’s disorientation took the form of feelings of disgust and hate towards his sex organs, hair distribution, masculine habits, male dress, and male sexuality.

As well as drawing a distinction between transvestites and transsexuals, Benjamin also attempted to distinguish between homosexuality and transsexualism. He proposed that a psychiatrist’s diagnosis of ‘homosexuality’ could be problematic for the transsexual, arguing: “The ‘gay’ life...is no solution for the transsexual. He does not like it. He actually dislikes homosexuals and feels he has nothing in common with them” (1966: 65). A short excerpt from Christine Jorgensen’s autobiography indicates support for this view:

During the months in [army] service, I had seen a few practicing homosexuals, those whom the other men called 'queer'. I couldn't condemn them, but I also knew that I certainly couldn't become like them...Furthermore, I had seen enough to know that homosexuality brought with it a social segregation and ostracism that I couldn't add to my own deep feeling of not belonging (1967: 33).

What is interesting here, and perhaps indicative of the times, is the idea that homosexuality would bring about social stigmatization whilst a 'sex change' somehow would not.

This notion that the 'true' transsexual was not homosexual became one of the central tenets for the 'Benjamin Criteria' for sex reassignment candidates. In fact, up until the last decade, individuals were turned away from this form of treatment if they stated their post-operative sexual preference as lesbian or gay (Bockting & Coleman, 1992; Nataf, 1996). However, it is important to take into account Benjamin's theoretical stance on homosexuality. Having cited Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin's (1948) estimate that 4% of the adult male population are exclusively homosexual, Benjamin appeared to prefer a more fluid interpretation of sexual orientation. He expressed dislike for the term 'homosexual' which is "applied too often", preferring to speak "merely of homosexual behaviour, inclinations, and more or less frequent activities" (1966: 25). Concluding strongly that transsexualism and homosexuality are very different "problems", gender and sex problems respectively, the idea that a post-operative transsexual may want to enter into a relationship with a member of the same genital sex appears to have completely failed him. We can only speculate reasons why, but attention can be drawn to two factors, the McCarthyism of the 1950's and his research focus on male-to-female transsexuals.

Much of Benjamin's research and theorizing was taking place against a political backdrop of growing McCarthy hysteria that constructed the homosexual as a "sexually perverted" bogeyman, eager to betray the American government and harm the American family (MacKenzie, 1994). There is no doubt that Harry Benjamin had considerable sympathy for the plight of his patients. It is probable that less stigma would be afforded to transsexuals who were diagnosed in terms of a treatable medical disorder, if some distance could be put between them and the homosexual. Secondly, Benjamin's research was principally concerned with male-to-female transsexuals, because at this point in time

far fewer cases of female-to-male transsexuals had been reported. Given this research took place against a historical legacy that theorized lesbians as ‘masculine’ (e.g. Ellis, 1936) or ‘Mannish’ (Krafft-Ebing, 1908), the idea that any man who took such drastic measures as having sex reassignment surgery would then enter into lesbian sexual relations may have appeared improbable, if not implausible. Richard Green supports this assumption. Describing one of the earliest occurrences of a transsexual who did not identify as heterosexual after surgery, he says:

An additional complication described by one male seeking sex reassignment was that his erotic attractions are only to women. Males are not sexually stimulating him. This patient’s primary motive in seeking sex reassignment appeared to be a gender one: that is, *he wished to lead the social life of a woman but not the sexual one*. He found himself in the rare situation of anticipating a life of lesbianism after surgery (Green, 1969: 288, my emphasis).

Returning to the distinction between transvestites and transsexuals, Benjamin suggested they lie on a continuum - where the defining differential is the role of the medical profession. As Benjamin states, the transsexual “puts all his faith and future into the hands of the doctor, particularly the surgeon”, whilst the transvestite “wants to be left alone”. He clearly believed that the medical professions have the greatest influence in determining the life paths of those who present as transsexual. He saw psychological intervention as ineffective and argued that most attempts to use psychotherapy to cure transsexuals had proven futile, often resulting in:

Some of them probably languishing in mental institutions, some in prisons, and the majority as miserable, unhappy members of the community, unless they have committed suicide. Only because of the recent advances in endocrinology and surgical techniques has the picture changed (1966: 14).

This enthusiasm for surgical intervention is reiterated in the Preface to *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. Referring to Hamburger et al (1953), Benjamin praises “the courageous and compassionate Danish physicians who, for the first time, dared to violate the tabu of a supposedly inviolate sex and gender concept” (1966: viii). However, it is Christine Jorgensen that receives Benjamin’s credit for publicizing both the transsexual ‘condition’ and sex reassignment as the favoured therapeutic intervention. This is illustrated in Benjamin’s emphatic acknowledgement:

Without her courage and determination, undoubtedly springing from a force deep inside her, transsexualism might be still unknown - certainly unknown by this term - and might be considered to be something barely on the fringe of medical science (1966: viii).

The case of Christine Jorgensen was of crucial importance in the creation of transsexual identity. The widespread media attention of the Jorgensen story in 1952, culminating in the publication of her autobiography in 1967, was greeted with varying reactions from other physicians and the wider general public. Billed as “The candid and courageous story of an outstanding woman who pioneered an age of sexual awareness through her own astonishing sex transformation!”, Jorgensen narrated her path from confused youth to celebrity show-girl and film maker. Possibly the most interesting revelation in the book was that she was already self-administrating ethinyl-oestradiol, a female hormone, before she approached physicians about her ‘condition’. Jorgensen is not the only person who has self-administrated hormones before presenting themselves to medical professionals. Hausman (1995) documents the case of Agnes, a young woman who in 1958 appeared at the Department of Psychiatry of the University of California, seeking plastic surgery to remedy an apparent endocrine abnormality. Agnes appeared as a typically ‘feminine’ woman, with breast development, wide hips and small waist, long hair and smooth skin, but nevertheless had a fully developed penis and atrophic scrotum. The UCLA researchers involved, Robert Stoller, Harold Garfinkel and Alexander Rosen could find no physiological explanation for her genital aberration. Instead, they hypothesized that she suffered from “testicular feminization syndrome, that is extreme feminization of the male body (breasts, no body and facial hair, feminine skin and subcutaneous fat distribution) due to oestrogens produced by the testes” (Stoller, 1968: 365). In due course, Agnes was given surgical treatment to remove the penis and testes and create a vagina. After the operation, Agnes was given oestrogen replacement therapy, as the testes, her perceived source of oestrogen had been removed. It was to the horror of the physicians involved, that eight years after first presenting at UCLA, Agnes revealed that she had actually been self-administrating her mother’s hormone replacement tablets since the age of twelve (Hausman, 1995). Thinking they were dealing with an intersexed patient, a ‘natural mistake’, the research team had been duped into carrying out sex reassignment surgery on a biological male.

One is unsure as to how the twelve-year-old Agnes discovered that taking her mother’s

hormone replacement tablets would give her the desired feminizing effects. Jorgensen, however, gained her knowledge of the role of hormones in body morphology through personal research, citing the discovery of Paul de Kruif's book, *The Male Hormone* as a critical turning point in her transformation. With the knowledge gained from this text, and experience drawn from a laboratory technician course at the *Manhattan Medical and Dental Assistants School*, she managed to purchase a course of 'the strongest' ethinyl-oestradiol tablets from a drug store and began self-administrating in 1948. This was two years before she made contact with Dr. Christian Hamburger, who would later carry out her reassignment surgery in 1952. In response to her question "what is wrong with me", she cites Hamburger response: "Why, I believe that you are the victim of a problem that usually starts in early childhood, an irresistible feeling that you wish to be regarded by society and by yourself, as belonging to the opposite sex. Nothing is able to change this feeling" (Jorgensen, 1967: 92). He also advised her that although he would be able to treat her, she may be a guinea pig for the surgical procedure. The processes revealed in these cases are of particular interest because they illustrate just how dependent the notion of a transsexual identity is upon the medical profession, as both Jorgensen and Agnes could only go so far in their desire to transition. Yet, one cannot help but wonder how the psychiatric profession greeted the revelation that Jorgensen and Agnes had been able to move some way towards this transition *unsupervised*.

However, perhaps more important, was the effect the Jorgensen case had on those who would subsequently present themselves to psychiatrists as transsexual. As Benjamin notes, the facts of Jorgensen's case "caused emotions to run high among those similarly effected. Suddenly they understood and 'found' themselves and saw hope for a release from an unhappy existence" (1966). Drawing upon the ideas of Ken Plummer (1995), it could be argued that these individuals did not 'find' themselves at all, rather they 'found' a story to tell about themselves as they were able to identify similarities between Jorgensen's narrative and their own life histories. Through this identification with Jorgensen's past experience, they could conclude that they, like her, were transsexual, thus recreating themselves through Jorgensen's story. This would be particularly applicable after the publication of her autobiography in 1967. This possibility of 'self-identity' or 'self-diagnosis', whichever way it is put, has been one of central concern throughout the literature on transsexualism. Individuals suffering from varying degrees of gender confusion have been able to say, "yes, that's me", after exposure to the

appropriate material, and put themselves forward for reassignment surgery. Inevitably, affairs became even more problematic for the clinical professionals. Not only were prospective candidates for reassignment able to identify their experience with the autobiographical accounts of transsexuals such as Jorgensen, they also gained extensive knowledge of ‘what it means to be transsexual’ from the psychiatric literature itself.

1.3 Diagnostic contentions

The term ‘transsexual’ is unusual as a diagnostic category because it names the method of treatment and rehabilitation (i.e. moving from one sex to the other) rather than the syndrome (gender dysphoria). It’s rather like a person suffering from depression saying ‘I am a Prozac person’. Furthermore, without a known cause, transsexualism is open to self-definition through personal suffering. Physicians, however, have their own criteria of symptoms that a patient must fulfill before they will accept their ‘self-defined illness’ (Money, 1986). In 1973, Fisk summarized the following guidelines for recognizing the ‘true transsexual’:

A life-long sense or feeling of being a member of the ‘other sex’; the early and persistent behaviouristic phenomenon of cross-dressing, coupled with a strong emphasis upon a total lack of erotic feelings associated with cross-dressing; and a disdain or repugnance for homosexual behaviour (Fisk, 1973: 8).

Not only did these criteria determine who is, or can be a ‘true’ transsexual they also provided justification for the category itself - by eliminating transvestite and homosexual behaviour. Yet, given the lack of organic indications of a ‘disease’ and the self-diagnostic nature of transsexualism, physicians are dependent upon the accuracy and honesty of the patients’ statements for diagnoses, as well as for their understanding of the disorder (Billings & Urban, 1995). As early as 1968, Kubie and Mackie wrote that patients demanding surgery “tailor their views of themselves and their personal histories to prevailing ‘scientific’ fashions” (1968: 435). Having consulted the guidelines as to what constitutes a ‘textbook’ transsexual, and knowing that reputable clinics only treated ‘textbook’ cases, candidates had little choice but to present as a ‘textbook’ case. As the psychiatrist’s job is to assess how well patients’ self-reported life histories fit the diagnostic criteria for transsexualism, it was not long before they caught on. As Fisk

states:

Soon it became conspicuously and disturbingly apparent that far too many patients presented a pat, almost rehearsed history, and seemingly were well versed in precisely what they should or should not say or reveal. Only later did we learn that there did and does exist a very effective grape-vine (Fisk, 1973: 8).

The threat of deception had become so strong that Stoller also complained:

Those of us faced with the task of diagnosing transsexualism have an additional burden these days, for most patients who request sex-reassignment are in complete command of the literature and know the answers before the questions are asked (1973a: 536).

Billings & Urban (1995) describe this as 'the con', arguing physicians reinforced this process by rewarding compliance with the desired surgery and turning away those who gave honest but unamended subjective histories. But, the idea that it is ever possible to give an accurate subjective account of one's past is highly debatable. Developments within social constructionist perspectives suggest that the analysis of memories tells us more about the ways in which people will attempt to construct their memories, in order to support their current situation and create a cohesive life story, than the truth of their past experiences (e.g. Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton, 1992). Billings and Urban do, however, make a valid point when they argue how inadequately the medical image of a stable life-long transsexual identification fits some individual's experiences and motivations. This notion of a fixed, monadic, sexual identity is clearly contradicted by the self-reflexive fluidity in sexuality and gender identities expressed by "a (male-to-female) patient...whose lover was also a post-operative male-to-female transsexual":

I thought I was a homosexual at one time; then I got married and had a child so I figured I was a heterosexual; then because of cross-dressing I thought I was a transvestite. Now [post-operatively] I see myself as bisexual (quoted by Billing & Urban, 1995: 111-2).

A second problem that has plagued the study of transsexualism, which can loosely be defined as the morality debate, takes issue with whether physical treatment of what are considered healthy bodies should be offered to those who, arguably, have a psychological disorder. Thomas Szasz, who describes transsexualism as "a condition tailor-made for

our surgical-technological age” (1990: 86), is, as ever, critical of the psychiatric profession. He goes on to argue that “instead of scrutinizing the nature of ‘transsexualism’, sexologists are now busily attacking and defending sex-change operations” (1990: 89). And, this has certainly been the case. News that a prominent centre for the surgical treatment of transsexualism had been set up at The John Hopkins University, sparked off a wave of opposition within medicine in the late 1960’s (Billings & Urban, 1995). This attack was led by psychoanalysts in private practice, labelling transsexuals as ‘all border-line psychotics’ and charging surgeons with ‘collaboration with psychosis’ (Meerloo, 1967: 263). In response, it was necessary for ‘sex-change’ proponents to legitimize surgical treatment. Billing & Urban (1995: 104) propose this was achieved through two methods: constructing an etiological theory which stressed the non-psychopathic character of the illness and rationalizing diagnostic and treatment strategies.

Whilst many proponents of sex-reassignment favoured a biological predisposition for transsexualism (e.g. Benjamin, 1966), it was Robert Stoller (1967; 1973b; 1975) who, by spearheading early socialization, provided the much needed less pathological etiological justification for cross-gender identification. Stoller claimed the male transsexual was the outcome of an over-intense physical relationship between the boy and his mother, coupled with the absence of the father who should have interrupted ‘the process of feminization’ (1967: 433). Furthermore, Stoller conceptualized transsexualism as a gender identity disorder, rather than a neurotic perversion, such as transvestism. As such, he argued that, due to parental factors, the male transsexual over-identifies with his mother to the extent that he believes he is the same as her, despite having different genitals. Stoller’s theory is based on the notion of a ‘core gender identity’, which is formed early in life. Despite proposing that this identity can vacillate at times between masculine and feminine expressions, he, nevertheless, suggested that its basis, the ‘core’, would always remain the same. Thus, he argued that psychotherapy is pointless for the transsexual, as there is no psychological conflict. The distress they exhibit is the result of their core gender identity *never* corresponding to their biological sex (Stoller, 1975).

Benjamin (1966) was in favour of permitting physical alteration of the visible genitalia and secondary sex characteristics if it had a beneficial effect on the individual’s life. Frequently, the benefit gained is described in terms of reducing the risk of a transsexual

individual committing suicide. Thus, the early defenses of sex reassignment surgery, in particular, stressed the patient's intense anguish and the duty of physicians 'to ease the existence of these fellow-men' (Hamburger, 1953: 373). Bockting & Coleman (1992), both clinicians currently working in the field, argue that this had the beneficial effect of swinging the treatment pendulum from attempting to 'cure' the transsexual with psychoanalysis or aversion therapy to facilitating acceptance and management of gender role transition. However, they also point out negative aspects of such a stance. Unfortunately, Benjamin's initial emphasis on the intensity of the suffering of the transsexual often resulted in less severe co-morbid psychopathology being overlooked when decisions were taken regarding treatment and sex reassignment. Thus, depression and anxiety came to be seen as symptoms of the gender disturbance, which would be alleviated by the sex reassignment. However, thirteen years after Benjamin's work, a widely publicized study by Meyer and Reter (1979) indicated that, contrary to Benjamin's assertions, sex reassignment did not decrease distress and suicide among transsexuals, or improve their general life functioning.

Jon Meyer, director of John Hopkins University's Gender Clinic was already becoming unsympathetic to the plight of transsexuals. In 1973, he complained that "the label 'transsexual' has come to cover such a 'multitude of sins'" (Meyer, 1973: 35 cited in Billing & Urban, 1995: 110). A year later he stated that amongst the patients who had requested, and on occasions received, surgery at John Hopkins were sadists, homosexuals, schizoids, masochists, homosexual prostitutes and psychotic depressives (Meyer, 1974). These findings were employed to support the decision at John Hopkins University in 1979 to decline further sex reassignment services. Based on the grounds that the patients they had operated upon were no better off than a sample of transsexual patients who received psychotherapy but no surgery (Meyer & Reter, 1979), this decision presented a mighty blow to those in favour of the medical treatment. One recent study (Green & Fleming, 1990) has reported more favourable follow up findings, but whether or not to advocate hormonal and surgical sex reassignment remains deeply controversial.

A third problem with transsexualism, closely related to those already outlined focuses on the complicated relationship between diagnosis and treatment. I have already pointed to one unusual feature, in that the diagnosis 'transsexual' is defined in terms of the treatment: to be 'transsexual' presumes movement across or between sexes. Hence, the

flip side to this is that if a patient says 'I am a transsexual', it already implies the course of treatment. For this reason, not only do the psychiatric profession have a problem in regulating the diagnosis of the disorder, the self-diagnosed transsexual may have already decided that sex reassignment surgery is the only viable treatment. Considerable attention has been paid to this problem in the clinically based literature, and significant effort has been made to regain control of both diagnosis and prescribed treatments. As Ross states:

Unfortunately, many who present for treatment...request gender reassignment as the 'cure'. It is necessary, however, for the professional to set aside this self-diagnosis and prescription for treatment, and to determine a diagnosis from a careful history and from other appropriate investigations (Ross, 1986: 1).

Bockting and Coleman also support this view. They argue that:

For many clients as well as professionals, this diagnosis [transsexualism] presupposes sex reassignment as the treatment of choice. Implying sex reassignment early on precludes the exploration of co-morbid psychopathology and of the various dynamics and motivations for sex reassignment. This approach has potentially disastrous consequences given the irreversibility of hormonal and surgical sex reassignment (Bockting and Coleman, 1992: 136).

Ross (1986a) suggests it is not uncommon for individuals who are homosexual to present as transsexuals, predominantly because they are unable to accept their homosexuality. In fact, of the many transsexuals presenting for treatment, it seems that gender reassignment may not always be the most common treatment. Lothstein & Levine (1981), who began discussing the importance of recognizing co-morbid psychopathology in the assessment and treatment of individuals with gender identity disorders, suggested that up to 70% of transsexual patients reject gender reassignment treatment following long term psychotherapy. Morgan (1978) gives the harsher summary that of those presenting to clinics as 'transsexual', 10% will have a major mental illness, 30% will be homophobic homosexuals, and 20-25% will be sexually inadequate individuals with ambiguous gender identity. Having highlighted three specific dilemmas faced by clinicians, it becomes apparent that a common thread links all of these issues. This is itself the greatest problem in theorizing transsexualism and concerns the lack of an etiological basis for the classification.

It is not an unusual occurrence for a diagnosed psychological disorder to lack an etiological basis, even when methods used to treat it have been found to be effective - take depression (Clark, Beck & Alford, 1999), for example. The problem with the treatment of transsexualism is the invasive and controversial nature of the treatment involved, coupled with the question of whether a post-operative transsexual has any claim or right to be recognized as a 'real' man or woman. Critics of the procedure would say no. For example, Janice Raymond in *The Transsexual Empire*, provided a very scathing account of male-to-female transsexuals as "misguided and mistaken men", who, "are not women". In her view, '[T]hey are deviant males' (1980: 183). Thomas Szasz argues along similar lines that the medical procedure is "simply turning men into fake women, and women into fake men" (1990: 87). Meyer & Hoopes (1974) also express this view in an elaborate quote, describing the situation of a disappointed post-operative male-to-female transsexual:

...in a thousand subtle ways, the reassignee has the bitter experience that he is not - and never will be - a real girl but is, at best, a convincing simulated female. Such an adjustment cannot compensate for the tragedy of having lost all chance to be male and of having, in the final analysis, no way to be really female (1974: 450, quoted in Billings & Urban, 1995).

Perhaps of most interest is an account given by Harry Benjamin in the Preface to *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. He wrote:

There exists a relatively small group of people - men more often than women - who want to "change their sex" (1966: viii).

It is surprising that his first offering of a definition for transsexualism negates its very possibility. By placing the explanation in scare quotes he illustrates the assumption that underlies each of these accounts: that sex is immutable, a given, which can only be 'changed', not changed. Later, he develops and confirms this position by stating:

No actual change of sex is ever possible. Sex and gender are decided at the moment of conception, when either two X chromosomes...insure the foundations for a future girl, or when one Y chromosome and one X chromosome...insure the birth of the boy (Benjamin, 1966: 46).

This reference to a biological explanation for 'sex' demonstrates his understanding of sex

as a fixed category. Thus, for some, it seems the only sure way for clinicians to convince critics of the legitimacy of sex reassignment surgery, would be to find a biological explanation for, or predisposition to, cross-gender identity.

Unfortunately for them, there has been little supporting evidence to support a biological explanation (Coleman, Gooren & Ross, 1989). In his article, 'How does transsexualism develop and why?', Michael Ross (1986b) concludes that, to date, there is no evidence that suggests genetic and endocrinological factors feature amongst the causes of gender disorientation. However, a recent series of publications by Dick Swaab and his colleagues (Swaab & Hofman, 1995; Swaab et al, 1997) has shown preliminary indications that there may be some difference in the brain structure of transsexuals. These findings were greeted enthusiastically by some members of the transsexual community. But, the reporting of a minute region of the hypothalamus as smaller in six post-operative male-to-female transsexuals than in a 'normal' man (whilst being similar in size to a 'normal' woman) is hardly conclusive that these transsexuals had the brain structure of a female all along. It should also be noted that these findings were based on the autopsies of transsexual subjects who, presumably, had been consuming known and, inevitably in some cases, unknown quantities of hormones over their life span. Furthermore, as Ross, Wålinder, Lundström and Thuwe (1981) argue, if there was a biological basis for transsexualism, occurrences would be expected to be fairly stable across similar western cultures. However, their study, comparing prevalence rates in Sweden and Australia, found marked variations in the incidence of transsexualism. The existence of a genetic or biological basis for their identity may seem attractive to some transsexuals - as is does to many homosexuals - as a means of defending themselves against discrimination. Yet, it is relevant to bear in mind that many feminists have argued that there are dangers in grounding identity and personal narratives in biological difference. As Jennifer Terry states, "biological explanations have historically been deployed to keep women in a subordinate position to men" (1997: 281).

In the search for the cause of transsexualism, evidence seems to be more supportive of psychological, social and environmental explanations, but again, this is not conclusive (Ross, 1986b; Coleman et al, 1989). Some cases seem to have shown support for Stoller's (1975) psychoanalytic etiological account of transsexualism (e.g. Lothstein, 1979), but many applicants appear not to have had the dysfunctional family dynamics that the theory

is based upon. Moreover, Stoller has little to suggest as an explanation for the developmental pattern of female-to-male transsexualism. This is the case with much of the clinical and psychiatric literature, where female-to-male transsexualism remains under-theorized and under-represented. Victoria Prince (1976) offers an alternative explanation, proposing that transsexualism should be seen as a 'communicable disease'. She suggests that sex reassignment is often grasped at around the same time as contact with, or publicity about, transsexual surgery. Unfortunately, there seems to be little widespread research that has been carried out to support this view. Again, favouring a social explanation, Ross, Rogers & McCulloch (1978) have argued that in some instances transsexuals are homosexual males who rationalize their preference for a male partner into the socially acceptable form of a heterosexual relationship by altering their gender. Ross (1986b) draws support for this suggestion from Lothstein (1979) who states, perhaps surprisingly, that society usually accepts a transsexual adaptation more readily than a homosexual one. How valid these conclusions are today is debatable. It should be remembered that these articles were written in the shadow of the removal of homosexuality from *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) in the US in the 1970's. One might like to think that acceptance of homosexuality has progressed sufficiently during the last twenty years for men not to feel the need for recourse to their own surgical castration in order to have same-sex relations, but homophobia and discrimination against gays and lesbians is still commonplace.

Research suggests transsexuals have very rigid views on gender roles (McCauley & Erhardt, 1977), but this may be less revealing than it seems. There is no guarantee that this is because male-to-female transsexuals *do* have rigid ideas about what it means to be a woman, since they may *express* rigid, stereotypical notions because they need to justify their own position as a 'real' woman. However, Ross et al (1981) did find that in societies that were more gender role rigid and which are also more hostile to homosexuality, there were three times more clinical consultations by individuals who labelled themselves as 'transsexual', than in less restrictive societies. Similarly, in an epidemiological study of transsexualism, Hoenig & Kenna (1973) indicated that most transsexuals came from lower socio-economic families, where gender roles are, reportedly, more fixed. However, it is apparent from the tenor of the debates surrounding the search for an etiological basis for transsexualism that the determinants of the 'disorder' remain hypothetical and controversial. Thus, with the lack of an etiological

justification for the diagnosis and treatment of transsexuals, clinicians have yet to solve the dilemmas outlined above. Instead, it has been argued that the clinical profession have attempted to regulate and control these issues through the re-labelling, re-categorization and re-classification of transsexualism.

1.4 Exit the transsexual

In recent years there have been a series of shifts in the conceptualization of transsexualism that eventually saw the term disappear from the DSM classification altogether (DSM IV, APA, 1994). Billing & Urban suggest that in the light of patients' revelations of acquiring sex reassignment by deception, proponents of this surgical treatment were "dangerously close to the accusations made by psychoanalytic critics - collaboration with psychosis" (1995: 110). They argue that rather than questioning the conceptual, clinical and diagnostic substructure of the 'disease', practitioners in the wake of Fisk (1973: 8) simply replaced the term 'transsexual' with 'gender dysphoria syndrome'. Hence, critics have argued that the category 'gender dysphoria' was created by the medical profession in order to reclaim the act of diagnosis, whilst proponents suggest that it provides an effective method of weeding out cases that present for sex reassignment inappropriately. In this format the mental health professions have come to regard transsexualism as a symptom of an underlying disorder rather than the disorder itself. Gender dysphoria is now seen as the underlying disorder, whilst transsexualism, the belief that one is, or should be, a member of the opposite biological sex, is the presenting symptom. With this new diagnostic label in place, transsexualism entered DSM III (APA, 1980) under the subsection Gender Identity Disorders (GID), subsumed under the broader category of psychosexual disorders. DSM III provided a diagnostic criteria for: GID/Children, Transsexualism; GID/Adolescent and Adult, Non-transsexual Type (GIDAANT); and GID/Not Otherwise Specified (GID/NOS). Transsexualism was also further subtyped, as homosexual, heterosexual, or asexual.

Ira Pauly, an early proponent of transsexualism, was delighted that the inclusion of GID "further legitimized these forms of gender dysphoria by formally recognizing them as conditions worthy of evaluation and treatment" (1992: 3). He believed the new classification provided the required validation of sex reassignment surgery, as it was now presented as a 'legitimate treatment' rather than as 'elective, cosmetic surgery'. Finally,

after many years, transsexualism had become a worldwide, classified mental disorder with its recognized treatment intact, although now under the guise of 'gender identity disorder'. However, Pauly was less keen on the changes to the GID classification introduced in the revised edition of DSM III in 1987. The removal of GID from the category of 'Sexual Disorders' to be placed in the more ambiguously titled section 'Disorders Usually First Evident in Infancy, Childhood, or Adolescence' resulted in GID becoming "somewhat lost, since they had no place in the table of contents" (1992: 3). His principal concern with this new classification system was that it may fail some individuals, known as secondary transsexuals (Person & Ovesey, 1974), who present themselves to clinicians as adults, having in some cases never suffered from gender dysphoria as a child. His other point of contention involved the chaos that the subtyping of homosexual and heterosexual transsexuals seemed to be causing. Unfortunately, DSM III-R was classifying sexual orientation on the basis of *genetic* sex, or the pre-operative anatomy of the individual, rather than the gender identity or sexual anatomy after sex reassignment (Coleman and Bockting, 1988; Pauly, 1992).

In the early 1990's recommendations for the next entry in DSM IV (APA, 1994) included the proposal to do away with the classification 'transsexualism' altogether by creating a single, broad category of GID. This proposal was justified by the wave of concern that the term 'transsexualism' automatically incorporates a recommendation in favour of sex reassignment surgery (SRS) (Levine, 1989). This view was supported by an interim report constructed in 1991, which stated:

Transsexualism appears designed for gender dysphoric individuals who have decided upon surgical sex reassignment as the solution to their inner distress (Bradley, Coates, Green, Levine, Mayer-Bahlburg, Pauly and Zucker, 1991: 334).

Although part of this subcommittee, Pauly categorically opposed the suggestion that the term transsexualism be eliminated, describing it as "a serious mistake" when "(M)aking the diagnosis is *not* synonymous with the clinician recommending the person for sex-reassignment surgery (Pauly, 1990a, 1990b)" (1992: 5). Drawing on the 'Standards of Care' set out by the *Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association*, Pauly argues that sufficient measures have been taken to assure the treatment assigned is appropriate, citing that:

Hormone treatment and/or SRS *on demand* is contra-indicated. It is herein declared to be professionally improper to perform hormonal sex reassignment or SRS without careful evaluation of the patient's reasons for requesting such services, and evaluation of the beliefs and attitudes upon which such reasons are based (Walker, Berger, Green, Laub, Reynolds and Wollman, 1985, cited by Pauly, 1992: 5-6).

Furthermore, the 'Standards of Care' state that before recommending sex reassignment surgery the clinician is advised to meet the following criteria:

1. Have known the patient for at least six months before endorsing the patient's request for genital surgery.
2. Require the patient to be evaluated by another psychologist or psychiatrist, who will have recommended in favour of SRS. At least one of two must be a psychiatrist.
3. Require the patient to have lived *successfully* in the opposite gender role for at least one year.
4. Require the patient to have undergone a urological examination (Cited in Pauly, 1992: 7).

Pauly's argument is based on the reasonable belief that some connection with past terminology, specifically 'transsexualism', should have been maintained in DSM IV in order to avoid unnecessary confusion, when the term will, undoubtedly, continue to be used in medical literature. However, contrary to Pauly's wishes, "The desire to uncouple the clinical diagnosis of gender dysphoria from criteria for approving patients for SRS" by merging these categories "under the single heading of 'GID'" (Bradley et al., 1991: 335) was upheld. As such, there is no classification under the term 'transsexual' in DSM IV, only a brief reference to explain the change.

One change in the classification that appears to be more helpful involves the recognition of different sexualities. Heterosexuality used to be one of the defining characteristics of 'what it meant to be a transsexual'. Gender reassignment would certainly not have been permitted if candidates had indicated any homosexual inclinations. This view has slowly changed over the years, and now it is widely recognized that many (estimates of up to

50%) post-operative male-to-female transsexuals pursue relationships with lesbian women (Pauly, 1991; Nataf, 1996). After important changes to the terminology employed in DSM IV, transsexual relationships are now recognized in terms of *gender status*, rather than the genetic composition of the individuals involved. As recently as 1987, in DSM III-R, a post-operative male-to-female transsexual and her lesbian partner would have been referred to as 'heterosexual'. More usefully, this has now been replaced with the far simpler 'sexually attracted to females'.

Recently, some clinicians have begun to debate the relevance of sexual orientation in understanding their client's gender identity and dysphoria, suggesting the current classification system overemphasizes sexual orientation (Coleman, Bockting & Gooren, 1993). They disagree with many theories of sexual and gender identity development, particularly the notion that a same-sex sexual orientation implies a certain degree of cross-gender identification, correctly arguing that such theoretical frameworks imply a stereotypical view of the homosexual and one that fails to be born out. Instead, it is suggested that future revisions of DSM should stop defining gender identity disorders in relation to a person's sexual orientation. They believe that this distinction has been used to discriminate against natal female gender dysphoric individuals who might be candidates for reassignment but are attracted to men, and hence would become, post-operatively, gay men (Coleman, Bockting & Gooren, 1993). In fact, Bockting & Coleman advocate:

...a clear separation of gender identity, social sex role and sexual orientation, which allows a wide spectrum of sexual identities and prevents limiting access to sex reassignment services to those who conform to a heterosexist paradigm of mental health (1992: 149).

Furthermore, they favour restricting the term 'transsexual' to those who have undergone a gender role transition, including anatomical changes. If it were possible to make such a restriction, the move might have some effect in challenging the pathological undertones of the identity 'transsexual' since post-operatively the gender dysphoria, or the disorder, should have been 'cured'. However, like Pauly (1990a; 1990b; 1992), they believe that gender identity disorders *do* have a place in classification systems of disorders, as many individuals who partake in cross-dressing or cross-gender behaviour present with significant levels of distress due to their gender non-conformity.

Meanwhile, these clinicians were not the only ones who desired the removal of the term 'transsexual' from DSM IV. Over recent years we have seen the growing politicization of the transgendered community as a whole, which takes the position that classification even of GID as a psychiatric disorder stigmatizes individuals. This feeling is highlighted in moves to reclaim transsexual identity through acts such as the re-spelling of 'transsexual' as transexual - note the missing 's'. The rationale behind this subtle change concerns the aim to alleviate the medicalized connotations the term invokes when taken as a personal identity (MacKenzie, 1994). The idea of freeing an identity from the pathologizing psychiatric discourse that surrounds it is not new. Most of the arguments utilized include the same points made by advocates who campaigned to remove homosexuality from DSM III in the 1970's. However, if that is the desired outcome, there are undeniable differences between a homosexual's and a transsexual's relationship with the medical profession, given the transsexual's reliance upon hormonal and surgical treatment.

Pauly presents a taster of the clinical establishment's position, arguing that GID should remain classified within the DSM manuals. Drawing a comparison between the prevalence of transsexualism and homosexuality, he proposes that the relative infrequency of transsexualism prevents us from seeing a gender identity disorder as "a variation of the human condition" (1992: 10). Secondly, whilst homosexuality was removed from DSM III because non-clinical samples of homosexuals demonstrated no more psychopathology than heterosexuals, Pauly (1990a) argues that gender dysphoric individuals have a higher significant incidence of mood disorders as well as evidence of Axis II pathology (Levine, 1989). Thus, it would appear that the efforts of campaign groups to de-pathologize the identity 'transsexual' are hampered, given that members of the clinical establishment are reluctant to challenge or dismiss contrary evidence. The defining difference between removing homosexuality and gender identity disorders from DSM IV, however, concerns the role of the medical practitioner. As Pauly (1992) points out, an individual who identifies as homosexual has no need to engage with the medical or psychiatric profession in order to pursue his or her lifestyle. Conversely, as we have already seen, if an individual identifies as transsexual, firstly they have to convince the psychiatrists they are 'genuine' in order to receive a referral for sex reassignment surgery. Secondly, they are reliant on the surgical skills of the surgeon for the final outcome of their treatment. Yet, it should be remembered that the clinician specializing in GID could also stand to lose if the category were to be totally removed. In many ways

these psychiatrists would become redundant if transsexualism was recognized as subjectively diagnosed and sex reassignment was seen as an 'option' for the self-identified transsexual. In what is already becoming a predominantly privately financed field, the transsexual would only be dependent upon the skills of the surgeon and the size of their bank balance.

Nevertheless, many of the psychiatric clinicians do appear to be genuinely concerned about the welfare of their clients. At the same time, much energy appears to centre around the question of who regulates the diagnosis of transsexualism and who controls access to sex reassignment surgery as the treatment of choice. It would have been simpler, for the sake of gender theorists if 'transsexualism' had survived as a clinical entity, but the fact that it did not tells us something about current trends in the scientific study of sexuality. It is not that those who argued for the removal of 'transsexualism' from DSM IV did not have the same faith in the Benjamin 'Standards of Care' - cited earlier by Pauly (1992) - but that they wanted to introduce tighter restrictions regarding the *practice* of these standards. Moreover, the study of transsexualism has always been on the fringe of medical science, and frequently attacked from both within and, more recently, from the community it set out to treat.

In their seminal essay, *The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism*, first published in 1982, Billings and Urban concluded their critique by suggesting that:

By substituting medical terminology for political discourse, the medical profession has tamed and transformed a potential wildcat strike at the gender factory (1995: 115).

I do not entirely agree. Certainly, providing sex reassignment surgery rather than encouraging people to live at or between the borders of the two sexes has the effect of normalizing a binary gender system. But, one of the problems with taking such a stance is that it completely denies transsexual agency in the construction of their own access to medical treatments. It has not been simply a matter of medical and psychiatric professionals re-classifying the diagnostic criteria for transsexualism. In the preface to a Special Issue on Gender Dysphoria, published by the *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, the editors commented:

In the context of a growing political movement in transgender communities across North America and Europe arguing for a depathologization of cross gender behavior (including removal of transvestism and transsexualism from DSM classification), the task of the clinician remains to provide up-to-date health care and ongoing support for gender dysphoric clients. This includes, but is not limited to, providing professional consultation regarding sex reassignment procedures. An interdisciplinary approach to treatment, research and education is essential for continuing progress (Bockting & Coleman, 1992: xix).

Frequently these shifts have not only been beneficial for the transsexual individual but have also taken place in response to transsexual efforts to reclaim and depathologize their 'condition'. Moreover, in recent years, transsexuals themselves have served on the steering committees of organizations such as *The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association*. The distinction between the transsexual subject and the clinical or academic expert is no longer so easy to discern. One would, perhaps, be naive to interpret these shifts and re-classifications as part of an objective scientific process - the result of an increased understanding of gender non-conformity. Yet, attempts to regulate and control access to surgical intervention have been increasingly underpinned by a genuine concern to provide choices and the means with which to carry these through thus, enabling those with complex gender identifications to lead full and successful lives.

In the next chapter I provide a detailed discussion of socio-cultural accounts of transsexualism and locate transsexualism within a historical overview of gender studies. I then build upon the final themes of this chapter by exploring in greater detail the impact of queer theory and transgender politics upon the emergence of a new discipline, 'trans-studies'.

3

Socio-cultural perspectives: From Gender to Transgender¹

“If the women’s movement is so into freeing up the definitions of gender, why not start with us?”

Politically aware transsexual quoted by D. H. Feinbloom,
Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views, (1976: 159)

“Transgender theories” are those ideas and arguments that are articulated by transgenderists, ideas that inform and are informed by transgender political movements...These theories articulate ideas about sex, gender, bodies and sexuality that constitute transgender theorizing as part of queer theorizing more broadly.

P. Elliot & K. Roen, *GLQ*, (1998: 231)

In this chapter I have two aims, firstly, to provide a brief overview of the conceptual history of gender studies and, secondly, to locate ‘transsexualism’ within these debates. Furthermore, I illustrate how ‘transsexualism’ rather than being studied in its own right is frequently used *conceptually* to facilitate, or to interrogate, shifts and moves in gender theory. Thus, I trace the emergence of ‘gender’ as a separate conceptual category from ‘sex’, through the subsequent critiques of the ‘sex/gender’ distinction, to the radical

¹ Lynne Segal’s phrase (August, 2000)

possibilities of Queer Theory. I then document the emergence of a new discipline 'trans-studies' - where the majority of academics and authors are themselves transgendered - and the potential it heralds for theorizing embodied subjectivity. I then return to the social sciences investigating how some feminist psychologists have engaged with transsexualism since the publication of Kessler and McKenna's seminal text: *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. I conclude by looking at some of the prominent *empirical* studies that have informed and guided the research principles for this project.

3.1 A sex/gender distinction?

When Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1953) wrote in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one", her pronouncement would facilitate the theoretical viewpoint that gender is an acquisition rather than inherent. The influence of de Beauvoir's philosophical thesis over the last fifty years has been profound. Both directly and indirectly: from early social constructionist accounts of gender such as Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna's important text, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, originally published in 1978, to the prolific usage of Judith Butler's notion of 'gender performativity' in much queer and feminist research since the publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Whilst paving the way for a feminist conceptualization of the socially constructed nature of gender, de Beauvoir was, however, willing to affirm that one was born with a 'sex' - defined in terms of male or female anatomy. During the 1970s and early 1980s, enthused by Robert Stoller's (1968) account of transsexualism - in which he claimed that the biological sex of a person has a tendency to augment, rather than determine the appropriate gender identity for that sex - the 'sex/gender system' (Rubin, 1975) became central to much feminist theory. Lynne Segal describes that the "...initial purpose of 'gender' was thus to displace the role of biology in determining 'masculinity' and 'femininity'", whilst its "...immediate consequence was to deny or minimize the existence of any fundamental differences between the sexes" (1999: 39). Thus, feminists such as Kate Millett (1971), Ann Oakley (1972), and Nancy Chodorow (1978) directed their political struggles towards neutralizing the sexually specific body via an agenda that sought gender equality through the reorganization of practices such as child-raising and socialization. So, as Elizabeth Grosz summarized:

...while male and female bodies remained untouched by and irrelevant to such programs, the associated gender traits of masculinity and femininity would, ideally, be transformed and equalized through a transformation of ideology (1994: 17).

Yet, whilst this school of feminism remained committed to a biologically determined, fixed and ahistorical notion of the body - in contrast with a socially and ideologically informed mind - a Cartesian dualist and implicitly rationalist account of personhood was maintained. Hence, by the middle of the 1980's there was much discord with the notion of a sex/gender distinction, particularly amongst those feminist proponents of 'sexual difference'. For example, Moira Gatens suggested that:

[T]heorists who uncritically use the mind/body distinction consistently characterize the human subject as either predominantly (or wholly) determined by biological forces, that is, heredity, or predominantly (or wholly) determined by the influence of social or familial relations, that is environment. Both these positions posit a naive causal relation between either the body and the mind or the environment and the mind which commits both viewpoints, as two sides of the same coin, to an a priori, neutral and passive conception of the subject. If we conceive the body to be neutral and passive and consciousness to be socially determined then we are at least halfway to a behavioural conception of subjectivity (1983: 8).

Instead, Gatens argued that rather than there being a neutral body, there are at least two kinds of bodies: the male body and the female body. Gatens, whilst trying to avoid both the essentialist and ahistorical, a priori accounts of the sexed body (which she attributed to those she criticized), suggested that some bodily experiences and events although "lacking any *fixed* significance, are likely, in all social structures, to be privileged sites of significance". For example, if menstruation, is seen as one of these 'privileged sites', "then there must be a qualitative difference between the kind of femininity 'lived' by women and that 'lived' by men". So, Gatens proposed that if the subject is "always a *sexed* subject", "[G]ender is not the issue; sexual difference is" (1983: 9, emphasis in original). In order to further substantiate her critique of the sex/gender distinction, Gatens re-examined Robert Stoller's original thesis on transsexualism that provided those earlier feminists with the means to argue that gender inequality was the result of socialization.

In his groundbreaking book, *Sex and Gender*, Stoller (1968b) claimed that a person's gender identity is primarily the result of post-natal psychological influences. Thus, in most instances this gender identity will develop in line with the individual's biological

sex. However, in some rarer cases, like that of the transsexual, these psychological influences can supersede the biologically determined sex of the person. However, Gatens points out (as argued in Chapter Two) that Stoller's psychoanalytic account for the genesis of transsexualism is far more complete for the case of the male-to-female transsexual than the female-to-male transsexual. She suggests that because the explanation for MtF transsexualism cannot simply be reversed for FtM transsexualism, it illustrates the asymmetry between masculinity/femininity and male/female:

The case of the female transsexual cannot be symmetrical. The relation of the female infant to the mother's body is not and cannot be problematic *in the same way*...Female transsexualism is much more likely to be a reaction against oppression...The transsexual knows, most clearly, that the issue is not one of gender but one of sex. It is not masculinity *per se* that is valorized in our culture but the *masculine male*. (Gatens, 1983: 15, emphasis in original)

Gatens's simplistic explanation for FtM transsexualism as a seemingly voluntaristic 'reaction against oppression' seems to me to be as problematic as Stoller's underdeveloped psychosexual account. However, she does raise the important point that gender attributes, encapsulated as masculine or feminine, are *qualitatively* different when performed by different kinds of bodies. Certainly, masculinity, when enacted by a male body will be read and interpreted differently than if that same masculinity could be enacted by a female body: a point which is crucial for the greater understanding of transsexual embodied subjectivity. However, Gatens concludes by warning that:

...the sex/gender distinction lends itself to those groups or individuals whose analyses reveal a desire to ignore sexual difference and prioritize 'class', 'discourse', 'power' or some other 'hobby-horse'...as if women's bodies and the representation and control of women's *bodies* were not a crucial stake in these struggles (1983: 17, emphasis in original).

Whilst I agree that in certain 'liberal' discussions the body tends to be either ignored or treated as sex-neutral, I find Gatens's dismissal of important aspects of most feminist projects somewhat hasty. To concentrate solely on sexual difference indicated by specific 'sites of privilege' such as menstruation or childbirth - as Gatens seems to imply - is itself rather reductive. Elizabeth Grosz describes how 'sexual difference' feminists, such as herself and Moira Gatens, see the body as "crucial to understanding woman's psychical and social existence", but within a sexual difference framework "the body is no longer understood as an ahistorical, biological given, acultural object" (1994: 18). This is

a welcome development from formulating the body as a *tabula rasa* upon which meanings are inscribed. Yet, surely for a more nuanced analysis, the body should not displace other points of departure such as 'class', 'discourse' or 'power', but rather be incorporated alongside these concepts which are always profoundly imbricated with subjectivity and gendered embodiment.

3.2 Queer Theory and its critiques

The shift from 'gender' to 'queer' is usually traced back to Gayle Rubin's (1984) argument that the category sexuality should be politically and analytically separated from that of gender (Segal, 1999). Whilst Rubin acknowledged that divergent feminist positions on sexuality made for an interesting discussion of 'sex', she attempted to:

...challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other (1984: 307).

So, whilst Rubin argued that sex and gender are related, as gender inevitably affects the functioning of the 'sexual system' and, at times, the sexual system manifests itself through gender specific forms, she concluded that they are *not* the same thing. However, it was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990: 16) who argued most emphatically for a "certain irreducibility" of sexuality to gender. In *Epistemologies of the Closet* Sedgwick formulates a substantive critique of the sex/gender distinction. She questions the way in which the term 'sex' has been used by many feminists to represent chromosomal 'sex' as "immutable and immanent in the individual". This is in contrast to 'gender', which "is seen as culturally mutable and variable, highly relational (in the sense that each of the binarized genders is defined primarily by its relation to the other), and inextricable from a history of power differentials between genders" (Sedgwick, 1990: 28). But, rather than only being concerned with the problematic notion of theorizing the body ahistorically - like those 'sexual difference' feminists described earlier - her critique focused, primarily, on the way that 'sex' can be used to imply so much more than chromosomal 'sex': namely, how 'sex' is often indistinguishable from 'sexuality'. Hence, aligned with Gayle Rubin, Sedgwick suggested that the questions of sexuality and the questions of gender -

although inextricable from one another, as each can be expressed only in terms of the other - are not the *same* question. Thus, Sedgwick's theoretical account assumed that:

...there is always at least the potential for an analytic distance between gender and sexuality, even if particular manifestations or features of particular sexualities are among the things that plunge women and men most ineluctably into the discursive, institutional, and bodily enmeshments of gender definition, gender relation, and gender inequality (1990: 30).

In her subsequent collection - *Tendencies* - Sedgwick suggests that one of the benefits of 'queer' is that it can be used to refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (1994: 8, emphasis in original). Whilst 'queer' may have emerged, at least politically, as a result of the reclamation and redeployment of an offensive term by some gays and lesbians, for Sedgwick (as a straight woman), 'queer' was not *necessarily* dependent on same-sex desire. Rather, she suggested that:

'Queer' seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation...One possible corollary: that what it takes - all it takes - to make the description 'queer' a true one is the impulsion *to* use it in the first person (1993: 9, emphasis in original).

Hence, within this conceptual framework, anyone whose sexual orientation is heterosexual could also be queer, if they chose to describe themselves as such. Thus, explicit to Sedgwick's notion of queer is its intrinsic relationship *to* gender, as her queer project is about "desires and identifications that move across gender lines, including the desires of men for women and of women for men" (1994: 11, emphasis in original). In addition, Sedgwick engages with the proposal that 'linguistic performativity' has become a site for reflection upon the way language can produce effects of, for example, identity, enforcement, seduction or challenge. Consequently, utterances that do not simply describe, but perform, the actions they name have implications for gender and sexuality. In part, this project entails attending to "powerful linguistic *positions*", which leads her to question whether the semantic force of a term such as queer is determined by subject position. For example, does the shift from using queer in the first person to directing it at a second or third person change the way we understand its meaning? This project is presented under the working title 'Queer Performativity' and is inevitably, as Sedgwick

acknowledges, informed by the work of Judith Butler.

Undoubtedly, Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* had the single greatest influence, not only upon Queer theory, but also upon the subsequent emergence of a field of transgender studies. This may seem surprising as her own relationship to queer theory remains rather ambivalent and she vehemently opposes those queer theorists who argue for the radical separation of sexuality from gender (Osborne & Segal, 1993). Despite this, the impact of *Gender Trouble* on Queer Theory has been immense. In this text, her central thesis, certainly the one that was most heavily drawn upon by her readership, revolved around the notion of 'gender performativity'. Butler suggested that the appearance of a gendered self, a stable core gender identity, was, in fact, produced by the regulation of specific 'attributes' along "culturally established lines of coherence". Thus:

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results (1990: 24-25).

Furthermore, when theorizing the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality, she proposed that if gender is the cultural interpretation of a sexed body, then it cannot be said that a specific gender should follow from a specific body. Even under the assumption of a stable binary gender system it cannot be assumed that the construction 'man' exclusively reflects a male body, or that 'woman' is the only gender interpretation of a female body. Instead, Butler (1990) draws upon Monique Wittig's (1987) notion of a 'heterosexual contract' to formulate her own conceptual term, the 'heterosexual matrix', which she subsequently employs to demonstrate the way in which bodies, genders and desires have been naturalized. Hence, the 'heterosexual matrix' assumes that:

...for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (1990: 151, n6).

Butler proposes that bodies, genders and desires are naturalized through the repetition of acts, gestures and spoken desires that produce the illusion of an internal essence; an illusion that is discursively maintained for the sole purpose of regulating sexuality within the confines of reproductive heterosexuality. However, the most profound effect Butler's

thesis was to have upon subsequent accounts of transgender was, perhaps, due to her employment of 'drag' to illustrate this notion of 'gender performativity' - her argument that there was no original for 'drag' to imitate; 'drag' reveals that all gender is a parody. As Butler states:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance...*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency* (1990: 137, emphasis in original).

One of the initial critiques of Butler's proposition, perhaps in response to this exemplification of 'drag' and exacerbated by many subsequent misreadings, was that Butler appeared to purport a voluntaristic aspect to 'gender performativity': that one is free to take up and exchange gender performances at will. These types of interpretations tend to figure in what Elspeth Probyn has described as "the sort of feel-good gender discourse at large". Where, "it is said that we can have whatever type of gender we want, and that there are as many genders as there are people, and that we wear our genders as drag" (1995: 79, cited in Lloyd, 1999: 199). However, a closer reading of Butler's work reveals that gender performativity is not seen as a choice, rather that gender identities achieve a certain degree of stability and coherence via a range of discourses available for delineating the body (Segal, 1999). As Butler herself suggests:

...gendered bodies are so many "styles of the flesh". These styles all never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an "act", as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "*performative*" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning (1990: 139; emphasis in original).

By counterpoising 'intentional' and 'performative' as two aspects of gender, 'performative' must be something other than 'intentional'; more than a voluntaristic act. Rather, performative is "*that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*" (Osborne & Segal, 1993: 112, emphasis in the original).

A second and related criticism of *Gender Trouble* focused on the way that by conceptualizing gender as 'performative', Butler appeared to ignore the category 'sex'. In *Gender Trouble*, 'sex' is formulated, like 'gender', as a cultural construction - to the

extent that we may find that “perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (1990: 7). Indeed, statements such as: “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body”, or “[T]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (1990: 136, emphasis in original), certainly give the impression that Butler fails to attend to the material constraints that anatomical, biological differences may pose for bodies and the plausibility of particular gender identifications. In her subsequent book, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler sets out a partial “rethinking of some of the parts of *Gender Trouble* that have caused confusion” (1993: xii), specifically, addressing the question of whether it is possible to link gender performativity to the materiality of the body.

Butler begins with an analysis of materiality that challenges her critics’ claims that a recourse to matter and the materiality of sex is necessary to ground feminist practice. Rather, Butler suggests that matter itself has a history: materiality cannot ground feminist claims because matter is already “fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put” (Butler, 1993: 29). As such the materiality of the body is never prior to discourse, but rather also its *effect*. As Butler proposes:

If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, in as much as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification (1993: 30; emphasis in original).

This time, Butler is careful to pre-empt potential criticism from her feminist peers who might suggest that she is arguing for a simple and singular notion of the body as a ‘linguistic effect’ that is reducible to a set of signifiers. Whilst she acknowledges that ‘problematizing matter’ risks a certain degree of epistemological uncertainty, she rejects the premise that it will result in political nihilism. Instead, she is attempting to destabilize materiality by calling into question the presupposition that the body pre-exists discourse in an attempt to initiate “new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter” (Butler, 1993: 30). As such, Butler proposes a rethink of the premise that the subject assumes or adopts

a bodily norm. Instead, she suggests that the subject or the speaking “I” is formed by the very process of assuming a ‘sex’. Thus, the forming of a ‘subject’ requires *identification* with the normative spectre of ‘sex’, which is necessarily reliant upon the rejection of other identifications. This repudiation results in the production of “a domain of abjection” which incorporates those “‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject”. Moreover, the materialization of a given sex will be dependent upon “*the regulation of identification practices*” to produce a continued disavowal of any identification with the ‘abject’ (Butler, 1993: 3, emphasis in original).

Butler’s revised position on the body proposes a shift away from the notion ‘construction’ that was so prevalent in her earlier account (Butler, 1990), and from the proposition that the body is a discursively inscribed *site* or *surface*. As such, Butler rejects formulations that juxtapose discursive constructions on the one hand with lived bodies on the other. Rather, she posits that “discourses (do) actually live in bodies. They lodge in bodies; bodies in fact carry discourses as part of their lifeblood” (Meijer & Prins, 1998: 282). Thus, in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler proposes:

...a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter* (1993: 9; emphasis in original).

Whilst clarifying that ‘construction’ is not a singular act or a voluntaristic process affected by the subject, Butler argues that construction takes place *in* historically located time. Furthermore, construction “is itself a *temporal* process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of the reiteration” (Butler, 1993: 10, emphasis added). Thus, whilst the practice of repetition serves to create the naturalized effect of sex, it also creates its instability. Butler argues that the reiteration of norms opens up gaps or fissures in the very constructions that seek to define and fix those norms. Thus, ‘sex’ is a temporal process of ‘becoming’ - yet never attaining - a fixed and idealized ‘sex’. Later, in an analysis of ‘drag’ portrayed in the film *Paris is Burning*, Butler - influenced by Lacanian theory - suggests that:

‘Realness’ is not exactly a category in which one competes; it is a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories. And yet what determines the effect of realness is the ability to

compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect. This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of a racial and class norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates (1993: 129).

Thus, there is no 'real' male or female body. Just an unattainable ideal to aspire to become - an ideal maintained through the reiteration and embodiment of gender norms and bound together by heterosexuality. Continuing her analysis, Butler suggests that this particular drag performance only works because it *cannot* be 'read' as performance. Here, parallels can be drawn with the common concern amongst many transsexuals to 'pass', where in order to 'pass', the transsexual must not be '*read*'. For, as Butler describes, "'reading' means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance, insulting or deriding someone". As, for Butler at least, all gender is performative, it would seem that the transsexual subject is entrenched in the very same process as all of us - striving for the effect of 'realness'.

In the final chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler remains resistant towards the ontological notion of 'being' that was originally expressed in *Gender Trouble*. Drawing on Lacan, she suggested that 'being the Phallus' is a masquerade that reduces *all* forms of 'being' to the form of 'appearing'; that gender ontology itself is reduced to the play of appearance (Butler, 1990: 47). In *Critically Queer*, Butler builds upon this account, stressing again that there is no ontological 'truth' to gender, even that aspect of gender that is 'performed'. Here, Butler draws an important distinction between 'performance' and 'performativity', insofar as performativity comprises of

...a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. *The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake*" (1993: 234, emphasis added; see also Osborne & Segal, 1996: 112).

Thus, it appears that by counterpoising 'performance' - which permits a degree of agency although no ontological 'truth' - and 'performativity' - which permits neither - Butler is attempting to navigate a necessary, but somewhat tricky philosophical path between a determinist and a voluntaristic/humanistic conception of the subject. Within this

conception, Butler suggests that:

[G]ender is neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as 'internal' and 'hidden,' nor is it reducible to a surface appearance; on the contrary, its undecidability is to be traced as the play *between* psyche and appearance (where the latter domain includes what appears in *words*). Further, this will be a 'play' regulated by heterosexist constraints though not, for that reason, fully reducible to them (1993: 234; emphasis in original).

The lesbian feminist Biddy Martin (1996) is also concerned with these questions of gender, sexuality and identity. However, whilst welcoming some of the developments that have been made by feminist, queer and lesbian theorists, Martin takes issue with particular aspects of Sedgwick's and Butler's work. For example, she is critical of the way that many queer theorists - and both Butler and Sedgwick exemplify this trend - fudge the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' to the extent that they become collapsed into one another. Martin is concerned that when Sedgwick announces that she will use gender to denominate "the whole package of physical and cultural distinctions between women and men" (1990: 29), she is sliding into a position where "sex is now gender is now sex is now woman's reproductive potential and the political battles over its control" (Martin, 1992: 76). Similarly, Martin is also worried that the way in which Sedgwick moves to make "sexuality irreducible to gender" results in sexuality becoming *so* distinct from gender that it seems "strangely exempt from the enmeshments and constraints of gender ...and, thus, even from the body" (1992: 77). Turning to the work of Judith Butler, Martin suggests that "Butler displaces the distinction in quite another way: by questioning the facticity of sex that is said to underlie the social constructedness of gender, and by emphasizing reconfigurations of the norms that govern sex and sexuality" (1996: 79). Thus, whilst Sedgwick conceptualizes gender as sex, for Butler, sex becomes gender. Martin argues that although the collapsing of sex and gender, often because of the difficulty in separating them, indicates some similarity between Butler's and Sedgwick's accounts, Butler "more explicitly connects the reconfiguration of bodily gender with the possibility of discursive resignification". As such, Butler is frequently charged by her critics for "failing at times to make the body enough of a drag on signification" (Martin, 1992: 80). Consequently, Martin suggests that:

...we pay more respect to what's given, to limits, even as we open the future to what we think is now unthinkable or deligitimated, that we do this in order to generate a notion of difference that is not fixed or stable in its

distribution across bodies, but is also not dispensable (Martin, 1992: 82).

Hence, Martin is critical of attempts, such as Sedgwick's, that she perceives as making the body irrelevant and thus constituting too radical a separation between feminist and queer projects. However, she is rather more supportive of Butler's approach which construes sex/gender and sexuality as the product of discursive practices - even at the level of the body, but only if "the body, the material is conceived as a drag or limit as well as a potential" (Martin, 1992: 92). This should certainly be heeded for any analysis of transsexualism.

Susan Bordo is another feminist theorist whose work has had a significant impact upon the twists and turns in the theorizing of gendered bodies. She is also sceptical of what she describes as "postmodern tendencies to 'textualize' the body" which frequently result in "giving a kind of free, creative rein to *meaning* at the expense of attention to the body's material locatedness in history, practice, culture" (Bordo, 1993: 38, emphasis in original). The problem of materiality and the related theme of mind/body dualism are comprehensively discussed in *Unbearable Weight* (1993) - a collection of articles, written over a number of years - that present a rich cultural analysis of bodily practices and theoretical positions. Bordo posits that, despite a long history of philosophical debate, Cartesian dualism has become a contemporary construction of self that shapes experience. As she states:

Dualism, of course, was not invented in the twentieth century. But there are distinctive ways in which it is *embodied* in contemporary culture, giving the lie to the social mythology that ours is a body-loving, de-repressive era. We may be *obsessed* with our bodies, but we are hardly accepting of them... My aim, however, is not to portray these obsessions as bizarre or anomalous, but rather, as the logical (if extreme) manifestations of anxieties and fantasies fostered by our culture (Bordo, 1993: 15, emphasis in original)

Bordo suggests that contemporary culture is high on "a postmodern intoxication with possibilities", with its emphasis upon the unstable, fluid, fragmented and heterogeneous, rather than the fixed and stable. This is affecting a transformation in discourse "that is gradually changing our conception and experience of our bodies, a discourse that encourages us to 'imagine the possibilities' and close our eyes to limits and consequences" (1993: 38-39). Bordo welcomes the insights provided by some poststructuralist work, particularly that informed by Foucault. However, she takes issue

with those poststructuralist strands that, at times, eulogize the ‘disembodied ideal’ and fantasize about “*capturing* that heterogeneity in our ‘readings’ by continually seeking difference for its own sake, by being guided by the pure *possibilities* of interpretation rather than an embodied point of view” (1993: 39-40, emphasis in original). Thus, Bordo suggests that cultural transformation can only be affected by shifts in “real, historical changes in the relations of power, modes of subjectivity, the organization of life” (1993: 41; see also Parker, 1992). Consequently, Bordo urges that to avoid both practical and representational repetition of the cultural production of dualism, feminism, and gender theory in general, must be underpinned by a struggle to incorporate “our histories of embodied experience” (Bordo, 1993: 42).

Hence, it would appear that feminist and queer attempts to reconceptualize gender theory beyond simply distinguishing sex from gender have been extremely useful. As Biddy Martin explains:

...the sex/gender split has had the consequence of leaving the assumption of biological sexual difference intact and of introducing a damaging body/mind split (1996: 72).

As we have seen, these problems have been theorized and challenged in a variety of conceptual and political ways. Yet, nowhere is a potential challenge to the mind/body split or discontinuity in the sex/gender system better exemplified than in the accounts of transsexual individuals. Thus, the resultant effects of shifts in gender theory have been of great benefit in the *enabling* as well as elaborating the *content* of social and cultural accounts of transsexualism and transgender - both because, and in spite of, the disputes they have unleashed.

3.3 From Queer to Transgender Studies

Queer theory set out to replace ‘gender’ with the theorizing of ‘sexuality’, as the theorizing of gender had, on occasion, operated to marginalize those individuals whose subjectivity and embodiment deviated from the dominant discourses of gender. Thus, queer subjects can include not only gays, lesbians, bisexuals, but also sadomasochists, transsexuals and transgenderists: as all of these are seen as crossing the boundaries of

gender, illustrating the infinite capacity of gender to mutate and create more possibilities for its expression (Kidd, 1999). But, as we will see, queer theory has not had an unproblematic relationship to the burgeoning work that is emerging from the new discipline 'trans-studies'. However, it will be suggested that the very emergence of 'trans-studies' was contingent upon both queer as a political movement as well as on the impact of 'queer studies' upon the theoretical conceptualizations of gender, subjectivity and embodiment. In this next section I present some of the debates that are currently taking place in this field, highlighting the way queer theory has, in diverse ways, informed them.

In the recent Transgender Special Edition of the academic journal *GLQ* the inspirational guest editor, Susan Stryker, proposes that at least two pronounced sets of factors have determined the academy's growing interest in 'transgender'. The first she describes as the 'postmodern condition'; the second, she suggests is, in part, due to the proliferation of individuals who "lay claim to some form of transgender identity" within "cultural zones where postmodern representational systems are well established" (1998: 147). Both provide new configurations of discourses for critical theorists to dissect. Accordingly, Stryker argues that:

Transgender phenomena have achieved critical importance (and critical chic) to the extent that they provide a site for grappling with the problematic relation between the principles of *performativity* and a *materiality* that, while inescapable, defies stable representation, particularly as experienced by embodied subjects (1998: 147, my emphasis).

Undoubtedly, the impact of Judith Butler's work over the last decade is implicit in this extract. However, the effect of 'queer-studies' upon the emergence of 'trans-studies' cannot be entirely reduced to theoretical debates. Queer, particularly in the United States, also manifested as a new political movement. Queer politics - incited by the devastating effects of AIDS upon the gay male community and the US government's apparent willingness to ignore it - emerged in April 1990 when a group in New York City met to discuss the series of homophobic attacks committed upon lesbians and gay men in the East Village. Reappropriating a term that was historically soiled by shame and degradation, this group began to mobilize under the banner 'Queer Nation'. Queer Nation's strategy was one of confrontational politics that aimed to "put perversion in the public's face" and "embrace the diverse lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities that had

been suppressed or marginalized by a restrictive politics of identity” (Bristow & Wilson, 1993: 9).

Within two years transgendered activists had also begun a similar process of political mobilization aimed at challenging pathologizing discourses and public intolerance acted out through discrimination, violence and harassment. For example, Stryker describes how as “a member of Transgender Nation - a militantly queer, direct action transsexual advocacy group - I was at the time involved in organizing a disruption and protest at the American Psychiatric Association’s 1993 annual meeting in San Francisco” (1994: 237). Other groups such as Transsexual Menace and Transgender Rights were also formed in direct response to transphobia. One such incident that has received a great deal of public attention - culminating in a Hollywood adaptation, *Boys Don’t Cry*, and an Oscar for the leading actress, Hilary Swank - was the brutal rape and subsequent murder of Brandon Teena, a cross-dressing FtM and two of his friends in Humboldt, Nebraska in December 1993. It is difficult to place Brandon Teena in terms of gender identification, and it is unlikely that Brandon ever named himself as a FtM transsexual or as transgendered. Likewise, according to his mother, neither did Brandon, as some press reports claimed, ever identify as lesbian (Nataf, 1996). However, it is clear that Brandon, a biological female, was murdered for the transgender practice of ‘passing’ as male. Judith Halberstam, quite rightly, warns against appropriating the lives of the dead for identity politics (Halberstam & Hale, 1998; Halberstam, 1998). But, the frequently distorted media reporting that referred to Brandon as ‘she’ and as a ‘cross-dressing lesbian’ proved to spur on the politicization and the establishment of organizations to defend transgender human rights (Nataf, 1996: 29).

Mary Brown Parlee suggests that new representations of gendered embodiment that have begun to emerge from the discourses of the ‘transgender liberation’ movement (Leslie Feinberg’s term, 1993) are “strikingly different from psychological theories of gendered embodiment emanating from the academy” (1996: 633). Parlee argues that activists who are committed to accounting for the variety in transgendered persons’ embodied subjectivities have had to move beyond such bedrock concepts as ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ and ‘straight’. Parlee draws upon the writings of Riki Anne Wilchins, founder of the activist group *Transsexual Menace*, to illustrate how transgender activists have been engaged in “rethinking - re-theorizing - sex and gender

categories, developing new terms” (Parlee, 1996: 633). Wilchins states:

I don't believe in 'male' and 'female' or 'man' and 'woman' either. Certainly I believe in them as political accomplishments, cultural categories instituted to cause us to read the body in a specific way: promoting and sustaining the imperative that the most important thing bodies can do is reproduce. But I don't view them as the so-called 'natural facts' they are interminably and predictably proposed to represent... The point is all these names reflect the political aims of a cultural regime which produces certain gender 'realities' for its own changing, and historically specific, needs... So, if we are to disrupt the regime, we must take control of language, take control of (corrupt) the definitions, disturb the structure. This brings us to a number of terms coming into increasing coinage in the 'gender community', such as 'gendertrash,' one 'S' transexuals, 'genderqueer' etc. (1995: 46; cited in Parlee, 1996: 635).

I sense a Butlerian at work. And, inevitably, Wilchins goes on to make explicit the influence of Judith Butler. Parlee suggests that “(G)iven her analysis, where and how she positions herself in the moral order, and her reasons for theorizing, Wilchins selectively makes use of 'official' knowledge produced from within the academy to clarify further her own and others' situation” (1996: 635). I am unsure about this 'chicken and egg' style argument, which suggests Wilchins simply draws upon Butler's thesis in order to support her own position. Rather, I believe that Butler's work has provided the discursive means by which transgendered individuals can begin to express and direct their 'rage', as Susan Stryker (1993) would describe it, at medical and scientific discourses that have sought to create uniformity in, or annihilation of their embodied gendered subjectivities. Certainly, in the exciting and edifying days of early queer politics, the political climate was ripe for the emergence of transgender activism. But, this activism, and the radical challenge it endeavoured to make, was also dependent upon the articulations of 'queer' theorists - Judith Butler, in particular. Contrary to Parlee's claim, Wilchins makes this explicit:

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler has pointed out that to define any categories, to create a grid of intelligible identities, you must inevitably case out and obscure others. These others become what she calls an 'abject' region: those identities which become unspeakable, even unthinkable, within the grid because there are no terms or names for them. So defining this grid means making decisions (in other words, having the *power*) to decide what kinds of gendered bodies 'matter' and which don't...It is inevitably the outside (i.e. 'us'), in remaining outside, that makes the inside possible. Because once the outside intrudes, neatness and coherence

immediately vanish and are quickly replaced with messy, disordered multiplicity. From this viewpoint, transgendered bodies and genders *are* that outside, and it is precisely by discarding us as 'gendertrash' if you will, by stigmatizing us or by delegitimizing us off the grid as merely 'aberrant' or 'deviant' or (Virginia Prince here) 'defective' or 'pathological,' which enables the binary grid to appear as immaculate, uncontaminated, and 'natural' (1995:47; cited in Parlee, 1996: 635).

Parlee is, however, correct to criticize those psychological theories of sexed/gendered embodiment, particularly, as she cites, of the ilk of Rom Harré (1991), which leave both 'gender' and the 'body' seriously under theorized. They also seemingly serve "to reproduce as scientific knowledge common-sense beliefs about gendered embodiment". Within these theories, Parlee argues that sex/gender categories are perceived as 'natural'. Thus, those individuals who transgress them "are to be spoken of, thought of and treated as objects (pathological, rare, anomalous) rather than as persons with moral standing and agency" (Parlee, 1996: 639). However, by attributing important shifts in the conceptualization of gender theory solely to the activities of politicized transgendered subjects, she does, I feel, somewhat over-look the historical locatedness of the emergence of 'trans-studies' and its contingency upon *both* queer politics *and* queer theory.

A somewhat different interpretation of the influence of queer studies upon 'trans-studies' is offered by Jay Prosser in the opening chapter of his narrative account of transsexualism, *Second Skins*. Rather than accepting the premise that queer sought to represent the transgendered subject, Prosser suggests that:

...queer studies *has made the transgendered subject*, the subject who crosses gender boundaries, a *key queer trope*... (1998: 5, my emphasis).

Whilst acknowledging that "transgender would not be of the moment if not for the queer moment" (1998: 6), Prosser argues that queer theory has elevated the transgendered subject above and beyond the transsexual subject. This, he suggests, is the result of queer theory's particular interest in those who cross gender lines, rather than in those who cross the lines of sex. Thus, Prosser attempts to redress what he sees as queer theory's omission of embodiment - in favour of gender performativity - by concentrating on transsexual narratives. He suggests that 'transition', in queer theory, may be explored in order to evidence the sex/gender system as a construction and thus, indicate the

impossibility of identity. However, for transsexualism, in contrast, 'transition' may be "the very route *to* identity and bodily integrity" (Prosser, 1998: 6, my emphasis).

Prosser's project is an important one. Having himself transitioned from female to male, his position is both sentient and sensitive to the experience of being transsexual. As such, he questions the growing trend for transsexuals to give up on 'passing', to 'come out', which he posits as an effect of the transsexual community engagement with transgendered politics. Prosser acknowledges that a politically driven 'coming out' rhetoric is important for creating both transgendered and transsexual as specific and, importantly, allied subjectivities. However, Prosser argues that rather than revealing gender categories as a fiction, as most 'queer' accounts would assert, *both* transsexual and transgendered narratives, to paraphrase, produce the sobering realization of the ongoing functional power that the categories of man and woman still carry for a sense of cultural belonging (Prosser, 1998: 11). Thus:

[W]hile coming out is necessary for establishing subjectivity, for transsexuals the act is intrinsically ambivalent. For in coming out and staking a claim to representation, the transsexual *undoes the realness* that is the conventional goal of this transition. These narratives return us to the complexities and difficulties that inevitably accompany real-life experiences of gender crossing and to the personal costs of not simply being a man or a woman. In accounts of individual lives, outside its current theoretical figuration transition often proves a barely livable zone (1998: 11-12, my emphasis).

Thus, Prosser is sceptical of many postmodern or poststructuralist informed accounts, of which Judith Halberstam's well known article *F2M* is a good example. In true queer celebratory style - and, paradoxically, using the same mantra as Jean Baudrillard (1992; discussed in Chapter One), Halberstam declared that:

We are all transsexuals except that the referent of the *trans* becomes less and less clear (and more and more queer). We are all cross-dressers... It is just that for some of us our costumes are made of fabric or material, while for others they are made of skin; for some an outfit can be changed; for others skin must be re sewn. There are no transsexuals (1994: 212).

Halberstam's argument was that the resultant effect of a postmodern fracturing and fragmenting of the concept 'sexual identity' would ensure the disappearance of the

specificity of transsexual identity. As such, she proposed that all “elective body alterations” should be subsumed under the rubric *cosmetic* surgery (Halberstam, 1994: 216). Unsurprisingly, the response to her paper was predominantly critical - and, at times, hostile - particularly, from members of the San Francisco based transsexual men’s group, FTM International (Halberstam, 1998). To her credit, Halberstam has taken these criticisms seriously and endeavoured to address them by “reconsider[ing] the various relations and nonrelations between FTM and butch subjectivities and bodies” (1998: 289). As such, she describes how her original presumption that some forms of transsexualism represented ‘gender essentialism’ was interpreted, unintentionally, as suggesting that she perceived “butchness as postmodern and therefore subversive while transsexualism was dated and deluded”. Instead, Halberstam claims that she was attempting to produce a theoretical and cultural space for ‘transgender butch’ that had a distinct epistemological frame from transsexuality: in effect, “the possibility of the nonoperated-upon transgender-identified person”. Unfortunately, Halberstam’s original thesis is typical of the type of analysis of transsexualism that seeks to use it in a conceptual fashion to support alternative agendas: in this case, theorizing female masculinity as transgender butch. Of course, what is lost is the transsexual subject, their subjectivity and sense of (dis)embodiment. Halberstam heeds this and thus concludes with a substantial reformulation of her previous position:

There are transsexuals, and we are not all transsexuals; gender is not fluid, and gender variance is not the same wherever we find it. Specificity is all...gender variance in and of itself (like sexual variance in and of itself) cannot be relied upon to produce a radical and oppositional politics simply by virtue of representing difference (1998: 306).

Consequently, the analysis offered by Prosser that draws upon texts that “engage with feelings of embodiment”, or “stories that not only represent but allow changes to somatic materiality” (Prosser, 1998: 16) is a much needed development if we are to dig ourselves out of the current impasse. Certainly the debate that seemingly oscillates between transsexualism as transgressing/reinstating the binary gender system - or, as Prosser describes it literalizing/deliteralizing; subversive/hegemonic, is a frustrating one. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s paper - *Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins* - Prosser suggests that these types of binaries saturate poststructuralist methods to the extent that it is impossible to simply “move ‘beyond’ them” (1998: 16). Instead, he suggests that we should begin to read transsexual

narratives in an attempt to rupture the binaries between literalizing/deliteralizing, reinscriptive/transgressive and subversive/hegemonic, with the aim of opening up a transitional space between them. All too often, and to its detriment, the sole purpose of poststructuralist theory has been to distinguish between that which is essentialist (bad) and that which is anti-essentialist (good). Thus, Prosser suggests that:

[T]o the extent that transsexual narratives cannot be read without our accounting for the subjective experience of being transgendered, reading them necessitates our taking at every step what Sedgwick and Frank term - it's a phrase that's been much circulated recently - "the risk of essentialism" (513). That is, to the extent that they are written out of experience, the body, sex, feeling, belief in immanent self, reading transsexual body narratives necessitates our using these categories that we have come to believe require deconstructing a priori (1998: 16).

Whilst this is a noble move, the unequivocal distinctions that Prosser is trying to draw throughout the book between transsexual, transgender and queer, in an attempt to ground a particular transsexual 'essence', are difficult ones to maintain. In a later chapter, *No Place Like Home*, Prosser separates the three terms arguing that the transgender movement has, problematically, attempted to queer transsexuality resulting in a radical overthrow of many of the features of "transsexuality's body narrative" (1998: 174). He continues by suggesting that:

...even as the style of transgender cuts and pastes bits and pieces of queer to produce a troubling performativity, the very fact of transgender's naming - a transgender studies, a transgendered movement, a transgendered subject, and so on - still marks *transgender's irreducibility to these queer correlates*. Most obviously, as the term 'transgender' suggests, this irreducibility pivots on the category of gender and an approach to transgender as the grounds of an identity (Prosser, 1998: 175, my emphasis).

In a critique of this account, Judith Halberstam suggests that the opposition that Prosser sets out between transgender and queer identities is false and that the distinctions he makes between queer, transgender and transsexual are confusing and inconsistent:

Sometimes *transgender* and *transsexual* are synonymous for him, and he sets them in opposition to *queer*, which is presented as maintaining the same relationship between gender identity and body morphology as is enforced within heteronormative culture. Sometimes *transgender* and *queer* are synonyms whose disruptive refigurations of desires and bodies are set in opposition to (non homosexual) transsexuality's surgical and hormonal recapitulation of heteronormative embodiment - its tendency to straighten

the alignment between body and identity (1998: 291, emphasis in original).

Although debates ensue about what is and what is not *queer*, it is *transgender* that is the difficult term here; what *transgender* means and how it *relates* to queer. Susan Stryker might suggest “*transgender* can in fact be read as a heterodox interpretation of *queer*, that it is a conceptualization of queerness based on the understandings of people who contest naturalized heteronormativity in ways that might include, but are not limited to, homosexual orientation or object choice” (1998: 149, emphasis in original). Thus, queer can incorporate both transgender and transsexuality. But, Jay Prosser would argue that “at the heart of transgender’s project lies a contradictory dynamic in relation to queerness and transsexuality: both differentiating against and inclusive of them”. Consequently, “‘transgender’ needs to be read in relation to, but not reduced to, transsexual and queer narratives” (1998: 176). Definitional dilemmas, indeed. Postmodernity may have set the stage for the emergence of queer and transgender, but it certainly does not permit a definitive explanation for the way in which they can be employed. In fact, these types of language games and border battles seem to contradict the very premise they set out to promote - unless, like Prosser, the aim is to ground these identities. Inevitably, the circularity of these arguments almost always results in frustrating loops, passing increasingly familiar points of reference, with little notion of the distance from the target destination, or even where that destination originally was.

Certainly, the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993), particularly her two book publications of the early 1990’s, has had a profound influence upon the emergence of trans-studies, not least, upon the conceptual language that is employed. Heeding the pertinent criticisms made by Biddy Martin and Susan Bordo (discussed in the previous section), I would like to suggest that Butler’s importance for the development of trans-studies has been *precisely* because of her *failure* to fully acknowledge the body as a drag upon gender signification (Martin, 1992: 80). In the next section, I look at how this interpretation has impacted upon transgendered theorists accounts as they move from theorizing transsexual subjectivity to incorporating “our histories of embodied experience” (Bordo, 1993: 42).

3.4 Transgender Studies: theorizing transsexual embodied subjectivity

Certainly the impact of queer has been of crucial importance to the way in which 'trans' subjectivities and embodiment are beginning to be theorized. But it was, perhaps, only after the success of Marjorie Garber's (1992) ground breaking social and cultural analysis of cross-dressing - *Vested Interests* - that there began to be a sea change in the publication pattern for academic accounts of transgenderism. As Garber proposed:

The transsexual body is not an absolute insignia of anything. Yet it makes the referent ("man" or "woman") seem knowable. Paradoxically, it is to transsexuals and transvestites that we need to look if we want to understand what gender categories mean (1992: 110, emphasis in original).

But, as Susan Stryker (1998) quite rightly points out, Garber's socio-cultural analysis was, like many previous feminist and queer accounts, solely concerned with how transsexuals and transvestites were constructed through the 'cultural gaze' with absolutely no regard for transsexual subjectivity. Instead, for the development of a field of 'trans-studies', Stryker suggests that:

First, transgender should be something more than the mere elaboration of certain already-established discourses on transgenderism - the medico-juridical discourse of gender dysphoria enforced by members of the HBGDA, for example, or moral discourses such as Janice Raymond's that masquerade as objective critique while passing judgment on the truth or justice of particular gender identities. Secondly, the field should also be predicated on an explicit recognition of transgendered people as active agents seeking to represent themselves through any number of strategies, rather than as passive objects of representation in a few dominant discourses (1998: 148).

In an early paper, Stryker (1994) provides a more detailed account of these issues suggesting that the transsexual body is not simply a creation of modern science, nor does the medically constructed nature of transsexual bodies preclude them from viable sites for subjectivity. Moreover, whilst medical science may enable the very means to transsexual embodiment, Stryker argues this does not *guarantee* the transsexual subject's complicity with a conservative and heteronormative agenda which, undoubtedly, upholds sex reassignment surgery as the establishment's treatment of choice:

As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are

something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intend us to be. Though medical techniques for sex reassignment are capable of crafting bodies that satisfy the visual and morphological criteria that generate naturalness as their effect, engaging with those very techniques produces a subjective experience that belies the naturalistic effect biomedical technology can achieve. Transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist (1994: 242).

Thus, the 'trans-project' was to begin by exploring the ebbs, flows, complexities and discontinuities of transgendered subjectivity and embodiment, in all its rich and multifaceted ways. No longer were transsexuals or transgenderists to be banished to short paragraphs, called up to support specific theoretical or moral positions whilst feminists and queer theorists contested the conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. The transsexual and transgenderist had arrived: finally subjects in their own right, engaged in their own battles and boundary wars.

"Its an exciting time here at the beginning of a movement", declares 'gender outlaw' Kate Bornstein in one of the best examples of a misreading of Butler's notion of 'gender performativity'. In a style more celebratory and, unfortunately, less empathetic to the plight of most transsexuals, Bornstein embarks upon an enthusiastic and deconstructive assault on the 'rules' of the gender system where:

Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender (1994: 52).

Although Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On men, women and the rest of us* possesses an energy that, at times, makes it fun to read, many of her theoretical goals are problematic. For example, one of Bornstein's principal concerns is to distinguish between those transsexual or transgendered individuals who appear to contest the gender system, 'gender outlaws' such as herself, and those individuals who appear to uphold the gender order, 'gender defenders'. As such, transsexuals who 'pass' are devalued because in appearing to conform to gender rules they reinstate the very rules that their act of transition undid. But, as Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen correctly point out, "the opposition Bornstein constructs for the purpose of privileging the outlaws denies the complexity and fluidity of identity she hopes to affirm and denies the possibility of a

sexual politics that might find support in either group” (1998: 239).

A second related problem with Bornstein’s account concerns how she perceives the relationship between the body and gender fluidity. Bornstein argues that the body has no limit on gender signification, that gender identities can be taken on at will and are in no way dependent upon the physical manifestation of the body. But can gender identities simply be taken on in isolation from other’s readings of our body? Even if this were the case, one might wonder why Bornstein was compelled to construct a female body, to signify to others her female identity. I must add that after reading her radical thesis, which divides the world between gender defenders and gender outlaws, I was somewhat dismayed to see how this ‘gender outlaw’ manifested physically. She seems to hold the rather privileged position of being able to ‘pass’ as a white, straight female - unless, of course, she comes out as ‘Kate Bornstein, the MtF transsexual, lesbian, performance artist’ in every transient interaction. However, those who seek to ‘pass’ on a daily basis are criticized for reinstating the binary gender system. I think that perhaps the most disappointing aspect of Bornstein’s thesis is that these claims are made retrospectively. She *has* transitioned, and does manifest to all intents and purposes as female, despite her claim to be a gender outlaw. Yet, she begins to argue against those who, for what must be a variety of social and economic factors, try to live their lives within the structures of a binary gender system. Unfortunately, I believe that Bornstein’s work whilst admirable for attempting to provide an account of transgender experience outside of socio-medical discourses feeds into an unhealthy and divisive tendency for the ‘transgenderist’ to be valorized over and above the transsexual.

Sandy Stone (1991), in her exciting and exuberant article *The Empire Strikes Back*, was one of the first transgendered academics to draw on Judith Butler’s work. Employing Butler’s concept of *cultural intelligibility*, Stone suggested that in the case of the transsexual, “the varieties of performative gender, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body *which is itself a medically constituted textual violence*, generate new and unpredictable dissonances” (1991: 296, emphasis in original). These dissonances would be created by juxtaposing the transsexual’s ‘refigured body’ with conventional gender discourse which, Stone argued, would result in the fragmentation and reconstitution of gender into new and unexpected fields. Thus, she suggested that transsexuals should not be constituted as a class or ‘third gender’, but:

...rather as a *genre* -- a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored (1991: 296, emphasis in original).

However, in order for this to take effect it would require transsexuals to make themselves *visible*, which in turn has serious implications for transsexual stories. The one factor that best indicates a successful transition is to 'pass'. Yet, 'passing' requires what Stone has described as the 'effacement of the prior gender role' and the construction of a plausible history. Thus, whilst more sympathetic to 'passing' transsexuals than Bornstein, Stone is, I believe, quite right in criticizing the seeming acceptability of 'wrong body' as an adequate descriptive category for transsexual experience. As she says: "[I]n fact 'wrong body' has come, virtually by default, to *define* the syndrome" and whilst academics, clinicians and transsexuals continue to "ontologize both sexuality and transsexuality in this way, we have foreclosed the possibility of analyzing desire and motivational complexity of individual lived experience" (1991: 297, emphasis in original).

Jay Prosser (1998) agrees that the 'wrong body formula' has become the nub of transsexual rhetoric deployed in order to obtain access to hormones and surgery. Yet, he claims that the proliferation of the wrong body figurative cannot be attributed singularly to its discursive power and cohesion with medical narratives. Instead, he suggests that many transsexuals continue to use this aphorism simply because it gives a very good representation of their feelings of disembodiment. As he states:

If the goal of transsexual transition is to align the feeling of gendered embodiment with material body, body image - which we might be tempted to align with the imaginary - clearly already has a material force for transsexuals. The image of being trapped in the wrong body conveys this force...The image of wrong embodiment describes most effectively the experience of pre-transition (dis)embodiment: the feeling of a sexed body dysphoria profoundly and subjectively experienced (1998: 69).

Thus, Prosser is concerned with the correspondence between material body surface and body image, or to paraphrase, the feeling of being at home in one's skin. For Prosser, skin appears as an organ both illustrating and enabling the "psychic/corporeal interchange of subjectivity". Thus, subjectivity cannot be said to be only about having a physical skin, but rather subjectivity is a matter of "psychic investment of self in skin" (1998: 73). Hence, as the skin is the organ that facilitates the sense of touch, Prosser goes

on to ask the question: how is one touched when the skin doesn't feel like it is one's own? A traditional part of transsexual narrative represented in the autobiographies of, for example, Caroline Cossey (1992) and Renée Richards (1983) is that, pre-surgery, the genitals remain untouchable in sexual relations. Prosser suggests that the delimitation of untouchable areas refuses "to sex" these areas. Hence, "the genitals remain unsexed, both nonerogenous and not included in the imaginary 'true sex' morphology". Yet, at the same time, Prosser proposes that this "nonerogenization implicitly acknowledges those genital parts as *already* materially sexed (that is male or female)" (Prosser, 1998: 77, my emphasis). Thus, it is the disavowal of sexual genitals that, paradoxically, substantiates a material sex that is incommensurable with gender identity. Hence, Prosser argues that the wrong body formula captures precisely this fundamental sense: the transsexual subject's conceptualization of sexed morphology as not the *property* of the subject's body image. Consequently, he explains that as this sense of inappropriateness is located in the material body, the transsexual subject seeks surgical intervention to alter their physicality rather than psychotherapy to re-conceptualize their body image.

As is becoming an increasingly important point in much social and cultural theory, one of Prosser's aims is to contribute to the theorizing of embodiment: particularly the exigent feelings of *disembodiment* that constitute much of transsexual lived experience. Another excellent article that also argues for the incorporation of these phenomenological aspects of experience for theorizing transsexual subjectivity, is Henry Rubin's (1998) *Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies*, which appeared in the Transgender Special Edition of the academic journal *GLQ*. Rubin suggests that phenomenology provides a framework for making sense of transsexualism in a way that also attends to and recognizes transsexual agency and subjectivity:

Phenomenology recognizes the circumscribed agency of embodied subjects who mobilize around their body image to sustain their life projects. A phenomenological method works to return agency to us as subjects and to return authority to our narratives. It justifies a turn to the self-reports of transsexual subjects as a place to find counterdiscursive knowledge (1998: 271).

Whilst he acknowledges that Foucauldian approaches have made it impossible to see these subjects and knowledges as anything but discursively conditioned, he is, I believe, correct to criticize discursive accounts that slide far too easily from analyzing social

structures into erasing subjectivity. Rubin cites Bernice Hausman's (1995) *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* as exemplifying this type of degeneration. In a similar vein to Billing and Urban (1995; see Chapter Two), Hausman's critique of transsexualism relegates the transsexual to a passive subject position who, as Rubin describes, "should somehow know better than to 'believe' in gender (while letting nontranssexuals off the hook)" (1998: 271).

Perhaps, of even more importance, Rubin's essay signals another 'strike back' from the *Transsexual Empire* (Stone, 1991). Rubin's critique highlights what I also see as the growing gulf between the way many feminists and queer theorists have expected 'transgender' to not only represent an *occasion* for gender transgression, but to actually breakdown and demolish the existing binary gender system. This poses a stark comparison with the lived experience of many of those who might actually describe themselves as transgendered. From Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna² (1978), via Janice Raymond (1979) to Tamsin Wilton (2000), and with many others in-between, feminists and queer authors have frequently complained that transsexuals reaffirm rather than transgress the binary gender system - leaving their own normative, congruent gender identities and sexed bodies unexamined. As Rubin argues:

Nontranssexuals assume the coherent legibility of their gendered embodiment or their identities and are not expected to carry a share of the revolutionary burden of over throwing gender or imagining what to replace it with. They do not walk around, as they seem to be asking us to do, without gender identities or legible bodies... They are not called upon to account for the fact that their gender is something they achieve. Somehow it has become our responsibility alone as transsexuals to shatter these norms. Somehow these critics think that because we 'know the rules' we should be the vanguard in charge of breaking them. It disappoints them that we have not made this connection between our knowledge and their program (1998: 273).

Coincidentally, perhaps, one of the most theoretically nuanced accounts of transgendered embodiment - *Transgenderism and the Question of Embodiment* - appears in the same journal, and attempts to move beyond these types of debates. Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen's (1998) article and preliminary findings have greatly informed the direction of this research. They argue that whilst "it is extremely important to be critical of medical

² They acknowledge this oversight in a recent reappraisal of *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. See Kessler & McKenna (2000)

approaches to the body and to transsexuality, we share (Biddy) Martin's view that the 'complex relations between the body and psyche (must not) disappear'. That is treating the body as a manipulative thing suggests there are no psychic investments in it that require consideration". Furthermore, they reject theories that "read gender identities and bodies as effects of historically specific constructions or that valorize crossing as a way to escape historical constructions" (Elliot & Roen, 1998: 243). Accordingly, they turn their attention to psychoanalytic concepts to enrich their analysis of transgendered embodiment. In a critique of the views of Judith Butler, they suggest that despite Butler's claim that psychoanalysis "is the best account of the psyche - and psychic subjection - that we have", she is unable "to escape the cultural determinism she explicitly hopes to avoid". Consequently, they suggest that:

When the major concern of feminist, queer, or transgender theorists is with the ways in which a given society stigmatizes, oppresses, or excludes its nonnormative others, it is necessary to employ a sociological or historical analysis. What poses problems...is that sexuality and psychic life cannot be understood with historical tools alone. To do so is to produce a limited reading that cannot adequately theorize a given subject's relation to his/her own embodiment, to unconscious desire, and to the particular history of a subject's own psychic life (Elliot & Roen, 1998: 246).

While a detailed psychoanalytic reading is most certainly beyond the remit of this research, I agree that for a full and rich understanding of transsexual embodied subjectivity there must be some recourse to psychic life. In their analysis of interviews with both MtF and FtM transsexuals, Elliot and Roen recorded that some participants had difficulties with notions that were being promoted by transgender theorists. These difficulties included: the desire to 'pass' as the other gender, the demand for anatomical congruity with gender through surgical intervention, and the reluctance to politicize what is also an intensely personal experience (Elliot & Roen, 1998: 257). In a particularly poignant excerpt taken from an interview with Babe, who was born with a female anatomy but identifies as a man, the authors describe how he has to negotiate a range of contradicting and powerful discourses:

It is possible to perceive Babe as being caught painfully among these opposing discourses: medical discourses that hold out a promise of surgery that might never actually be available; transgender discourses that challenge him to live as a man, or better, as a transgendered person, without relying on the promise of surgery; and the Christian discourses of his home and family,

which encourage him to love and respect his (female) body as a creation of God. It is little wonder that the Cartesian view of oneself as “trapped in the wrong body” is of greatest comfort and therefore of immediate use to Babe (Elliot & Roen, 1998: 250).

This sympathetic and complex account of just some of the difficulties this transsexual subject has to negotiate sets the tone for the analysis presented in subsequent chapters of this thesis. In this section it has been illustrated how a new academic discipline has arisen in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of transsexual subjectivity. The disagreements between those promoting a transgender agenda, where they argue for a rejection of ‘passing’ and in some cases the refusal of bodily alteration (e.g. Bornstein, 1993; Stone, 1991), and those who embrace and theorize the experiences of those who do transition, perhaps even investing in a return to identity and essence (e.g. Prosser, 1998), have pushed forward the project of understanding embodied ‘trans’ subjectivities. Transsexualism is so often theorized conceptually in an attempt to gain a better grasp of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. These new debates should, however, not only be of benefit for a greater knowledge of transsexualism, but should also yield a more nuanced understanding of the embodied gendered subjectivities of us all. However, I now want to return to the social sciences, feminist psychology in particular, to ascertain their particular input into the theorizing of transsexualism in the last thirty years.

3.5 Feminists’ engagement with transsexualism: A promising start

It was 1978 when Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna published *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. Although its immediate impact may have been slight (Kessler & McKenna, 2000), over the years this text has taken on a seminal status. Proposing a radical shift from the gender theorists of the day, Kessler and McKenna drew on a study of transsexualism to argue that both sex and gender were social constructions. As they stated in the preface:

What does it mean to say that the existence of two sexes is an ‘irreducible fact’? In this book we will show that this ‘irreducible fact’ is a product of social interaction in everyday life and that gender in everyday life provides the basis for all scientific work on gender and sex (Kessler & McKenna, 1978: vii; cited in Crawford, 2000).

It would seem two feminist psychologists, Kessler and McKenna, had pre-empted the

developments of queer theory by more than a decade. More surprisingly, it has only been in the last few years that they have begun to be accredited with this (e.g. Lundgren, 2000; Golden, 2000; see Kessler & McKenna, 2000). Years before either Moira Gatens, Gayle Rubin or Judith Butler began the task of critiquing the sex/gender distinction, Kessler and McKenna proposed that “the constitutive belief that there are two genders not only produces the idea of gender role, but also creates a sense that there is a physical dichotomy”. Thus, drawing upon an ethnomethodological approach, they suggest that:

...gender is a social construction, that a world of two ‘sexes’ is a result of the socially shared, taken-for-granted methods which members use to construct reality (1985: xi).

Kessler and McKenna employ ‘gender’, rather than ‘sex’, “even when referring to those aspects of being a woman (girl) or man (boy) that have traditionally been viewed as biological”. This highlights their proposal “that the element of social construction is primary in *all* aspects of being female and male”. Consequently, they only used the term ‘sex’ to refer to reproductive and sexual activities (Kessler & McKenna, 1985: 7, emphasis added; see also Crawford, 2000: 8).

What is apparent here, is the way in which Kessler and McKenna - as Sedgwick and Butler were to repeat and Martin to critique - also collapsed together the categories sex and gender. In a recent *Feminism & Psychology* Special Edition, Eva Lundgren takes up this issue arguing that, retrospectively, the problem with Kessler and McKenna’s thesis “is that ‘sex’ remains something ‘pure’, a fixed and given biology which is not relevant to the construction of gender” (2000: 59). The problem with this approach mimics many of the critiques of gender theory that we have seen so far - they neglect to see the body as a culturally formed dimension that is both construing and construed by experience (Lundgren, 2000). More recently, in response to this criticism, Kessler and McKenna state:

By neglecting to problematize the body, itself, as a culturally formed dimension, we may have given the impression that we believe that the construction of the body has no significance in the process of gender construction... We do not believe that there is a ‘purely biological body’ (2000: 71).

Certainly the critique that Kessler and McKenna failed to problematize the body should

be heeded, particularly in the light of the last twenty years of feminist and gender research. But, they still provided one of the best feminist analyses of transsexualism to date, and were responsible for beginning the task of engaging with cultural practices of gender construction. Moreover, their research represented a significant shift away from traditional studies of transsexualism that focused on etiology (e.g. Stoller, 1968, 1975), or social deviance (e.g. Feinbloom, 1976), or treatment (e.g. Benjamin, 1966), yet also avoided the moralistic diatribe that dominated critiques such as that of radical feminist Janice Raymond (1979). Rather, their prime focus was to investigate “what transsexualism can illuminate about the day-to-day social construction of gender by all persons” (Kessler & McKenna, 1985: 112). Their ethnomethodological analysis of interviews with fifteen transsexuals produced six beliefs that focused upon practices of ‘passing’ that contributed to the ‘naturalization of gender’. They suggested that by rarely referring to themselves as ‘transsexual’ and by claiming to have always been one gender, transsexuals, like all of us, supported the ‘natural’ binary gender system. However, the transsexual has to consciously employ particular techniques for ‘passing’ as this gender, which include: creating gender attributes; general talk; public physical appearance; the private body; the personal past.

In order to expand upon the concept ‘passing’, Kessler and McKenna drew upon the theoretical work of Garfinkel (1967), who suggested that passing is an *ongoing* practice. However, they proposed an amendment Garfinkel’s thesis that most of the gender ‘work’ in order to ‘pass’ needs to be done by the displayer, rather than the perceiver. Instead, they suggested that:

[I]n short, there is little that the displayer needs to do once he/she has provided the initial information, except maintain the sense of “naturalness” of her/his gender. Passing is an ongoing practice, but it is practiced by both parties. Transsexuals become more “natural” females or males and less self-consciously transsexuals when they realize that passing is not totally their responsibility (1985: 137).

Thus, whilst the transsexual can, to some extent, rely upon the fact that the perceiver tends to stick to their original gender reading - unless it is seriously challenged - the task of maintaining their own gender coherence must be seen as more problematic. This is particularly the case for the last ‘passing’ technique. Kessler and McKenna argued that whilst genitals are the major insignia of gender, if our genitals are incongruous with our

gender presentation, it is necessary that everything is done to protect the body. However, because so few of our interactions actually involve a public viewing (or potential viewing) of our genitals we only need give the impression of having the appropriate genitals to people who will undoubtedly never see them. As such:

[T]his is the same as saying we must give the impression of being and always having been the gender we lay claim to. Gender is historical. In concrete terms this involves talking in such a way that we reveal ourselves to have a history as a male or female. Transsexuals must not only conceal their real past (in most cases), but they must also create a new past (1985: 132).

As we have seen from the analyses of transsexual subjectivity, it is precisely this technique of 'passing' - denying a different gender history; refusing to identify as transsexual - that is increasingly being challenged. Thus, there appears to have been a shift in the last twenty years, inspired by queer and transgender studies, where refusing to 'pass' not only allows for a greater understanding of the specificity of transsexual embodied subjectivity, but also contributes to a day-to-day *denaturalization* of gender. Kessler and McKenna's project must be acknowledged for the role it has played in this.

3.6 Feminist Contentions: the disengagement from transsexualism

Whilst feminist psychologists were off to such a blistering start in the attempt to deconstruct the apparent naturalness of gender - via an analysis of transsexualism - we might wonder why it has taken so long for them to re-engage seriously with this topic. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the fact that the very 'gender' of Gender Studies has become almost synonymous with 'woman', underpinned by a variety of feminist political positions. Thus, the transsexual subject has rarely been theorized within many contemporary feminist accounts of gender and when she or he is, the debates are often conceptually confused, particularly when retreats are made into essentialist accounts of 'woman' in order to refuse the male-to-female transsexual's claim to be female. A good example of this can be found in Germaine Greer's latest feminist offering *The Whole Woman*, in which she attacks just about everything that seems to annoy her. In the chapter 'Pantomime Dames', Greer concludes that:

Whatever else it is gender reassignment is an exorcism of the mother. When a man decides to spend his life impersonating his mother (like Norman Bates in *Psycho*) it is as if he murders her and gets away with it, proving at a stroke that there was nothing to her. His intentions are no more honourable than any female impersonator's; his achievement is to gag all those who would call his bluff. When he forces his way into the few private spaces women may enjoy and shouts down their objections, and bombards the woman who will not accept him with threats and hate mail, he does as rapists have always done (1999: 74).

Serious accusations, indeed. Undoubtedly, Greer is making some tacit reference to the dispute that ensued after the appointment of a male-to-female transsexual at her Cambridge college and may have led to her own resignation. Here, male-to-female transsexuals are constructed as the bastard of the feminist movement: infiltrating and penetrating female spaces, impersonating and annihilating their mothers, not just in a 'weird' or 'freakish' sense, but in the fashion of the ultimate psychopath - Norman Bates. However, as Gayle Rubin argued as long ago as 1984:

...transsexuals are as likely to exhibit sexist attitudes or behavior as any politically random social grouping. But to claim that they are inherently anti-feminist is sheer fantasy. A good deal of current feminist literature attributes the oppression of women to graphic representations of sex, prostitution, sex education, sadomasochism, male homosexuality and transsexuality. Whatever happened to the family, religion, education, child-rearing practices, the media, the state, psychiatry, job discrimination, and unequal pay? (Rubin, 1984/1994: 302)

In this section I focus specifically upon some feminist psychologists' lack of engagement with transsexualism and the more recent concept of transgenderism over the last decade. I take as my point of departure the academic journal *Feminism and Psychology*, one of the most successful feminist journals to publish and serve feminist psychologists. Since its genesis in 1991 (and prior to the year 2000 Special Feature referred too earlier), this journal published only two papers including 'transsexual' or 'transgender' in the title. Moreover, both of these appeared in the Observations and Commentaries section rather than as a lengthier central article. The first, *The Politics of Transgender*, written by the radical feminist Janice Raymond, repeats and builds on the caustic criticism of transsexualism she originally penned in her infamous text *The Transsexual Empire* (1979/1994b):

...transsexual surgery and treatment do nothing to challenge gender conformity but rather reinforce it by encouraging the individual to become an agreeable participant in a role-defined society, substituting one sex-role stereotype for the other. What ultimately happens in the transsexual fabrication process is that men are turned into artifactual women. Although transsexuals are in many ways what a patriarchal society's stereotype of femininity is, they are not real women (Raymond, 1994: 628).

Here, Raymond attempts to get to grips with recent developments in the field, in particular, the emergence of a new identity, namely 'transgendered'. Maintaining the combative writing style of her earlier text, Raymond vehemently rejects the notion that transgender politics offer a way to transcend gender. Acknowledging that on the personal level it can be provocative, she suggests that at the political level it fails as dismally as transsexualism to move beyond sex-role stereotypes:

Instead, transgenderism reduces gender resistance to wardrobes, hormones, surgery and posturing - anything but sexual equality. A real sexual politics says yes to a view and reality of transgender that instead of conforming to gender, really transforms it (1994: 632).

But, maybe this is because 'sexual politics', in the single and reductive radical feminist sense, is not the purpose of transgender activists. Instead, as we have seen, their work is primarily informed by a Butlerian (1990) feminist critique of hegemonic gender norms. By illustrating the performativity of gender they challenge the notion that a specific gender should, necessarily, follow from a definitive body.

The second paper *Women's Self Starvation, Cosmetic Surgery and Transsexualism* written by another radical feminist, Tania Lienert (1998), similarly attacks the notion that transsexualism is transgressive, whilst illustrating another trend in feminist theorizing of transsexualism. Here, transsexualism is used *conceptually* to strengthen the author's politically motivated arguments against women's bodily alteration. Inevitably, this approach to transsexualism perpetuates simplistic and sometimes clichéd understandings of transsexual experience. For example, Lienert argues for:

...radical solutions developed from radical feminist ideas: (such as) education and counselling aimed at the empowerment of women and transsexuals to reject surgical and hormonal solutions to their bodily dilemmas and accept themselves as they are (1998: 245).

This argument fails to acknowledge that transsexuals are *immediately* offered and *do*

undergo psychotherapy as set out in the *Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Guidelines* (HBIGDA, 1998). Significantly, continuing along the path towards reassignment surgery implies, as Prosser (1998) has also suggested, that counselling fails to effect a sufficient sense of relief for those individuals with severely fragmented gender identifications. Furthermore, transsexuals undergo radical changes in body morphology. These include, for male-to-female transsexuals, penectomy, vaginoplasty, and hormone replacement tablets every day for life, and for female-to-male transsexuals, bilateral mastectomy, hysterectomy, monthly testosterone injections and attempts at phalloplasty that frequently result in poor surgical outcomes. This, in addition to deed poll name changes and legal status effects, is hardly on a par with a nose job or breast augmentation. In fact, some post-operative transsexuals will strongly object to alternative forms of 'cosmetic' surgery after reassignment, because they do, ironically as it may seem, just want to be 'themselves' - albeit with a new embodied gender identity. This is illustrated by an extract from one of the interviews with a male-to-female transsexual that I conducted as part of this research:

K: can you describe how you feel about your body since your transition?

A: umm (.....) I would like to have bigger breasts but umm I'm not going to have plastic surgery umm I don't (.) I mean I am who I am and I don't believe that er I want to be improved in anyway by, by artificial means (Artemis, MtF, 50, 3/306-309, see appendix 3 for notes on transcription).

Of course, others will report that "[T]ranssexuals, whose legitimacy has been, in part, created by the possibility of genital surgery, already think of it as at least partly cosmetic" (Kessler, 1998: 116). This type of totalizing talk is extremely unhelpful. As Sandy Stone so sharply puts it:

There are no subjects in these discourses, only homogenized, totalized objects -- factually replicating earlier histories of minority discourses in the large. So when I speak the forgotten word, it will perhaps wake memories of other debates. The word is *some* (1991: 298, emphasis in original).

Of course *some* transsexuals may regard reassignment surgery as cosmetic, particularly given the unswerving influence of capitalism and the resultant effect that most reassignment surgery is now conducted privately, paid for by the trans-person. But, for many others, surgery will be cited as not simply life changing, but also life-saving.

Not surprisingly then, theorizing 'transsexualism', and more recently, 'transgenderism', are contentious areas for feminism. I have chosen to use the articles by Raymond (1994) and Lienert (1998) as a springboard because they illustrate clearly one of the central problems for some feminist analyses of transsexualism and transgenderism: whether or not a male-to-female transsexual can identify as 'woman'. This question is of particular interest because it alludes to the conflict and contradictions inherent in feminists' own deliberations over the ontological status of 'woman'. Yet, from the discussion so far, it should be clear that theorizing the embodied subjectivities of transsexual and transgendered individuals may provide the perfect site for the meeting of the various debates that feminist psychologists are engaged with when theorizing the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. Hence, in this study I move away from a radical feminist vilification of transsexualism for upholding a heterosexist patriarchal gender system. Instead, I attempt to demonstrate some of the contradictions and complexities inherent in the identification practices of both male-to-female and female-to-male trans-people and, in a more general sense, add to a small but growing collection of socio-cultural empirical accounts. These accounts are generally motivated by an interest in transsexual subjectivity and embodiment and what they can tell us about broader concepts such as sex, gender and sexuality.

3.7 Empirical studies

The problem with most of the accounts of transsexualism discussed is that - whilst being of great interest - they rarely engage in empirical research that actually gathers data about transsexual individuals' own subjective experience. Surprisingly, this is even the case with many of those transgendered academics who are themselves urging for more theoretical accounts that attend to transgendered embodied subjectivity. However, there are a few exceptions. As discussed earlier, Kessler and McKenna, employing an ethnomethodological approach, underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology, began the trend for engaging in empirical accounts of transsexualism in the attempt to evidence the socially constructed nature of sex/gender. In the late 1980's Ann Bolin published her very useful study *In Search of Eve: Transsexual Rites of Passage*, which employed the method of participant-observation as sixteen male-to-female transsexuals went through the process of transition. Her findings challenged several assumptions that

emanated from the medical establishment:

Transsexuals were shown not to have family histories with dominant mothers and absent fathers, exclusive homosexual orientation, effeminate childhoods, nor did they view their penises as organs of hate and disgust. In addition, contrary to reports in the literature, transsexuals generally were not hyper-feminine in gender identity or role (1988 : xii).

Perhaps the best aspects of this research is that Bolin provides one of the earliest reports of transsexualism that challenges the notion that male-to-female transsexuals have been women all along; with “fully crystallized feminine identities” prior to transition. Rather, she perceives “these identities as gradually emerging in conjunction with changes in social identity and physical appearance” (1988: xii). Yet, whilst theorizing gendered embodiment as a process of *becoming*, Bolin, somewhat problematically, suggests that at a later stage, the transsexual actually arrives at the identity ‘woman’, and then drops the identity transsexual. Thus, within this theoretical account, ‘transsexualism’ is conceptualized as a transient and temporary category that the individual passes through on their way to becoming male or female. As Bolin proposes:

Their transformation is a multifaceted one in which the unachievable is achieved. By participating in this gender violation, these renegades of the male role paradoxically support the societal tenet that there are only two genders, and one cannot be in between. *Their passage is one into normalcy*, where after the surgery, they can disappear into their culture as natural women. The rite of transition is therefore a temporary sojourn of transformation; once they have passed and endured it, *transsexuals can assume the status of those born female* (1988: 8-9, emphasis added).

So, again, within this type of conceptualization male-to-female transsexuals are shown to be maintaining the binary gender system where, once they have had surgery and their genitals match their gender identity, they can ‘disappear’ with a secure female identification. This, like many accounts, fails on three levels. Firstly, to engage with transsexuals’ narratives of having a differently gendered history; secondly, to engage with the transitional process of female-to-male transsexuals who frequently do not have genital surgery; thirdly, and most importantly, to acknowledge that the body places limits upon gender presentation other than that defined by the genitals. For example, a forty year old, 6ft tall, biological male with thick dark body hair will have more difficulty disappearing into their culture as a ‘natural’ woman than a small framed biological male

who began transitioning in his late teens, before the effects of testosterone had marked his body to such a degree.

More recently, Richard Ekins (1993; 1997) has also conducted qualitative research to produce *Male Femaling: A grounded theory approach to cross-dressing and sex-changing*. In a huge study, theoretically informed by social interactionism (e.g. Goffman, 1959), involving 200 informants, with data collection conducted over set periods since 1979, Ekins attempts to consider “cross-dressing and sex-changing from the standpoint of a *systematic* and *empirical* explanation of the interrelations between sex, sexuality and gender” (1997: 26, emphasis in original). As such, he formulates the notion of ‘male-femaling’, which consists of five phases that “enable justice to be done to the processual and emergent nature of much cross-dressing and sex-changing phenomena” (1997: 163). These are ‘beginning femaling’, ‘fantasying femaling’, ‘doing female’, ‘constituting femaling’, and ‘consolidating femaling’. It is indeed, a very rich and interesting analysis. Yet, as Ekins himself notes:

Had I started the study in the early 1990’s, for instance, I might well have been more sensitive to the idea of gender as performance as opposed to category or identity (Butler 1990; Bornstein 1994). Had I begun as late as 1995, when the book was in its final stages, I might well have been influenced by Ken Plummer’s important *Telling Sexual Stories* (Plummer 1995). Again, back in the 1980’s the significance of decoupling sex, sexuality and gender had not been grasped. I had to labour hard on this. It may be that this decoupling will become the common currency of those working in the vanguard of the emerging field of ‘transgender studies’ (1997: 164).

Ekins’s self-reflections have been given serious consideration in the formulation of this research project which provides another example of empirical research into social and cultural aspects of transsexualism and the broader task of theorizing the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. This research began in the aftermath of all the developments Ekins cites. As such, these have, theoretically and conceptually, profoundly informed this study. Furthermore, this research differs from most existing empirical studies as it engages with the experiences of both male-to-female transsexuals and female-to-male transsexuals, never assuming that their process of transition simply reflects one another. This time, discourse analysis is the principal method of choice. By employing a different methodological tool from these empirical studies, underpinned by

an alternative epistemological framework that blends poststructuralism with phenomenology and particular psychoanalytic conceptions, I intend to build upon these existing accounts, ultimately facilitating a greater understanding of transsexual embodied subjectivity. These methodological considerations are discussed in the next chapter.

4

Methodology and Method³

For all its detachment and freedom from emotion, our science is still the dupe of linguistic habits; it has never yet got rid of those changelings called “subjects”.

Neitzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, (1887, trans. 1956: 179)

This chapter is concerned with formulating a methodological approach that, firstly, draws upon poststructuralist thinking to trace the discursive constructions that shape and mould transsexual identity, and secondly, moves beyond a purely textual analysis in order to inform the social and cultural study of self, identity and embodiment. A theoretical framework for the study of identity (Woodward, 1997) is outlined and the poststructuralist assumptions which underpin this approach are highlighted. Two forms of *discourse analysis*, usefully distinguished as discourse analysis and the analysis of discourses (Burr, 1995), employed within the discipline of psychology are critically evaluated - pinpointing some of the problems for theorizing embodied subjectivity from within discursive psychology. A more nuanced analysis of transsexual experience must pay heed to the differences between the transitional processes of male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, the possibilities for embodied subjectivity and accessibility

³ Some of the ideas and text in this chapter have been published. See Katherine Johnson (2001).

to the new gender position they take up, as well as their individual life trajectories. In an attempt to address these issues and provide a rich account of the experience of *Being Transsexual*, I construct a more eclectic methodological approach. This entails incorporating alongside an analysis of discourses psychoanalytic concepts for theorizing subjectivity (Hollway, 1989; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) and phenomenological notions for researching embodiment (e. g. Csordas, 1999). I conclude the methodology section of this chapter by providing a summary of the ways in which the key concepts of this thesis are mobilized throughout the analysis chapters. The final part of the chapter presents a detailed account of the method, introducing the participants, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.1 Theoretical framework for studying ‘identity’

The term ‘identity’ is increasingly used in conjunction with variously defined groups, whether they are youths, gays or transsexuals. Given the prolific usage of the term ‘identity’, it is important to try to specify exactly what one means by identity. Therefore, an approach originally outlined by Kathryn Woodward (1997) will be drawn upon to illustrate the stance taken in this thesis. Firstly, this framework incorporates a shift away from essentialist notions of belonging instead focusing on non-essentialist definitions of identity that highlight difference, as well as common or shared characteristics. For example, if we look back at the definition of transsexualism provided in the excerpt by Roberto (1983, see Chapter One), we can see a criterion for transition that is effective in shaping a very fixed and rigid account of transsexual experience. This stands in stark comparison to an excerpt taken from a Transgender community leaflet:

Some (but not all) transgender people may use hormones or surgery, but these have serious effects on general health, mental and emotional well-being, and sexual pleasure and function. **Many express their gender without medical aid**, and most do not have genital surgery. Some identify as male, female, both (bi-gender), or neither; as male to female, female to male, transsexual, man or woman of transgender background, or person with transgender qualities; as gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual or other. However we may identify, and whatever medical options we choose, we all deserve to be treated with equal dignity and respect (norrie mAy-welby, 1997).

This extract provides a diverse account of transgendered experience. In contrast, the excerpt taken from Robert (1983) emerges from the theorizing of the transsexual condition within the traditional 'medical model' (Kando, 1973). This entails the collection of biographical and in-depth psychological data followed by a period of analysis, classification, diagnosis and etiological theorizing (Ekins, 1997). Arguably, it is necessary to challenge these types of accounts and allow for diversity in experience if we are to establish a greater understanding of how certain individuals position themselves in relation to the discourses of transsexualism.

A second feature of Woodward's theoretical framework is that an identity is always perceived as relational. An identity can only be formed, not necessarily in opposition to somebody else, but in relation to, or differing from, somebody else. This identity can be established through *symbolic marking*. For example, badges or uniforms are two methods of marking a specific identity. In the case of transsexual identity, individuals wearing *Transsexual Menace* T-shirts (the North American political lobbying group for transsexual and transgendered individuals) have proved an effective means of symbolically marking a transsexual political identity. However, it is not vital that the marking of an identity be physically identifiable because identity is also maintained through social and material conditions. For example, legal discourses mark transsexuals as 'outsiders', as 'different' or even taboo. In the UK, transsexuals cannot entirely take up the position of male or female whilst the legal right to change their birth certificates, marry, and become the adoptive parents of their partner's children, are not permitted. Furthermore, since the case of *P V's S and Cornwall County Council*, where the European Court of Justice ruled that P's dismissal because of her intention to transition was unfair on the grounds of sex, the government has sought to introduce amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 regarding cases of transsexualism. The proposed amendments focus upon the interim period of six months to one year when the individual is in transition. For example:

14c) During the period and six months afterwards, *it will be lawful to exclude* the individual from jobs involving contact with members of the public or customers who are changing e.g. staff in health clubs, clothes shop assistants, home helps, swimming attendants etc.

(DfEE: Consultation Paper. January 1998, my emphasis)

Whatever one's opinion about the validity of such proposals which attach specific conditions to the legal protection of transsexuals, these changes to employment legislation could have very real effects for the transsexual, including social exclusion and material disadvantages.

Finally, this framework purports that identities are not unified. There may be contradictions that have to be negotiated, both within the individual, and between the individual and other group members. For example, contradictions may arise between the political identity adopted by *Press for Change* or *Transsexual Menace*, and the individual identities of those living in a shared culture. This point can be illustrated through a comparison of some of the visual images used to portray *Press for Change's* political campaign, and photographic art coming out of the transgender community. *Press for Change* presents the conservative, conformist face of transsexuality, exemplified in slogans such as "Gail and Pete are in love. Why not let them get married?" This is superimposed upon a picture of a very ordinary looking heterosexual couple. Underpinning this image is the promise that Gail and Peter will not offend the status quo, they just want to blend in with heteronormativity (see Chapter Eight for critique of this campaigning style). In contrast, images such as those produced by the FTM photographer Loren Cameron (1996) can be read as transgressive. Here, Cameron poses naked for the camera. His muscular, gym-honed body with clearly defined pectorals and washboard stomach indicates a male body. Everything about him exudes maleness. But, a closer inspection of the genital area reveals that he has no penis. The figure is confusing, is he a woman who has had a bilateral mastectomy, taken hormones and worked out in the gym, or a man who has had a penectomy? Thus, the image provides a radical challenge to our gender assumptions and becomes more opaque as we try to search for the socially and culturally mediated markers of sexual difference in order to categorize him as male or female.

4.2 Conceptual assumptions of poststructuralism

The theoretical framework outlined for researching identity is informed by the principles of poststructuralist theory. Poststructuralism emphasizes that when conceptualizing identity it is necessary to attend to different dimensions of identity, by highlighting these

differences both between individuals and within the individual. In addition a poststructuralist approach entails incorporating the notion that subjectivity is constituted through language. Poststructuralism makes certain assumptions about language, subjectivity, knowledge and truth (Weedon, 1987). Its founding principle is that language is thought to constitute our social reality, rather than reflect a social reality that is already given. There is no universally shared meaning for any given concept, as meaning can vary from language to language, culture to culture, and across time. Therefore, a poststructuralist account assumes that meaning is composed within language and is not guaranteed by the subject that speaks it. Thus, within this approach, language is paramount for the study of transsexual identity, as it is the place where a sense of self and subjectivity are constructed. Who we are, and how we understand ourselves does not originate in 'pre-packaged' forms inside us. Our identities are all effects of language, as the structure of language determines the way that experience and consciousness are structured (Woodward, 1997). Therefore, it follows that given language is a social phenomenon, identity is not an internalized 'entity' that belongs to the individual, but an interactive, inter-relational ongoing process of construction. Hence, the construction of identity is dependent on exchanges between people, whether this is through face-to-face dialogue, or via the communicative mediums of reading, radio, or television. An example taken from an interview with a male-to-female participant clearly illustrates the central role of language in her process of transition:

K : how long did the reassignment take you?

S: (.) umm (..) well I, *I'd realized from speaking to Dina exactly who I was.* That I wasn't a drag queen, I wasn't a transvestite, umm, that I was like she was. *I was actually transsexual* (Sally, MtF, 35, 3/93-95).

Language is visibly a crucible of change for her identity. It was only after talking with a friend, also a transsexual woman, when Sally says she realized who she was. She came across her identity as transsexual through language, in conversation with a friend. It is this point that brings to the fore one of the most potentially 'liberating' aspects of this approach. If language is the place where identities are built and maintained, then poststructuralist theory sees language as the major site where oppressive identities can be challenged or changed. What it means to be a transsexual, woman, or man, can all be transformed and reconstructed.

4.3 What is discourse analysis?⁴

Psychological research traditionally exerts great effort to adhere to methods that are more commonly found in the physical sciences. This raises questions and debates that are particularly pertinent to the study of mental states and human experience. Within a positivistic approach, researchers attempt to isolate specific mental states or behaviours in order to test pre-determined hypotheses. The application of this type of research approach to social phenomena has long been a contentious area (see Nietzsche, 1887, p.80). Can social scientists really control for all the possible variables that may be involved when considering a particular aspect of behaviour? Moreover, can the self ever be reduced to a “true” entity as research of this kind implies? Here, true is placed in scare quotes as some researchers, usually those influenced by poststructuralist or postmodernist perspectives, question the notion that there really is a truth out there waiting to be discovered. These theorists (e.g. Gergen, 1985; 1991; Shotter, 1993) draw, to a varying degree, on the assumptions of social constructionism which argues that knowledge is socially and culturally specific. Thus, in what has been documented as ‘the turn to language’ (Parker, 1989), there has become an increasing trend for social scientist to critique positivistic approaches. Rather, their emphasis is upon documenting the inconsistencies and fluctuations in selfhood by including methods of discursive analysis within their research.

Discourse analysis is almost synonymous with critical and in some cases feminist research. Michel Foucault defined ‘discourse’ as ‘the practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak’ (1969: 49). Others use it to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), as well as visual texts and social practices (Fairclough, 1995; Parker, 1992). The method provides us with a useful analytic tool that can be employed to identify and tease apart the discourses that are at work in a particular text. These can then be used, amongst other things, to comment on social processes that participate in the maintenance of structures of oppression. Foucault was, perhaps, the most influential proponent of this approach to emerge from the French poststructuralist tradition. In the

⁴ Judith Halberstam’s question, September 1999.

light of his account of 'genealogies of power', notions of power and oppression have undergone major transformations. As Elizabeth Grosz (1995) describes, Foucault has rendered the notion of oppression considerably more sophisticated by alerting us to the idea that the attribution of social value is not simply a matter of being depicted as passive and compliant, stripped of all forms of resistance. Rather, a position of subordination "exerts its own kind of forces...its own practices, and knowledges, which, depending on their socio-cultural placement and the contingencies of the power game that we have no choice but to continue playing, may be propelled into positions of power and domination" (Grosz, 1995: 210). Accordingly, the work of Foucault has provided an inspiration for some of those classified as oppressed, for there is always the possibility of a certain agency which will enable them to both challenge and transform their position (Weeks, 1985, 1989; Halperin, 1995). In fact, Foucault's work has been drawn on heavily by many feminists and queer theorists in their struggles against gender and sexuality inequities, informing both their political ideas and practices. Thus, attention to discourse facilitates many goals: an historical account of knowledge, a critique of psychological/legal/medical practices by challenging their truth claims, and an analysis that informs political practice and struggles (Burman & Parker, 1993).

Discourse analysis is used in many variants from cognitive linguistics to deconstruction, affording the analysis of language and texts. In psychology, discourse analysis is now a well-established method (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1995), but there are two distinct approaches which Vivian Burr (1995) usefully distinguishes between as 'discourse analysis' (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and the 'analysis of discourse' (e.g. Hollway, 1989; Parker, 1992).

Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* is perhaps one of the most influential research methods publications in recent times, ushering in a new era for psychological research. Rather than using the term discourse, they refer to 'interpretative repertoires' that highlight the way an individual frames an issue. In a similar vein, they are looking to analyze the 'performative qualities of discourses' in order to theorize what people are doing with their talk and writing, deciphering what they are trying to achieve. This notion of language function is one of the central suppositions of discourse analysis. However, the analysis of function cannot be seen in the simplistic terms of categorizing pieces of

speech because it is very much dependent upon the analyst's 'reading' of the context in which the speech occurs. Furthermore, a person's account will often vary in accordance with its function or the purpose of the talk. This notion of variation is the second major component of discourse analysis. In discourse analysis variation is as important, if not more important than consistency. This stands in stark contrast to the near fetishism for homogeneity of variance within traditional quantitative research, where it is not uncommon for researchers relying on statistical methods to discard outliers, or those that vary too much, in an effort to return a significant result. But, as Potter and Wetherell point out, if talk is orientated to many different functions, any examination of language over time will reveal considerable variation. This variation takes place because, on every occasion, people are using their language to construct versions of the world. This leads us to the third crucial component of discourse analysis, the assumption that talk and writing are constructed out of pre-existing resources. Inevitably, this will involve the exclusion of some resources. Reflecting on what has been left out is of as much value to the researcher as the analysis of what is included, because absences will aid in the construction of a particular version of 'reality'.

These principles are common to most forms of discourse analysis. However, the approaches differ in their consideration of subjectivity. For Potter and Wetherell nothing exists outside of the text. The sole purpose of their analysis is to determine the action orientation of any given rhetoric. As they state:

The researcher should bracket off the whole issue of the quality of accounts as accurate or inaccurate descriptions of mental states...Our focus is exclusively on discourse itself: how it is constructed, its functions and the consequences which arise from different discursive organization (1987: 178).

But in doing so, they appear to completely bypass the notion of subjectivity. In fact, frequent criticism has been directed at this approach, occasionally charging Potter and Wetherell with returning to some form of behaviourism, where the mind is only perceived as a black box. Despite their wish to avoid these charges, Potter and Wetherell's critics suggest they fail to move beyond acknowledging the limitations of 'blank subjectivity' (e.g. Hollway, 1989, Parker, 1997). Consequently, this approach does not seem sufficiently encompassing for many of those endeavouring to undertake

psychological research where mental states, consciousness, unconsciousness or notions of how an individual experiences their self, identity and world are of utmost importance.

The second approach, the 'analysis of discourses' (e.g. Parker 1992; Hollway, 1989), has developed out of attempts to solve the problem of theorizing subjectivity. Within this approach, prevalent discourses of, for example, gender and sexuality are examined and their identity and power implications are brought to the fore. Often this involves identifying the positions offered by different discourses, spelling out the identity and political implications of these. It incorporates a Foucauldian approach, analyzing how specific discourses become grounded in social and material reality. Foucault, through his analysis of institutions such as the asylum, illustrated how discourses that originated in the institution are taken up by the subject, which then loop back to both legitimize and perpetuate the institution (Foucault, 1973). With the clinical classification of transsexualism in mind (see Chapter One), precisely this type of 'looping' process took place with the early psychiatric diagnostic and classificatory systems for transsexualism. It has been well documented that by the 1970's, clinicians had been concerned about the lack of variation in prospect reassignment candidate's personal accounts (Stoller, 1973a; Billing & Urban, 1995; see Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion). After the clinical establishment of a rigid classification system that needed to be adhered to, those requiring reassignment simply accessed the necessary documentation and presented themselves as textbook cases. Thus, the clinicians positioned transsexuals within specific discourses that were then reinforced by those who, necessarily, positioned themselves in the same discourses when presenting themselves for reassignment. Therefore, this Foucauldian approach also allows us to illustrate how subject positions are constructed through discourse.

Wendy Hollway (1989) draws on the notions of 'positioning' and 'multiple subjectivity' to explain the experience of being a subject. For Hollway, positioning refers to how subjects are constructed through identifying their subjective experience within specific discourses, positioning themselves within those discourses (for an alternative approach to positioning theory see Harré & Langenhove 1999). Furthermore, she found that subjects position themselves within varying and often contradictory discourses, invoking the term multiple subjectivity, and lending support to the poststructuralist attack on the Western philosophical notion of a rational and unified self. This image of the self as multiple

challenges more traditional models, such as those proposed by trait theory, role theory and humanistic accounts, most of which perceive the self as an entity, with one true nature which is waiting to be discovered. These theories have been paramount to psychology's conception of the individual person, making it possible to contrast the individual with society, as natural pairs in a balanced dichotomy (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Moreover, under the encompassing heading of social constructionism, a whole new branch of critical psychology has emerged dedicating considerable effort to re-conceptualize the subject (e.g. Gergen, 1985; Henriques et al., 1984). This incorporation of different linguistic practices into conceptualizing the self is arguably, a radical, political and *potentially* emancipatory activity (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), because if subjectivity is constituted through language, then it allows for the possibility of change. As Hollway states:

...it is possible to transform the meaning of experience by bringing a different set of assumptions to bear on it...in consciousness-raising groups, women learn to position themselves in a feminist discourse (1989: 97).

One problem with this approach is that the ability to change has to be seen as only a *potential* ability. We must remember that some positions are not easily transformed, and some people will hang on ferociously to particular discursive positions, even when they are consciously aware that it produces a negative, oppressed, or even destructive sense of self (Parker, 1992). As Lynne Segal perceptively writes in response to Judith Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity:

Mostly we can only enact those behaviours which have long since become familiar and meaningful to us in expressing ourselves... Challenge to our gendered 'identities' may be more than we can handle (Segal, 1994; 208).

Despite the potentially liberating qualities of this approach for theorizing subjectivity and identity, if we only view the subject as a set of multiple and contradictory positionings or subjectivities, how can we account for continuity of the subject and their subjective experience of identity? To only see the subject as bound up in, and the effect of, multiple and varying discourses does not provide all the necessary components for a comprehensive theory of self, identity and subjectivity.

One means for accounting for continuity in the subject is provided by Ian Parker (1992).

In *Discourse Dynamics*, prompted by Foucault, Parker reminds us that discourses are always grounded in social and material structures. Consequently, he argues, strategies for self-change that rely solely upon the modification of discourses are curbed by their inherent idealism. Instead, Parker suggests that discursive change is shackled by four material constraints: direct physical coercion; the material organization of space; the habitual, physical orientation of the individual to discourse of different kinds; the constitution of subjectivity in language (1992: 38-39). Thus, he proposes that access to alternative discourses is contingent upon changes in real conditions outside of the text. For example, if we take the limit upon discursive change 'the constitution of subjectivity in language' and apply it to the material grounding of gender discourses, we will see that certain gender subject positions can become associated with certain emotional responses and practices of self. Thus, it may appear appealing to encourage the transsexual individual to take up the gender position for his or her biological sex (Lienert, 1998 see Chapter Three), but these positions, undoubtedly, will fail to mobilize the same desires or level of identification with particular cultural practices of gender. Thus, the complex dynamics of desires and identifications cannot be neglected if new and potentially empowering discourses are to replace old and possibly constraining ones (Parker, 1992)⁵. And, as Bidy Martin argued (1992, see Chapter Three for further discussion), the body must also be seen as a limitation - particularly for those individuals who are attempting to re-position themselves with the discourses of the opposite gender (more about this later).

In *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology*, Wendy Hollway (1989) also attempts to account for why individuals position themselves within a specific set of discourses and why they may hold on to these positions even when they know they are detrimental to their sense of self. Hollway, like Parker, is influenced by the work of Foucault and also incorporates a poststructuralist critique of idealism. As such, she argues that:

...people's subjectivities are produced within discourses, history and relations, and the meanings that they produce in accounts of their experience and themselves both produce and reproduce these subjectivities and can modify them (1989: 41).

⁵I am grateful to Carla Willig for providing me with a summary of this work.

However, where Hollway differs from Parker, is in her deployment of psychoanalytic theory, particularly Melanie Klein's (1960) account of inter-psychic defenses encapsulated in the concepts 'splitting' and 'projection', to account for why individuals take up specific discursive positions. Hollway is drawn to the psychoanalytic theories of Klein because Klein privileges the defensive processes that work *between* people. Thus, Hollway suggests that positions are taken up "through the continuous, everyday, defensive negotiation of intersubjective relationships within the field of effects of power/knowledge relations" (1989: 84).

Hollway again draws upon the theories of the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1988a; 1988b) in her more recent book, *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*, co-authored with Tony Jefferson (2000). Here, Hollway & Jefferson reiterate the notion that the self is forged from unconscious defenses against anxiety. They suggest that illuminating the way conflict and suffering impact upon the psyche will enable us to ascertain why individuals invest in particular discourses, rather than others. This premise forms the crux of their theory of the defended subject. As such, they propose that "(T)he idea of the defended subject shows how subjects invest in discourses when these offer positions which provide protection against anxiety and therefore supports to identity" (2000: 23). Hollway and Jefferson's project is both ambitious and contentious. Yet, it is also a much needed development within social psychology as it currently supplies one of the only methodological approaches that attempts to theorize a psychosocial subject - via the blending of poststructuralist informed ideas with psychoanalysis.

4.4 Beyond Discourse: criticisms and developments

One of the most potent fears when employing social constructionist arguments is that a critic will misuse them to the further detriment of an already oppressed group. Carol Vance (1984) clearly illustrated this in the case of homosexuality, describing how right-wing proponents of 'family values' interpretation of the theory led them to conclude that individuals had the ability to change. In a similar vein, this type of critique could be levelled against transsexuals. If gender identity is socially constructed, then they can change their identity, removing the need for hormone prescriptions, reassignment surgery, and the legal recognition of their 'new' gender. This is, of course, a gross

misinterpretation of the theory (as well as actual experience), and as it has already been pointed out, individuals often do not have the power to change their sexual and gender identities. Therefore, it is important to be aware that the discursive constitution of subjectivity is more than the individual consciously choosing to identify with particular subject positions within a discourse. Rather, some have argued that we need to move beyond discourse by attending to psychic processes (e.g. Segal, 1990, 1994; Woodward, 1997; Hollway 1989), as well as symbolic marking and social and material conditions (e.g. Parker, 1992; Willig, 1999), if we are to conceptualize a persuasive theory of identity. It also needs to be registered that individuals are also placed in specific subject positions by others (Parker, 1992). This is especially important in the case of the transsexuals, as, inevitably, one will be allocated to the gendered position of male or female on the basis of others' readings of our appearance and physicality. Undoubtedly, the body plays a crucial role in the construction of an individual's self-identity, as the body acts as a symbolic marker of gender in all our social interactions. If a body is read or recognized as male, then the subject will be positioned within a discourse of masculinity, whether or not they would position themselves in that discourse. So, for male-to-female transsexuals, being read as male and positioned in the discourses of masculinity can be very distressing when they position themselves within a discourse of femininity.

4.5 The turn to embodiment

During recent years, we have witnessed a huge growth in the 'technologization of the body' (Henriques et al, 1998), exemplified through practices from weight training to gender reassignment, where various techniques are used to shape and hone the body. The notion of an increasingly malleable body has introduced a new and exciting referent into the identity equation. To speak of subjectivity is simply no longer sufficient as it becomes ever more apparent that subjectivity is always already embodied. Yet, despite the influence of technologies of the body, with their endless possibilities for the construct of new identities, there remain very many bodily and material limitations that science cannot transcend (Henriques et al, 1998). Phalloplasty, for example, is not yet a viable option for many female-to-male transsexuals given the relatively poor surgical outcomes.

I will argue here that it is essential to develop a theory of embodied subjectivity, partly

for studying the phenomenon of living a certain experience, but also because the body constrains our subjectivity. It is the body, through its fleshy physicality and the social processes that shape it, which restricts our ability to position ourselves within particular discourses, or identify with specific discursive constructs, without confusing or disrupting them. Whilst the definitions, the day to day interpretations of manhood and womanhood are so bound up with their biology, we cannot see our subjective experience of gender as anything but regulated and constrained by our physicality. It is therefore important to expand on a discursive approach to identity, which tends to overlook the role of the body in identity construction. We need to develop our methodological tools if we are to work towards a theory of embodied subjectivity, where we attend to the subjective experience of transsexuals, but where we also recognize that this experience is embodied. As Henry Rubin wrote in a recent Transgender anthology, arguing for the incorporation of a phenomenological approach in Trans Studies:

...it seems particularly prudent to use a method that not only legitimates subjectively informed knowledge but also recognizes the significance of bodies for the lived experience of the I (Rubin, 1998: 268).

4.6 Poststructuralism meets phenomenology

The theoretical position taken in this study has been greatly influenced by some of the papers in a recent collection entitled *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture* (Weiss & Haber, 1999), particularly, Thomas J. Csordas's contribution 'Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology'. For researchers like myself, who missed the 'turn to language' during the late 1970's, Csordas usefully reminds us that the introduction of a semiotic, or more recently, a discursive approach was designed to increase our understanding of culture via the mantra: 'text as metaphor.' He goes on to argue that, unfortunately:

...textuality has become, if you will, a hungry metaphor, swallowing all of culture to the point where it became possible and even convincing to hear the deconstructionist motto that there is nothing outside of the text. ...the text metaphor has virtually...gobbled up the body itself -- certainly we have all heard phrases like "the body as text," "the inscription of culture on the body," "reading the body." I would go on to assert that for many contemporary scholars the text metaphor has ceased to be a metaphor at all,

and it is taken quite literally (Csordas, 1999: 146).

This is a crucial point. It is important to resist seeing the body as a natural substance upon which culture carves its meanings. Instead, emphasis should be upon studying subjectivity, identities and culture from an embodiment standpoint - where individuals are always already embodied. Equally so, within this approach the role of biology is never denied but, at the same time, biology must be seen as always and already cultural. Thus, there is no Nature/Culture, only NatureCultures (Latour, 1993), where they are entwined and enmeshed, indivisible from one another. Consequently, embodiment is an exciting area of study because it is situated precisely at the multiple intersections of Nature and Culture (Weiss & Haber, 1999).

Certainly, the body is not always forgotten about but, in recent years, it has usually been written about as an object *for* study or included as an appendage to our socially constructed identities and fragmented senses of self. The effect of representing the body in this way is two-fold. Firstly, in alignment with the feminist conception of a sex/gender distinction, the body, in either its male or female form, becomes synonymous with 'sex', the biological bedrock upon which gender is inscribed. Meanwhile, 'gender' is seen as socially constructed. What it means to be a man or woman is constructed through language and subject to change across time and culture. Although, a sex/gender distinction has been extremely useful, particularly in a feminist framework for challenging gender inequalities (see Chapter Three), it has left the body under theorized. The 'body' or 'sex' is still often seen as a biological given - the result of nature - immune to the cultural environment in which it lives.

The second effect of conducting research that presents the body as a separate entity from who or what we think ourselves to be, is the perpetuation of Cartesian dualism. This effect is exacerbated by the previous outcome of drawing a distinction between sex and gender. As gender is seen as socially and culturally constructed and mapped onto a particular body, gender becomes associated with the mind, giving us a re-run of mind/body separatism (Martin, 1991). This is most clearly illustrated in the case of transsexualism. The notion of a sex/gender distinction allows for the conception that even though someone may have a male body (sex) they can have a female identification (gender). Female identification, how they think of themselves, is thus located in the

mind, while their biological 'truth' is indicated by a male body. Some feminists have used this to challenge the ontological status of both 'sex' and 'gender' (e.g. Butler, 1990, 1993, see Chapter Three for further discussion). Others, however, have attempt to locate this supposed incongruity within the actual structures of the brain/mind: for example, in biological studies that focus on locating gender in the divergent sizes of various nooks and crannies in the recesses of the brain (e.g. Swaab & Hoffman, 1995).

Some social and cultural theorists have, however, started to make some headway into the problematic oversight of embodied subjectivity inherent in discursive approaches. Central to this development is the criticism that a social constructionist approach when staying with just talk and language may only serve to re-inscribe those dualisms, such as individual/society or mind/body, that it allegedly aimed to dismantle (Bayer, 1998). The linguistic tools available to us usually exacerbate this. Unfortunately, language is inherently dualistic which is one reason why concentrating on purely discursive representations often succeeds in reinforcing the dualisms that were intended to be deconstructed. Similarly, Edward Sampson is critical of constructionism, which may correctly emphasize that objects like the body are constituted in and through talk, but nevertheless, fails to attend to the fact that "when I talk about the body I must use that very body in this talk. In other words, talk conversation and discourse are embodied activities, not merely disembodied linguistic recitations" (1998: 24). Thus, embodied discourse must also be seen as deeply embedded within cultural practices, nowhere more so than in the culturally located bodily practices which define sexual difference. As Bourdieu comments, male-female differences are based on "a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking...in posture, in the gestures and movements of the body" (Bourdieu, 1980: 70, cited in Sampson, 1998: 25).

In the last few years an extraordinary number of texts have been published attempting to deal with questions about 'materiality' or 'the body' that appeared to be so frequently overlooked within some earlier poststructuralist accounts. Titles such as: *Volatile Bodies* (Grosz, 1994), *Bodies that Matter* (Butler, 1993), *Embodied Practices* (Davies, 1997), *Body Talk* (Ussher, 1997), *Bodies of Thought* (Burkitt, 1999), the list goes on. Very recently, frequent references are drawn to phenomenology, citing the work of Merleau-Ponty (e.g. Burr, 1999; Butt, 1999, Burkitt, 1999), in particular his use of Heidegger's phrase 'being-in-the-world'. Vivien Burr explains how Merleau-Ponty was critical of the

empiricist notion that subjects acquire knowledge of external objects via mentalistic and disembodied perceptual processes. She proposes that:

Merleau Ponty draws our attention to the way in which we apprehend our world always and inevitably through our bodies. Our bodies are our only means of knowing the world; our experience is given to us through our bodies. We inhabit the material world, we live *in* it and are not observers *of* it (Burr, 1999: 120, emphasis in original).

Thus, within phenomenological perspectives, experience is given through the body. This contrasts with the poststructuralist interpretation where it is thought that experience is attained through language. However, Ian Burkitt usefully points out the problematic nature of the term 'experience' within the social sciences because "used in its everyday sense, experience can suggest unmediated, first-hand knowledge which escapes power and ideology in one fell swoop, revealing the unalloyed truth about the world" (1999: 105). Burkitt draws on the work of the feminist Iris Young (1990) to suggest that 'experience' is still a useful phrase for those working within an embodiment perspective. Young suggests that:

No experience or reality is unmediated by language and symbols; nevertheless, there are aspects of perception, action and response that are not linguistically constituted. By the term 'experience' I also wish to evoke a pragmatic context of meaning. Meaning subsists not only in signs and symbols, but also in the movement and consequences of action; experience carries the connotation of context and action (cited in Burkitt, 1999: 105).

Thus, with this notion of experience in mind, it is not surprising that many of those engaged in theorizing embodiment pitch their theoretical stance somewhere between poststructuralism and phenomenology. There is by no means a whole-sale ditching of many of the positive elements of social constructionist theory, rather a serious undertaking to answer some of the challenges that have been levelled at discursive psychology. Hence:

In building a more phenomenological approach to embodiment... [A]ccount is taken of the effects of power on the body, particularly in terms of habitual actions that create dispositions and contribute to a sense of identity, and yet the performative is not reduced solely to the structures of the signifying system (Burkitt, 1999: 107).

However, often working within a theoretical perspective, many of these social theorists have little to say about *how* to empirically research embodiment, or these 'bodily practices' that impinge upon subjectivity, self and identity. In order to meet the 'empirical' requirements of our discipline we need to not only develop a methodological approach, but an approach that brings 'bodiliness into method' (Csordas, 1999). Csordas directs our attention to the historian Morris Berman who posed the issue of engaging with data from an embodied standpoint like this:

History gets written with the mind holding the pen. What would it look like, what would it read like, if it got written with the body holding the pen? (1989: 110; cited in Csordas, 1999: 149)

He advocates a "visceral history" that conceptualizes history as made and experienced by the body, but also "requires the experiential engagement of the historian in the matter of history. A twinge in the gut as an indicator of inner accuracy of interpretation, or the experience of anger as a grounding for writing a history of anger, are examples he cites of bringing bodiliness into method" (Csordas, 1999: 149). This is, I'm sure, a method that most of us have used when handling large quantities of data - even if we are reluctant to admit it at the risk of appearing 'too subjective'. Certainly there are dangers in using instinct to drive our interpretations of data, but as a yard stick for marking out data of particular significance that needs further explanation, an acknowledgement of gut reaction should not be that unusual. Importantly for this study, Csordas also refutes the notion that there is "an absolute methodological gulf between representation and being-in-the-world" (1999: 148). Thus, unlike Foucault (1970, cited in Ruben, 1998) Csordas does not see an inherent inconsistency between poststructuralist and phenomenological approaches. In fact, he suggests that being-in-the-world *can* be understood from representations because embodiment is about "neither behaviour nor essence per se, but about experience and subjectivity, and understanding these is a function of interpreting action in different modes and expressions in different idioms". Thus, in response to the question *how* do we study embodiment, he responds:

There is no special kind of data or a special method for eliciting such data, but a methodological attitude that demands attention to bodiliness even in purely verbal data such as written and oral interview (Csordas, 1999: 148).

Similarly, Susan Bordo encourages philosophers and other social theorists to move away

from the abstract 'theory of the body' and bring "the concreteness of the body...into their own work" (1998: 84). Again, she does not advocate a complete rejection of the study of representations, rather she urges researchers to become far more involved with the body through attention to 'bodily practices' - in addition to 'representations' and 'discourses':

...I believe that the study of representations and cultural 'discourse' - while an important part of the cultural study of the body - cannot by itself stand as a history of the body. Those discourses impinge on us as fleshly bodies, and often in ways that cannot be determined from a study of representations alone. To make such determinations, we need to get down and dirty with the body on the level of its practices - to look at what we are actually eating (or not eating), the lengths we will go to keep ourselves perpetually young, the practices that we engage in, emulating TV and pop icons, and so forth (Bordo, 1998: 91).

In the following section this notion of 'bodily practices' is explored using two examples: Eating and Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). I will attempt to argue that these practices have effects on our being-in-the-world above and beyond that which can be accounted for discursively. Bordo (1998) wrote that we need "to look at what we are actually eating (or not eating)" as one means of getting "down and dirty with the body at the level of its practices". Certainly, food has come to mean much more than an energy source needed for our survival - particularly in recent years. Television is often saturated with programmes in the genre of 'The Naked Chef', 'Can't Cook, Won't Cook', Ready Steady Cook, and who would have thought that Delia Smith would become a cultural icon. Elspeth Probyn (1999) writes inspiringly about the explosion of food culture as part of the creation of new national identities: linking 'Mod Oz' cuisine to a new 'multicultural' Australian identity and 'Mod English' cuisine to 'Cool Britannia'. Consequently, she suggests that individuals employ eating practices as a 'technique of self' (in the Foucauldian sense) in order to differentiate themselves from others. Without a doubt, what, how, why, when and where we eat (or do not eat) are intrinsically linked to social and cultural structures such as class, gender, ethnicity, kinship and identity and the meanings these hold for each of us will, of course, be mediated discursively. Reflecting on 'foodie' practices, such as eating and cooking, may provide an insight into "how we hope to produce ourselves as thoughtful and even ethical beings, connected to each other in sometimes pleasurable, often painful, and always regulated ways" (Probyn, 1999: 422). But, food also has a material effect upon our corporeality. What we eat, or do not eat, may say something about who we are, but the actual break-down of the food, the

calories, the nutrients, the fat percentage and vitamin content, will have a very real effect on our embodiment and our being-in-the-world. If, for whatever reasons, we eat a healthier diet we will have a slimmer physique and quite possibly live longer. Whether or not this is seen as a good thing is, without doubt, socially constructed. Gluttony has shifted from being a sign of wealth to an individual trait that signifies a lack of self-control. But, despite its change in meaning, eating a greater number of calories will have an effect on body size, and therefore physical presence, that remains far more consistent across time, history and cultures.

Similarly, a FtM transsexual may position himself, his gendered subjectivity, within the discourses of masculinity whilst his body reads female. His decision to take testosterone is, undoubtedly, mediated by the medical discourses that shape a transsexual identity and the societal expectations of male embodiment. Yet, the beard growth that will soon appear on his face cannot possibly be thought of as discursive. What beard growth means in determining a particular type of manhood, or - in the case of beard growth in some women - womanhood, *is* discursive but the relationship between testosterone and *that* beard growth has nothing to do with discourse. Here, we see an example of NatureCulture (Latour, 1993). Beard growth will always be interpreted in terms of cultural and social practices of gendered embodiment, as outside of these practices beard growth has no meaning or purpose (it needs to be interpreted). However, the beard growth itself, the coarse hairs that push up through the skin, cannot be accounted for by, or reduced to discourse.

The notion of 'cultural practices' is also central to Christine Griffin's (1999) critique of the current state of some discursive psychology. She argues that the cultural domain, in its wider sense, fails to impact upon much of the work in 'critical' and 'discursive' psychology, at both the theoretical and methodological levels. Instead, she proposes that ethnographic methods be employed alongside the more traditional discursive methods of data collection, such as interviews. These ethnographic methods would include the standard observational techniques and research field-notes that have been widely used in anthropological studies, but also the anomalies of research that are so often omitted from studies in psychology. Griffin illustrates this criticism, the failure to report such anomalies, by drawing on the work of Valerie Hey, who studied girls' friendships in school during the mid-late 1980's. Half way through her fieldwork Hey was informed

that she would have to leave the school she was researching since a number of male teachers found her presence in classrooms “too disruptive”. I agree that these types of events, which can be so insightful, need to be both included and discussed. But, perhaps, this criticism is more pertinent to traditional psychological methods as, generally, these anomalies are included in any ‘good’ qualitative research, under the rubric of ‘reflexivity’. Griffin’s second criticism is more serious, and still one that critical discursive approaches have yet to come to grips with. Here, the problem is critical social psychology’s failure to engage with the diverse cultural practices and unique trajectories through which individuals come to construct and imagine themselves as social beings.

Attempting to acknowledge some of the complexity of the cultural domain, it is therefore also necessary in this study to engage with the disparate cultural practices of corporeality that facilitate and distinguish gender identification. More importantly, it highlights the need to explore how the transsexual subject negotiates cultural practices of gendered embodiment; learns new modes of physical deportment, gestures and speech patterns; as well as how they attempt to shake off those practices which will have already been subject to repetition and stored within the structures of the body during many years of socialization. Thus, although primarily discursive, the methodological approach also draws upon some of the principles of phenomenology and psychoanalysis in order to allow for a greater understanding of the experience of *Being Transsexual*.

4.7 Mobilizing key concepts

Before outlining the method, I present a brief summary of the meanings of the key concepts that are utilized in the analysis chapters (see Chapters Five, Six and Seven)

4.7 (i) Identity

I deploy the term ‘identity’ to refer to a particular formation of self that is constructed through cultural and symbolic practices. It is assumed that identities are multiple, relational and open to change.

4.7 (ii) Identification

Identification is deployed to imply the degree to which an individual may identify with or resist an identity category. For example, the experiences of these participants may fit well with the discourses and practices that construct a transsexual identity. However, they may, for a variety of reasons, resist identifying as transsexual. Similarly, although their past gender experiences may problematize their relationship to the identity categories 'male' or 'female', they may fully embrace these identifications.

4.7 (iii) Discourse

Discourse is used to refer to both textual and socio-cultural practices that constitute a particular phenomenon. For example, the phenomenon transsexualism is constructed through medical, biological, Cartesian dualist and psychoanalytic discourses, amongst others.

4.7 (iv) Discursive construct

Discursive construct is typically used to refer to a particular phrase when talking about a phenomenon. For example, 'born in the wrong body' is a commonly found discursive construction that draws upon a Cartesian dualist discourse and is deployed to represent the experience of being transsexual.

4.7 (v) Discursive position

Positioning is used to refer to the way in which an individual will construct their experience by positioning it within a particular discourse. For example, some of the participants positioned themselves within biological discourses arguing that their transsexuality was the result of a birth defect.

4.7 (vi) Embodied subjectivity

Subjectivity refers to our sense of who we are. It is assumed that this is constituted through language and other socio-cultural practices. The conjunction of subjectivity with

embodiment highlights the need to acknowledge that we are fleshy physical beings and our sense of who we are will all ways be constructed and mediated through our intersubjective relationships as embodied beings.

4.8 Method

14 individuals who self-identified as either transsexual or transgendered, or sometimes both (see Chapter One and Chapter Five), were recruited through various sources. Advertisements were placed in the FTM Network quarterly journal *Boys Own* and *The Pink Paper*, a nationwide gay and lesbian weekly publication. Leaflets were also distributed at *The Transgender Film Festival*, London, during September 1998. In addition 'snowballing' was deployed, where participants already enlisted introduced others that were willing to partake. An equal number of male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals were recruited (seven of each) in order to facilitate comparison across the post-operative genders, as it was expected there would be differences in their experiences when moving towards either a male gender or a female gender.

Participants' interest in the research project was slow to begin with. The first male-to-female participant was contacted through a work colleague, and it was hoped that 'snowballing' would lead to other individuals volunteering to partake. After three months it was apparent that other forms of recruitment were required. This time period coincided with *The 2nd International Transgender Film Festival* at the Lux Cinema in Hoxton Square, London. The organizers very kindly allowed me to leave 200 leaflets (see appendix 1a), distributed between the front desk at the cinema and a nearby art exhibition, advertising the research and requesting the help of transsexual/transgendered individuals. The response again was very disappointing. Only one female-to-male participant was recruited via this method and they were one of the last to make contact, three months after the festival, when they came across my advert whilst tidying up some papers. After this, two forms of advertising were conducted simultaneously.

The FTM Network, with the assistance of Dr Stephen Whittle, agreed to place an advertising slip (see appendix 1b) in the next edition of their publication, *Boys Own*. The first respondent was crucial as they gave a good recommendation to three other FTM

London members who also agreed to partake. Four other female-to-male participants also responded to the advert slip. Interviews could only be arranged with two of these as, unfortunately, funds were not available for travel expenses to Scotland and, were even less likely for the fourth respondent, who resided in the US and got in touch via e-mail.

A final advert was placed in *The Pink Paper* (see appendix 1c), a free weekly paper principally focusing on gay and lesbian issues but including 'trans' stories and news. The central motivations for choosing the gay press, rather than a national newspaper, were cost and coverage. The advert for *The Pink Paper* cost £66 (funded by Middlesex University) and ran for six weeks. Although I was interested in different sexual orientation identifications and realized it was unlikely that many heterosexual male-to-female respondents would reply, the risk of funding a 'one hit' advert in the national press - that may well have received a low response rate - was too high. In fact, this advert was hugely successful. Thirteen male-to-female individuals made contact and one female-to-male. Of the thirteen male-to-female respondents interviews were arranged with seven participants (one did not turn up). Of the other five respondents, one had their phone cut off so I was unable to continue contact, two lived in regions that were too far and costly for me to travel to, and two were only just beginning to discuss their transgendered feelings. Although it would have been very interesting for the project to hear these individuals' stories, interviews were not conducted as the criterion for participation had already been set as 'having begun hormone therapy'. However, I felt uneasy about simply turning down these individuals, as, for some, I was their first point of contact. One, in particular, divulged some highly personal and sensitive information in our initial phone conversation. Thus, wherever possible, I gave contact details of qualified counsellors who would hopefully help them to make sense of their gender confusions.

4.8 (i) Participants

All names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants. Please note all identifications are made tentatively, the complexity and fluidity of the participants' gender and sexual identifications will be explored over the following three chapters.

4.8 (ii) Male-to-Female Respondents

Artemis: age 51, she had just had surgery when she made contact in response to the *Pink Paper* advert. Her sexual orientation was lesbian or S/M dyke and she was Asian, and single. She had begun transitioning four years ago and her surgery was privately funded. She was employed and lived in London.

Caroline: age 29, she had had surgery three years ago and she made contact in response to the *Pink Paper* advert. Her sexual orientation was lesbian and she was single and white. She began transitioning four years ago, after a referral from a private psychiatrist but later received a Health Authority Grant to fund her surgery. She was employed and lived in the south-east of England.

Cheryl: age 41, she identified as transgendered rather than transsexual and although she had begun taking hormones four years ago she had not yet decided whether to transition permanently. In fact, Cheryl still lived much of her life, particularly at work, in a male role. She was sexually attracted to women and would, if the situation arose, identify as lesbian. She was white, single, registered with a private psychiatrist and had recently left her job. She responded to the advert in the *Pink Paper* and lived in London.

Emily: age 33, she had begun transitioning five years ago and was registered at Charing Cross Gender Clinic. She was the only male-to-female participant not to be transitioning privately and was waiting for a date for NHS funded surgery. She was white, lived with her lesbian lover and was employed. She responded to the advert in the *Pink Paper* and lived in London.

Karen: age 23, she was the only heterosexual male-to-female participant and she had begun transitioning five years ago soon after leaving school. Her surgery was privately funded. She had been in a relationship for three months and her partner was unaware of her transsexual status. She was white and working full-time. She responded to the advert in the *Pink Paper* by e-mail and lived in the south-east of England.

Sally: age 35, she had surgery two years prior to the interviews and this was privately funded. She was lesbian identified, white and lived with her female partner. She was

unemployed. She was originally contacted by a colleague of mine - a friend of hers - and kindly agreed to be the first participant. She lived in London.

Sarah: age 36, she began to transition five years ago and was about to have her surgery, which was to be privately funded. She identified as lesbian, was white, single and employed. She responded to the advert in the *Pink Paper* by e-mail and lived in the Manchester region.

4.8 (iii) Female-to-Male Respondents

Albert: age 59, he had surgery 30 years ago and was the only female-to-male participant to have had a phalloplasty constructed. His surgery was NHS funded and he identified as heterosexual. Older than the other participants, Albert only became aware of the concept 'transsexual' and the existing support groups seven years prior to the interviews. He was single, white, lived in the south-east of England and was due to retire. He responded after receiving a request slip in *Boys Own*.

Billy: age 46, he transitioned four years ago. This was when he finally made the decision to live full-time in a male role, although he had had privately funded chest surgery and a hysterectomy ten years previously and had been 'flip-flopping' between gender roles since his early twenties. He was white, heterosexual, although he saw himself as 'queer' rather than 'straight' and lived in London with his female partner. He was studying at university and responded via the recommendation of other *FTM London* group members.

Neil: age 35, he decided to transition three years ago. At the time of the interview he was awaiting chest surgery which was to be privately funded. Neil was heterosexual, white and single. He lived in London, was self-employed and responded via the recommendation of other *FTM London* group members.

Richard: age 24, he had begun hormones 14 months ago. Being unemployed and registered with a private psychiatrist, he had no immediate plans for chest surgery. He loosely identified as gay, was white and single. He lived in London and also responded via the recommendation of other *FTM London* group members.

Ruben: age 19, he was the youngest participant. He had been taking hormones for a year and a half and his transition was being supervised by Charing Cross Gender Clinic. At this point in time he was still waiting to see when he would be put on a waiting list for NHS funded chest surgery. He was white, single and identified as heterosexual. He lived in the south of England and was currently studying. He responded to the request slip sent out in *Boys Own*, by mail.

Jason: age 39, he had begun transitioning two and a half years ago. He had undergone privately funded chest surgery, was white, heterosexual, and single. He lived in the south-east of England, was employed and was the first female-to-male participant to respond to the request slip sent out in *Boys Own*.

Sam: age 32, he had begun transitioning two years ago and had subsequently had privately funded chest surgery. He was white, heterosexual and had stayed with his long-term female partner since transitioning. He was employed and lived in London. He responded to the leaflets distributed at the *Transgender Film Festival*.

4.8 (iv) Pilot Interview

The format for the interview questions used in the second interview (focusing on the participants' understanding of gender and sexuality terminology) had already been successfully employed in an undergraduate research dissertation which explored how lesbian and heterosexual women constructed their gender identity in relation to their sexual orientation (Johnson, 1997). Thus, for this study, after a detailed research of existing clinical literature, socio-cultural accounts and most importantly, transgender community based publications, many of these questions were re-worded to focus on transsexual identity. Following this, considerable time was spent with supervisors reflecting upon the ordering of the interview schedule, the new questions that focused upon attitudes to media reports and legal position (interview one) and autobiographical questions (interview three; see 4.8(v) for further discussion). The three interviews conducted with the first participant were intended to be employed as a pilot study, but the interviews ran so smoothly and effectively it was decided to include this participant in the main study - this decision was also influenced by the problematic start to recruiting participants. Reflecting on the first interviews, only one amendment was made to the

interview schedule. In the undergraduate project lesbian participants had been asked:

Do you or would you use methods to divert attention from your sexuality?

If so what? How do you feel about this?

These questions pertained to issues around lesbian identity and 'visibility', in that the 'best' representation of a lesbian is often construed as a butch woman (Calhoun, 1996, see Chapter Seven), and many lesbian women will project a different image at work than when they are socializing. However, the lesbian male-to-female participant who took part in the pilot interview found this question confusing and problematic - possibly because they were more concerned with 'passing' as female than as 'straight'. Hence, this question was dropped from subsequent interviews.

The interview questions were primarily the same for male-to-female and female-to-male participants, although the ordering depended upon the direction of their transition. Thus, separate schedules were constructed to avoid any confusion or embarrassing errors on behalf of the interviewer.

4.8 (v) Interviews

Although I focus on 'interview' to describe the method of data collection here, I tried to avoid such terminology when engaging with participants. 'Interview' can invoke the idea of correct answers given in a stressful situation, such as a job interview or a police interview. I wanted to avoid such connotations so focused on 'discussing your experience' when asking for participants to 'help with a research project'. It was hoped that this would be a productive means of empowering participants as it assumes, correctly, that they will have more knowledge about their 'condition' than the researcher.

Interview schedules (see appendix 2) were constructed to cover three broad areas that formed the basis for discussion on three occasions. The first focused on the participants' general attitudes, feelings and beliefs about how transsexuals were represented in the media, and their legal position in the United Kingdom. The second interview questioned the participants' understanding of various terminological concepts of gender and sexuality. This included questions such as 'what does it mean to be transsexual?' and

‘what does it mean to be a man, a woman, masculine and feminine?’ The rationale behind this type of questioning was to try to ascertain what exactly the respondent meant when using these terms. Of course, the notion that they would use one term exclusively to represent a fixed concept is naive, but this type of questioning permitted the documentation of the richness of meanings that can be present in a particular word, clause or discourse. Sexual orientation issues were also discussed in this interview. Contrary to traditional gender expectations, only one male-to-female transsexual identified as heterosexual, where as only one female-to-male transsexual identified as gay. This distribution could, perhaps, as indicated above, be explained by the method of recruitment, as all the male-to-female participants were found through the advertisement in *The Pink Paper*. The final interview focused on the individuals’ own experiences of the transition process, incorporating a narrative account from childhood through to the present day. The interview schedule was conducted in this manner in order to move from the public to the personal. It was expected that the participants’ growing familiarity with the interviewer would facilitate self-disclosure - particularly in the final interview, which dealt with the participants’ own experiences.

The venue for the interview was left to the participant to decide upon, with the emphasis on their comfort. Also, with restricted funds there were no means available to reimburse participants’ travel costs. However, to add some diversity to the geographical location of the participants, some limited funds were provided by *Middlesex University* to enable a few interviews to take place with respondents who lived outside of London and the south-east of England. Although, no claims could or would be made to having a representative sample, as wide a variety of stories as possible were sought in order to enrich the data. This was particularly the case with the female-to-male respondents as all of them came through the same tight knit organization, *The FTM Network*. Many of the London Group members met up on a monthly basis and spent a great deal of time pondering the same types of questions as in the interviews. Such a support group is admirable for those individuals engaging with these issues. But, for the sake of the research, I was keen to interview some members who were simply affiliated with the group rather than only its core members, who, at times, responded in terms of the groups pre-discussed conclusions. Thus, some travel outside of London and two over-night stays were conducted during the interviewing period.

All the interviews took place in the homes of participants with the exception of two male-to-female respondents. Karen, who travelled to work in London, requested the first meeting in a pub near to her office. This was agreed to but, unfortunately, the recording was so poor that the interview was un-transcribable. The following two meetings took place, at my request and her agreement, in a quieter room in her company's building. The other participant, Sarah lived some way outside of Manchester, and since I only had access to public transport, she suggested we also meet at her workplace in central Manchester. Fortunately, she had a very private workstation and the interviews went ahead uninterrupted.

In total forty-two interviews were conducted, with the first and second interview taking on average just over an hour, and the third interview taking between one hour and a half and two hours. Whilst the interview schedule was divided into three separate sections, at times, I only met twice with the participant. This was usually dictated by their availability times or travel cost to their home. Thus, for those who lived outside of London, I only made two trips, conducting the first and second interview on the first visit and the third interview on the second visit. Forty-one interviews have since been transcribed in a style that emphasizes readability, rather than specific details such as intonation. Transcription is extremely laborious and it has taken between six and nine hours for each interview (see appendix 3 for transcription notes)

4.9 Analysis of Interviews

4.9 (i) Initial confusions

In total nine months was spent pouring over the forty-one interview scripts attempting to extract discourses and discursive positions without losing the context of the participants' self-narratives. At this point all sorts of anxieties regarding the method and its suitability were encountered. At times, when the text was chunked into categories that related to the interview questions, I felt that I had strayed into the realms of grounded theory (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Ekins, 1997). At others, when trying to analyze the third interview which focused on biographical accounts, I wondered if a narrative method which permitted a greater degree of interpretation (e.g. Josselson &

Leiblich, 1999; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) would, perhaps, be more appropriate. And very occasionally, after underlining and drawing reference to practically every word on the page, I felt like running away to an exotic location: bathing in a warm turquoise sea became infinitely more attractive than drowning in the sea of Xerox paper that littered the floor of my study. Undoubtedly, these are problems that plague most qualitative researchers although we rarely read about them. More importantly, whilst well equipped with the rationale behind discourse analysis, we rarely encounter any guides to how researchers *did* their analysis. Perhaps this is because a detailed account of what was done may not only seem prescriptive, but also - for those of us concerned with more than language - we might discover we are not doing discourse analysis 'properly' after all.

4.9 (ii) Shifting Approaches

From the moment of transcription some well-known dualistic discourses and positions were easily recognized. For example: mind/body, individual/society, or biological V's psychological explanations for transsexualism. However, as it has already been pointed out, dualism in itself is not always of much interest, as language also remains inherently dualistic. Despite this, obvious discourses and positions of interest were noted during the transcription period for future reference. The next step was to try to systematically analyze the interviews adhering to the principles outlined by Potter & Wetherell (1987), as well as attending to issues of subjectivity (Hollway, 1989; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and power and identity implications (Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). Three months later hampered by the sheer quantity of transcripts and becoming increasingly frustrated and confused, little in road had been made. Rather than reducing the data, each reading seemed to elicit an escalating number of positions, contradictions and themes. Supervisors suggested a change in direction.

This time, the data was approached from a thematic perspective. This entailed extracting anything that pertained to the central aims of the thesis, such as: a greater understanding of what transsexual and transgender identifications mean and how they are negotiated; notions of self in transition, gender identity and embodied subjectivity; the relationship between gender and sexual orientation identifications. Of course, there were many other categories - particularly those to do with participants' experiences with the medical and clinical establishments, as well as family and employment based relationships, and media

and legal representations of transsexualism - that do not feature so predominantly in the analysis chapters.

To facilitate a comparison between MtF and FtM respondents it was decided to tackle their scripts separately. For no particular reason the MtF participants' transcripts were addressed first. A coding frame was outlined (see appendices 4a) addressing eight distinct themes: transsexualism; gender; sexual orientation; self and identity; the body; social relations; media portrayal; experience with medical/psychiatric profession. Eight computer files pertaining to these themes were constructed and then those files that related to the focal themes of the thesis (i.e. gender and sexual orientation identifications; self; identity; embodied subjectivity) were broken down into a far more detailed framework. This facilitated the teasing out of specific discourses. For example, within the 'transsexualism' file, a 'Cartesian dualist' discourse dominated explanations for transsexualism, and within the 'gender' file biological discourses dominated explanations of gender identity. But, most of the analysis involved tracing through the complex and contradictory web of both gender and sexual orientation identifications and their relationship to one another. Thus, the second interview became the central focus for discourse analysis, with interviews one and three being used to complement and contradict those discourses, positions and themes already extracted. The text contained in files such as 'medical/psychiatric profession' remained fairly un-deconstructed and may be subjected to a more detailed analysis in the future, perhaps using a narrative style of analysis that may be more compatible with the structure of the text elicited from the third interview.

The FtM participants' interviews were analyzed using a similar detailed framework to the one constructed for the MtF respondents' texts (see appendix 4b). However, due care and attention was taken not to simply fit the coding frame to the new set of data. It was expected that differences would be found between the two sets of data in terms of experience and the discourses or positions that were drawn upon to express this. At times this was certainly the case. For example, constructing 'transsexualism as distinct from transvestism' featured strongly within many of the MtF respondents' accounts but not at all in the FtM participants' accounts. It has been argued that the female transvestite is an anomaly because no erotic value is entailed when a woman dresses in male clothing (Stoller, 1968). Although this statement could be questioned in the light of recent Drag

King publications (e.g. Halberstam, 1997; LeGrace Volcano & Halberstam, 1999), traditionally they appear to be a rarer phenomenon than male transvestism (Fenichel, 1930). Instead, in the FtM respondents' accounts these types of 'border wars' (Hale & Halberstam, 1998) tended to focus on distinguishing FtM identity from a butch lesbian identity. Thus, although the coding framework for the FtM respondents follows a similar format, subtle differences were recorded when deconstructing the principle themes. These are discussed in the analysis chapters.

However, the data still had to be reduced further and the vital decisions about which extracts should be included in the thesis needed to be made. At this point, heeding the advice of Csordas (1999), a more intuitive method was used. Addressing the data from an 'embodied standpoint' involved not only focusing on the embodied subjectivities of the participants, but also bringing my own 'bodiliness to method'. Thus, each extract was chosen 'viscerally', inevitably guided by my own interest and by how well I felt the extract would enhance the 'story' that was being told: A story which attempted to account for the complex experience of *Being Transsexual*. Undoubtedly, others would have chosen differently.

4.10 Ethical considerations

4.10 (i) Recruitment

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the internal, departmental ethics committee, before any advertisements were publicized (see appendix 5). Advertisements informed participants that the research would endeavour to increase understanding of transsexual experience and that their participation would greatly aid this process. Contact was initiated with the participants via e-mail or telephone when they responded to the various forms of adverts. At this stage more information regarding the central themes of the interviews was disclosed. Some respondents immediately withdrew, as they did not want to partake in a recorded conversation. Those who agreed to participate were assured that they could withdraw at any point including mid-interview.

4.10 (ii) Interviews and commitment to respondents

All participants were assured that, wherever possible, anonymity and confidentiality would be protected. Thus, particular steps needed to be taken in order not to violate this contract and, at the same time, to allow Health and Safety precautions to be met. Hence, when an interview was arranged at a participant's home the name, address and telephone number were left in an envelope with a designated supervisor or peer. Time guidelines were provided whereby the interviewer would ring at a particular hour to confirm all had gone well. This procedure worked effectively as I did not have to renege my commitments to confidentiality whilst protecting my own safety.

During the interview I took as much care as possible to facilitate participant self-disclosure. The role taken by the interviewer is clearly of great importance in how the participants construct their responses, but it also affects the type of experience the participant will have. Griffin (1990) describes three stances the interviewer might take during their discussion. Researcher as 'Kewpie doll' involves keeping one's eyes and ears open and one's mouth closed (Polsky, 1969). Alternatively, the researcher as 'nodding dog' involves giving encouragement through smiles and nods but keeping verbal intervention to the minimum. This approach might involve participants reading the smiles and nods as positive or negative feedback so cannot be seen as a neutral intervention. Finally, Griffin describes the stance of 'talking-back'. This can involve the interviewer either challenging what the participant says, or encouraging mutual self-disclosure in the form of a friendly discussion. As in previous research (e.g. Gilfoyle, Wilson & Brown, 1993) a mixture of all three approaches were adopted to achieve a participatory rather than voyeuristic approach to the subject matter (Currie & Kazi, 1987), but the extent to which this took place varied between participants. In fact, whilst I wanted to promote the respondent's own self-disclosure by taking care not to interject or interrupt the flow of their narration, at times it would have been suspicious and, perhaps, insulting not to have responded to some of their questions. Many participants were, quite justifiably, curious to know what motivated my interest in researching transsexualism, and, on occasion, asked about my own gender and sexual orientation identifications. At first I was somewhat uncomfortable, as well as unfamiliar, with responding to these types of questions in this context: expressing my own anxieties around gender and sexual identities under their spotlight of enquiry. However, I tried to

be as honest and open as possible in order to maintain a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in the interview and, perhaps more importantly, to try to diminish as much as possible some of the power relations that were undoubtedly in play. It was hoped that the setting would be very different from that encountered when transsexual individuals present themselves for diagnosis and are reliant on producing the correct 'story' in order to attain their requests for medical interventions. Thus, to avoid implying that I was in anyway an 'expert', or that I required the participants to 'prove' their status, was crucial to the type of interview setting I wanted to create. Whilst recognizing that the conversation topics might be, at times, distressing, it was hoped that the participants would, overall, have a positive interview experience. In fact, several months later, one of the MtF participants rang me to ask if I would become her counsellor as she had found the interviews to be very beneficial. I explained to her that, unfortunately, I was not qualified for this type of psychotherapeutic relationship. Again, this raises ethical implications regarding the responsibility of the researcher to participants that not only give so generously of their own time, but also, after disclosing so much personal information, may make certain attachments to the interviewer. In this case, I passed on as much information as possible about alternative sources of counselling that were available to her, in addition to the unsatisfactory service she was already receiving.

Other commitments made to respondents involved issues around what was to be done with the research. Of course, it will be endeavoured to ensure all respondents will receive feedback at the end of the research process. However, this commitment will take place in a variety of forms. Integral to this decision are the problematics of meeting the specific requests that some of the participants made when talking about their own reasons for becoming involved with the project. For example, some of the respondents were motivated to partake simply to help raise the profile of transsexual research. They had what could be called a more 'realist' approach where although they may not agree with all - or even much - of the research in the area, at least research was beginning to take place that actually engaged with their own views and experiences. Conversely, other respondents had heavily invested political positions and much of their interviews would revolve around their professed political aims. Here, I tried to emphasize that the research was looking at the diversity of transsexual experience and whilst being very grateful for their time and an insight into their political goals, the final project may not fit entirely with their specific political agenda. Whilst social constructionist accounts can so often

descend into pure relativism it is impossible, particularly if you wish to avoid this, to be all things to all people. Hence, feedback will take the form of academic papers at small transgender community orientated conferences along with individual copies of any published work for all participants.

4.10 (iii) Analysis restrictions

Pledges of confidentiality and anonymity, wherever possible, were made to all the participants and must be adhered to. However, the depth and coverage of life history during the three interviews could make the participants easily identifiable, particularly given the relatively small number of transsexual individuals in the UK. Whilst I believe that for the sake of research rigour original data files should be made available for the checking of, for example, context, at the same time, commitments made to research participants must be upheld. For this reason I have decided not to include the interview transcripts as an appendix. Furthermore, permission to use a more detailed personal account would be requested before proceeding with a narrative style analysis which may be less protective of an individual's identity than discourse analysis.

The discursive constructions, positionings and themes that emerged from the analysis are presented in the following three chapters. The first of these chapters attempts to move beyond a Cartesian dualist representation of transsexualism by arguing that it fails to account for the complex web of identification the transsexual has to negotiate when attempting to explain their life story.

5

Being transsexual: beyond Cartesian dualist constructions

...in common perception, to name oneself as transsexual is to own precisely to being gender displaced, to being a subject in transition, moving beyond or in between sexual difference.

Jay Prosser, *Second Skins*, (1998: 2)

Dualism (thus) cannot be deconstructed in culture the way it can be on paper. To be concretely - that is, culturally - accomplished requires that we bring the 'margins' to the 'center,' that we legitimate and nurture, in those institutions from which they have been excluded, marginalized ways of knowing, speaking, being.

Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, (1993: 41)

Remembering our past, carrying it with us always, may be the necessary requirement for maintaining, as they say, the wholeness of the self.

Milan Kundera, *Identity*, (1999: 43)

Given the paucity of qualitative studies of transsexualism, one of the central aims for this research was to gain a greater understanding of the lived experience of transsexual individuals: what does it mean to *be* transsexual? The methodological approach, with its focus on how meaning is constructed through language, necessitated that this question

became central during the interview sessions. It could not be assumed that the participants were using 'transsexual' or 'transgendered', or any of the other identification terms in the same way as each other or as the researcher. Thus, this chapter begins by exploring how these identifications are embraced and resisted whilst explicating the variety of ways in which they are deployed. As is the case with most Western philosophical notions of personhood, many of these accounts were dominated by the use of a Cartesian dualist discourse that promulgates the notion of a rational unified self that pre-exists the physical body. However, in an attempt to step beyond simply documenting how pervasive Cartesian dualism is, I will illustrate how a Cartesian dualist construction of transsexualism becomes problematic for the transsexual individual, particularly when recounting their life story.

5.1 What does it mean to be transsexual?

5.1 (i) Cartesian dualism versus biological reductionism

In response to questions about their own beliefs about what it means to be transsexual, most of the participants' accounts were littered with the Cartesian dualist construction 'being born in the wrong body'. For example Artemis suggested that:

...one of the most frustrating things about umm about going through this whole process is umm (..) is (..) the, is hearing the odd comment from somebody that is (..) is unhappy with umm their sex because they perceive themselves as being umm a little bit ugly or not masculine enough or whatever...but that is so superficial compared to somebody who has the misfortune of *being born in the wrong body* (Artemis, MtF, 50, 2/220-223, 225-226).

Yet, by implication, this aphorism has the effect of constructing a problematic image of selfhood that perceives the subject as born into a docile body, with a rational unified sense of self fully formed. Clearly, 'born in the wrong body' as an all-encompassing explanation for transsexualism is unsatisfactory (see Chapter One and Chapter Three). There was, however, some support for Prosser's (1998) claim that 'born in the wrong body' provides a pertinent account of the *feelings* of disembodiment the transsexual subject encounters. As Caroline describes:

...this is going to sound so clichéd you know the thing about the woman trapped in a man's body, it is the biggest cliché under the sun but it's true. It's the only way you can really describe it and it's not until you start going through the whole process of changing over that you realize that (Caroline, MtF, 29, 1/155-158).

However, given that 'born in the wrong body' is a well-known media account of transsexualism, it was not that surprising to find this representation readily available within the participants' interview scripts. Perhaps more revealing was the apparent superseding of this aphorism by the more recent notion that transsexuals 'have the brain of the other gender'. At some point during the interviews *every* participant drew on this specific explanation. As Albert demonstrates:

A:...I was never a woman (K: uhum). I was a child, but I didn't grow up into a woman. Do you see what I mean? Because my whole person, my whole core identity was male so I couldn't grow into a woman. *Of course my body looked as if it was, but that, but you are not your body, you are your your brain. It's your brain that makes you a person, you are not your body* (Albert, FtM, 59, 1/ 185-189).

Again, Albert is clearly employing a dualistic representation of selfhood, where gendered subjectivity is accounted for in terms of the brain, and the body is docile, even redundant, in determining a gender identity. However, whether this construction is representative of a Cartesian dualist doctrine is debatable. It could be argued that 'having the brain of the other gender' is a more sophisticated deployment of the same Cartesian dualist discourse that distinguishes the mind from the body as a separate substance. Indeed, many of the participants used the terms 'brain' and 'mind' interchangeably, as illustrated in the following two extracts taken from the same interview with Ruben:

K: what do you think it means to be transsexual?

R:...I think you've got the brain of the opposite sex (.) that your body is, so, you know, it's not yours (Ruben, FtM, 19, 2/8-9).

In this first statement Ruben suggests that being transsexual entails a mismatch between the brain and the body - to the extent that the body feels that it does not belong to the transsexual subject. However, later in the interview Ruben replaces the term brain with the term mind to explain that to be a man implies a match between these two entities:

K:...what does it mean to you to be a man?

R:...I think it's really complicated the question you ask but (..) because you'd have your body to match your mind for one thing, just so you can live your life like as you should do... (Ruben, FtM, 19, 2/139-142).

The appeal of the phrase 'having the brain of the other gender', which has been greeted with much support from the 'trans' community, stems from its dubious biological underpinnings. These claims have been precipitated by recent neurological studies (Swaab & Hoffman, 1995; Swaab et al, 1997, discussed in Chapter Two) that have sought to pinpoint gender identity confusion within the structures of the brain. Thus, it could be argued that in a strict philosophical sense, this type of explanation for transsexualism is in fact materialist: rather than indicating separate substances, the brain and body are both assemblages of physical matter. Hence, this explanation could more readily be interpreted as biologically reductionist. As such, it is possible to argue that 'having the brain of the other gender' is indicative of the recent and flourishing trend that seeks to reify the biological at the expense of the psychological.

5.1 (ii) Biological fate or psychological choice

Certainly there is a fear of the psychological within most of the participants' accounts - as there is undoubtedly with many contemporary explanations for complex phenomena. The following exchange between Albert and myself is quoted at length as it illustrates clearly the level of anxiety that can be evoked when transsexualism is associated with the psychological:

A:...from my point of view, you know, I was born with this medical condition. It was treated in nineteen sixty-nine, seventy. Seventy-one surgery done, take hormones, finished.

K: was it treated as a medical condition at that time?

A: it's been among the list of medical conditions now for about thirty odd years I think. I think it was, I think even before that it was a known medical condition, it certainly is now anyway (K: but why?) it's listed as a as a medical condition (K: in DSM?) yeah (K: but that's a psychiatric listing so) well this is what, this is one of the problems. I mean to my mind it's just a load of, it's just a way for psychiatrists to get work (K: mm) because to my mind it's it's just, that's stupid. (K: right) umm (..) The only people who need a psychiatrist as far as I can see are psychiatrists umm dreadful umm (..) I don't think that at any point that I've ever had a sort of mental condition (K: mm) umm, you know, I'm I'm pretty sure that I've, I'm very sure that I'm quite well balanced umm (.) and I'm quite sure it's not a psychiatric disorder umm it never should have been put down as one (..) just because when when the thing was first realized the state of knowledge was

zilch ... on the state of knowledge (then) I can understand why they would just out and say it's a mental condition etc. but I think we understand so much more today that *it's high time that they looked at that again and realized that it isn't a mental condition*. Many of the people that I've met are very very intelligent people and by no means (..) psychiatric in the sense of having any, they're not schizophrenic they're not, you know, they're perfectly well balanced people and very clever people most of them umm and I think you know I I'm adamant in fact that it's time that they remove that (K; mm) from from the (..) from the record and realize that *it is just a medical condition*. You're born with it, you have treatment for it and for all intents and purposes you're cured (K; yeah) but that's the thing that gets up my nose that you never seem to be cured. Well according to the rest of the world, you know, it just is nonsense (Albert, FtM, 59, 1/111-126; 131-142).

Albert is clearly very angry at the idea that transsexualism could be, and is, tainted by association with a psychiatric diagnosis as he perceives transsexualism as a treatable biological condition. The refusal of a clinical diagnosis exacerbated by problematic relations with the psychiatric professions, which were often perceived as 'gate-keepers', was a common theme to emerge from most of the participants' interviews. In contrast, to describe transsexualism as a treatable medical condition appears to legitimize the transsexual participants' claims to be the other gender. It would appear that to pinpoint the psychological in the development of particular desires, complexities and inconsistencies of self signifies a complicity on behalf of the subject with this very process: biology is our fate, psychology is of our own volition. The lack of conclusive evidence for a biological etiology for transsexualism always leaves transsexuals' claim to be the other gender in a fragile state. Caroline illustrates this point when she draws a comparison with the medical condition 'intersexed':

C:...It's fine to be intersexed. People feel sorry for people that are born intersexed but if you're born transsexual they still think it's a choice umm (..) but it is a type of intersexed condition umm (..) brain of one gender, body of another (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/60-62).

For those who are born intersexed with the visible physical features of both sexes there is a tangible element to their diagnosis, grounded in biology, that is simply not available to those who present themselves as transsexual. This juxtaposing of psychological choice with biological pre-destination appears to be a strong motivation for couching transsexualism in the discourses of medical science. This was evidenced in some responses to questions about the clinical terminology that surrounds transsexualism:

KJ:...is gender dysphoria a term that you've used?

K: umm (..) no not really I think I may have used it with my parents to try to er break them into it gently because it sounds less threatening, it sounds less extreme (KJ: right) and also it sounds, I don't know, if one can have a kind of nice medical sounding label one can put on it then it's easier for other people I think, who one has to tell, like one's family and one's friends. It's easier for them to accept because the thing that most incenses me is the great fiction that it's a choice (KJ: right) and I I think gender dysphoria by (..) couching as a more clinical term umm slightly negates the fictional choice (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/40-48).

So, for Karen, positioning herself within the medical discourses of transsexualism is an effective means of legitimizing her condition by avoiding any connotation with a 'fictional choice' that is associated with psychological explanations. The anxiety provoked by the premise that to be transsexual is a choice is often exacerbated by representations of the transsexual as a freak or weirdo. And, this idea was commonly cited in the participants' accounts. For example, Karen resisted identifying as transsexual for precisely this reason:

...I've worked so hard and been through so much (.) hassle pain (.) to get to the stage where I'm happy and where I, I feel normal and I just don't want to take that away from myself for anything (KJ: mm). I don't want to put myself back in a box where I feel like a weirdo (KJ: mm) and I don't want anyone else thinking I'm a weirdo either (...) umm I don't think I'm, well I I mean while I think that my circumstances are unusual, but I'm also aware that it's not my fault and (..) I just don't want, I just don't want anyone looking at me and questioning anything about me (KJ: mm) I just don't want to feel that (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/127-134).

Thus, psychological explanations for transsexualism tend to infer that a transsexual identity is taken up by choice. But, why would anyone *choose* to position themselves within a category that is frequently exemplified as 'freak', 'weirdo' or 'not normal'? Attempts to dissipate these negative representations are found in statements such as "it's not my fault" which, in turn, both implies and supports the story that transsexuals are born that way: it is a medical condition. As Albert explains:

A:...you know it there there are so many anomalies of one sort or another (.) but *why is it that that (...) one small lot of people are sort of picked out as being strange and weird* it just doesn't make any sense. umm. Mind you, I mean I'm I'm absolutely positive that you're born with it and I think it's exactly the same with homosexuality. I think it's a condition that you're born with (Albert, FtM, 59, 1/151-155).

Here, drawing reference to another minority group, lesbians and gays, Albert challenges the notion that transsexuals are 'weird'. If transsexuals are "born with it", as a biological explanation implies, it must be a 'natural' condition rather than being strange, weird or freakish. Thus, parallels can be drawn with the same debates that have dominated the theorizing of homosexuality in recent years - particularly in the light of the impact of identity politics (e.g. Whisman, 1996; Sullivan, 1995. See Chapters Seven and Nine for further discussion of the relationship between transgender and gay and lesbian politics).

5.1 (iii) Deploying psychoanalytic discourses

Whilst there appeared to be a strong resistance amongst informants to psychological interpretations in favour of a biological explanation for the condition of *being* transsexual, biological discourses were not always so pervasive in their accounts when they were attempting to provide a *narrative* account of the path towards transition. For example, a biological explanation for transsexualism is made more feasible by the clinical criterion that suggests gender dysphoria is frequently evident from early childhood. However, some participants effectively deployed alternative, yet complementary, discourses to explain *why* they had not begun to transition until much later in life. For example, Jason drew on psychoanalytic discourses peppered with references to 'repression', 'uncovering the real me' and 'making sense of my childhood' through dream analysis in a psychotherapeutic setting:

J:...I think it's something you discover within yourself that has always been there (K: right) so the umm to be transsexual or transgendered umm you don't pick up the label and think oh that's what I am, it wasn't like that for me umm because I'd already seen an article or a couple of articles...so there were things like that around but that didn't make me think ok oh that's what I am, I think it's a thing you you discover in yourself. It could have been a trigger point but it wasn't (K: right) so it's something that has always been you I think, (K: uhum). It's always been part of you and it's this shall we say gender (...) which has been pushed inwards right from when you're young and you start displaying your gender because it doesn't fit into society. It it's not allowed (Jason, FtM, 39, 1/12-28).

Rather than identifying his experience with a familiar identity category 'transsexual', Jason explains how he 'discovered' his 'true' male gender which had been repressed since early childhood because of societal pressures to act and behave in a gender specific way: pressures and expectations determined by his female body. In the next extract,

Jason describes his route to discovering his 'true' male gender that had been 'repressed' over the years. This path involved dream analysis whilst receiving psychotherapy:

J:...I dreamt I had, I was male and had all the body parts and that that's part of when I first started going to psychotherapy and this, I just was going into a pit of depression and I wasn't going to come out of it unless I got some serious help, but I didn't know what it was about (K: right) and it became very clear during the psychotherapy. That's what started me off to think I've got to do something about this. All of a sudden you know stuff fits into place and you suddenly think yes, you know, it's been there all these years why, you know, it's just been you've repressed it all umm but the language of dreams was was very powerful in umm saying what the issues were and always had been and had been repressed (K; right) I'll give I'll give you an example this is one of the most telling examples umm of a dream I had very shortly after I started going to the psychotherapist and all we'd done is talk about my childhood that's all umm I'd had literally had two or three sessions I think and umm I dreamt I was in the old family house where I was brought up. My parents live in a different house now. Er, I could hear all these cats crying in the garden there were loads of them moving around and meowing and stuff and I was in the house and I thought I was alone umm and then all of a sudden there was this big cat came to the house and umm (...) I was with this cat (K: right) and er we started having a fight and all of a sudden this cat lost it's skin and there was a man inside and this man got out (.) with a gun (..) (K: ooh) and that prompted I mean you can see the analogy and like the psychotherapist said to me because I said what's this about? And she said, well what what do you see as a cat? I said, well I suppose female. Cats tend to be associated as female. And what was inside? A man. And she didn't say, you know, she was very good she didn't say I think this is what you are, although she said she knew immediately what was going on, particularly from that dream. Because there was a man inside me, and it started to fit with my childhood (Jason, FtM, 39, 1/361-382).

Jason began transitioning at the age of 36. Prior to this he had no medical record of gender dysphoria, just a sense of unease with himself and his long-term lesbian relationship. Thus, although he deployed Cartesian dualist and biological discourses to explain the transsexual 'condition', when his life history began to disrupt the medical discourses that construct transsexualism these specific representations of his experience of *being* transsexual were incomplete, unsatisfactory and over-simplistic. Instead, another powerful discourse, psychoanalysis, is drawn upon to facilitate a reconstruction of the past that makes sense in the light of his own personal sense of a lack of continuity in his gendered subjectivity. Deploying a psychoanalytic discourse suggests he was 'born in the wrong body', but he had repressed this. Furthermore, implicit in this account is Jason's awareness of the correct procedure for self-discovery within psychotherapy. He is unequivocal that this interpretation did not come from his therapist, "she was very

good”, but “didn’t say”, despite knowing “immediately what was going on”. Hence, this justification of his therapist’s actions supports his interpretation that he discovered his ‘true’, but repressed, gender identity in psychotherapy. Moreover, it also avoids any of the problems or criticisms that have been associated with psychotherapeutic practices and particularly well documented in the debates that circulate around such phenomena as false memory syndrome (e.g. Sandler & Fonagy, 1997).

Ian Parker suggests that, whilst at times psychoanalysis may provide a useful framework for understanding social phenomena, we need to be “more sceptical about psychoanalytic truth claims”. As such, he proposes that “[R]ather than treat psychoanalysis simply as a key to unlock the secrets of the subject, we should reflect upon how it has been fashioned as part of a particular system of self-talk and self-reference in Western culture” (Parker, 1997: 483). This opens up numerous contentious issues. Whilst, undoubtedly, a short extract from a single interview should not be used as a basis to challenge a deep-level psychoanalytic interpretation, it could be argued that the reading Jason makes of his own dream is not itself psychoanalytically informed. He dreamt that he was a man, breaking out of a feline, female shell, represented by the cat, and thus concluded that he was a man trapped in a female body: the classic trope of transsexualism. Did his dream really provide a sharp poke from his sub-conscious to awaken him to the fact that he had been “born with this bloody condition” (see the next extract)?

Such an interpretation, as we shall see, is something of a caricature of psychoanalytic thinking. Within psychoanalytic theory, the relationship between dreams and the subconscious are perceived to be far more complex than the one represented in Jason’s account. As Stephen Frosh has suggested, “[T]he dream and the subconscious: the two things are related, but not the same” (Frosh, 1999: 187). Freud suggested that “dream-interpretation, if it is not made too difficult by the patient’s resistance, leads to knowledge of his hidden and repressed *wishes* and of the complexes nourished by them” (1991: 64-65, my emphasis). Within this context, rather than providing clarification of a male identity, the dream provides evidence of Jason’s unconscious *wish* to be a man. From here, a range of alternative plausible accounts of why Jason might wish to be a man can be constructed: an immediate example might be to overcome conflict between wanting to conform with heteronormativity, despite sexually desiring women. As such, psychoanalysis may be one means of providing insight into the fragmented, inconsistent

and irrational bases of human existence (Wetherell, 1999). But, it also provides, somewhat against its own grain, a pervasive discourse that helps Jason to reflect upon his past, make sense of his childhood unhappiness in terms of being born with the wrong physical manifestation for his 'true' gender identity, as well as permitting an ongoing resistance to a lesbian identification. Furthermore, deploying the concept 'repression' enables him to explain his delay in transition until his late thirties, even though he had been aware of other transsexuals and the notion of transsexualism for some time. Despite this awareness, he had never identified this term with his own feelings prior to undertaking a course of psychotherapy. Thus, the notion of 'repression' can be seen as a powerful discursive tool for explaining the apparent inconsistency inherent in his life story, which includes having lived as a female for thirty-six years even though he was "born with a medical condition". This is expressed in his anger and disappointment at being born with a female body when his gender self-perception is male:

J:...you know *you've been born with this bloody condition* anyhow but you know you could have been born with cerebral palsy or whatever but you know I still would have been male but whatever you have, however you were born, you are still born you know as a (..) a male with all the right parts, you know, it's just so key to your existence, who you are. So, I obviously felt quite strongly about it (..) and cheated by it. I also felt cheated by, you know, all my childhood stuff but er I did make the best of it that I could umm but it was, well things could have been different. I could have had a happy childhood (K: uhum) I could have, I think I did reasonably well, I think, under the circumstances, to get a professional qualification and be working and having, having a house and stuff (K; mm) (...) but umm I don't know (Jason, FtM, 39, 3/87-97).

My point is neither to negate Jason's uncomfortable feelings with his gender over the years, nor to dismiss the use of psychoanalytic concepts he may have acquired from a lengthy period of in-depth therapy (although, in this case, Jason began transitioning within seven months of commencing psychotherapy). Rather, my goal is to discern the ways in which these participants tell cohesive life narratives, grounded within accessible discourses of the self. The requirement for self-cohesion and ordered narratives is mediated by symbolic systems and discursive practices which, within Western societies, propagate a rational notion of personhood that tend to overlook fluctuations, shifts and inconsistencies in selfhood. However, the alternative danger in some recent deconstructions of sexual practices is that in attending only to the fragments and inconsistencies of self-fashioning in order to combat Enlightenment notions of

personhood, we overlook the need for a stable sense of self for psychological well-being. As Jason states: gender identity is “key to your existence, who you are”. Here lies a dilemma for those academics working within postmodern epistemologies - the impossibility of either defending or dispensing with identities (Connolly, 1991). As Connolly states:

My identity is what I am and how I am recognized rather than what I choose, want or consent to. It is the dense self from which choosing, wanting and consenting proceed. Without that density, these acts could not occur; with it, they are recognized as mine (Connolly, 1991: 64, cited in Hekman, 2000: 295).

According to Susan Hekman, even Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) has, albeit tentatively, conceded that “some version of a core is necessary to psychic health” (Hekman, 2000: 293). Hekman argues that the trend in recent postmodern theory to reject any notion of core subjectivity and define identity as a fiction is profoundly misleading. She draws upon James Glass (1993) who suggests that “unity of self is both a difficult achievement and a necessary requirement for leading any version of a good and satisfying life”. He also criticizes those postmodern accounts that deploy “identity disorders as an ideal deconstructed identity”, suggesting that they are “irresponsible and insensitive to the human cost of these illnesses” (Hekman, 2000: 299). This line of thinking, however, risks falling back into the pitfalls of essentializing identity and pathologizing transsexualism. But, if the goal of psychology is, as some see it, to assist individuals to make sense of complex psychic phenomena, then I would suggest that for those who share this view, it is a risk worth taking. The somewhat confused filtering of psychoanalytic discourses that permeated Jason’s narrative account, epitomized in the claim that his dream revealed the ‘truth’ of his male identity is, as a truth claim, problematic. But, as an interpretation partially couched within the discourses of psychoanalysis, it does enable him to create some semblance of order, cohesion and wholeness of self within his narrative - a necessary requirement for psychic health. As Adam Phillips suggests:

All psychoanalysis can produce is the life-stories told and constructed in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, as theory and therapy, can never be useful - despite Freud’s commitment to the progressivism of Science - as a way of putting us closer to the Truth. But it can be useful in the way it adds to our repertoire of ways of thinking about the past (1994: 67).

5.1 (iv) Transsexualism as spiritual quest

There was also evidence of the construction of transsexualism within what can loosely be described as 'new age' discourses. For example, in a discussion of influential television documentaries about transsexualism, Neil described his transition in terms of a spiritual quest:

N...of course the most recent thing which everybody will tell you was the 'In the Wrong Body' programme that Zac did (K: yeah) which was excellent as well (K: mm) and I remember at the time I just thought that *it was so excellent that these people have risen to the challenge that was within them because that's how I've always seen it is that you know you've had this challenge since you were really really young and it's like well what are we going to do about it* and you go through all these different phases and umm increasingly I used to have to fight off a lot of depression about that (Neil, FtM, 35, 1/58-64).

Thus, for Neil, transitioning was a life-long challenge that had been awaiting him since early childhood. His initial confusions and understandable reluctance to face up to his 'challenge' resulted in depressive episodes. However, rather than seeking solace from the counselling professions, as Jason had, he found his own path to transition through the deployment of self-help style literature:

... there's an expression that I got out of one of my books because I use to like write out all these cards of like amazing sayings that I saw, you know, to encourage me and there's things like um *Fear is frozen excitement*, right, and actually that is partly true because when I finally *faced the fear and did it any way*, as the book says, umm, I mean it took a long while but things feel so much more exciting now (K: mm). You know, things are groovy again and they weren't for quite a long time but they are now (K: mm) so (.) it's kind of like you know I hope I won't, I don't think I will, but if I die tomorrow at least I know that I died *living my dream, being true to myself, doing what needed to be done* and it would have been a drag to have died like two years ago and (.) which always use to bug me. I thought blimey, you know, I'd better not die now because it will be so irritating (K: yeah) so *I'll have to reincarnate all over again and face all this bullshit again to go uuh oh no I can't do it, you know, so I thought let's just do it now and whack through a load of stuff on this life now*. So that's what I did (hh) crazy crazy but true (hh) (Neil, FtM, 35, 1/248-262).

In contrast to Jason's construction of transsexualism as something you have to dig out, reveal, or uncover, Neil's construction of transsexualism as a spiritual quest allows for a

greater degree of fluidity within his conceptualization of gender across the lifetime. The preponderance of soul-life within his account lent itself to a greater sense of *possibility* in each of our life paths, where our future gender manifestations are not necessarily static, fixed or predetermined, even if our current sense of self may seem reasonably secure. For example, in the next extract he suggests that at some point in the future I could face the same issues that he has recently had to deal with:

...To me, to be honest, the bottom line is that essentially we're all human beings and actually *these are only different manifestations of our (.) soul life if you like. Do you know what I mean? I mean I don't see you as really any different from me. It's just that in this life, my path at the moment is, you know, here and at any time also our paths could cross or you could find yourself being maybe faced with the possibilities of my path in five years time. Do you know what I mean? It's I just see it as all much more flexible and really the love of labels is to do with people trying to hold fear at bay you know by trying to come up with systems that that make people feel safe (.) (.) whereas I I think that the reality er er as I see it is that things are much more infinite than that* (K: mm) (Neil, FtM, 35, 1/197-205).

Thus, Neil suggests that labels or identities that are taken up by and placed upon people can be restrictive as they both contain and restrain the infinite number of possibilities and paths we may encounter over the life-span. Whilst this type of conception exemplifies the celebratory and emancipatory tone that frequently underpinned the interviews with Neil, the suggestion that we are “all human beings”, albeit performing “different manifestations of our soul-life”, appears to down play the impact that ‘bodiliness’ has upon our sense of selfhood. This would appear to be particularly incongruous with the case of the transsexual subject given the frequently expressed level of distress and sense of urgency to rectify feelings of disembodiment through physical intervention.

5.2 Negotiating processes of transsexual identification

In this section I attempt to outline some of the contradictions and complexities inherent in discursive practices of gender identification. Principally, I examine two positions: firstly, resisting identifying as transsexual and, secondly, insisting upon identifying as transsexual. Jay Prosser (discussed in Chapter Three) argues that both transsexual and transgendered narratives produce the sobering realization of the ongoing functional power that the categories of man and woman still carry for a sense of cultural belonging

(Prosser, 1998: 11). And, certainly, within some of these participants' accounts there was a marked resistance to being identified as 'transsexual'.

5.2 (i) Resisting transsexual identification

Some of the informants rejected the identification category 'transsexual' because, as Prosser has described, "in coming out and staking a claim to representation, the transsexual undoes the *realness* that is the conventional goal of this transition" (Prosser, 1998: 11, my emphasis). This ambivalence towards deploying transsexual as a self-identification is clearly apparent within the following extract taken from an interview with Caroline:

K: is it (transsexual) a term you identify with?

C: transsexual? umm no actually I don't now and umm I will always be a transsexual, umm but I didn't change sex to become a transsexual er, at the moment, er, I always was a transsexual er, *it's a medical term umm I went through to become a woman* (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/35-38).

Caroline evidently has difficulty in identifying as 'transsexual'. Acknowledging that she 'will always be transsexual' signifies the move from one gender to the other, which will always be part of her history. Yet, defining transsexualism as a 'medical term' legitimizes her claim to be a woman, as it signifies what Anne Bolin (1988) has described as 'transsexual rites of passage'. This entails moving from a male identity through a treatable medical condition, 'transsexual', to emerge the other side as 'woman'. However, the sense of 'always being a transsexual', of having a differently gendered past, problematizes Caroline's ability to identify as a 'real' woman: She later expands on this point by suggesting she is "never really going to be a woman":

...I mean I can never quite get there because (..) I wasn't born a woman and as good as science gets *I'm never really going to be a woman*. I might look like a woman and they might be able to do this to me, and that to me but I'll never really be a woman and even if nobody can tell, I'll know the difference (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/230-233).

For Caroline, in contrast with the more recent trends in politicized transsexual and transgender narratives (e.g. Feinberg, 1993) that have sought to establish trans-subjectivities by rewriting transsexual narratives as open-ended (Prosser, 1998), the notion that her transition is never fully accomplished is an uncomfortable one. Thus, these excerpts illustrate the problems that the binary gender system creates for those who

although born 'male' feel they are not men yet, can never be 'real' women. However, to take up the identification of 'transsexual' actually suggests they are outside of the gender system or, as Prosser would describe, "gender displaced" (1998: 2): this serves as a constant reminder of cultural non-conformity which to many is distressingly unacceptable. These types of dilemmas were also found in the accounts of some of the FtM participants. For example, Albert describes how he only uses the identity category 'transsexual' for the political campaign work of *Press for Change*:

K: so is it (transsexual) a term you identify with?

A: no, to my mind, as far as I am concerned, I I don't really. I mean I I identify with it, I identify with it on the service because I am concerned with other people who have this problem but on a personal level I don't believe that I am transsexual. I was transsexual (..) but I had treatment and surgery so to my mind I'm no longer transsexual (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/27-32).

Again, Albert is drawing reference to particular 'rites of passage' where transsexual is seen as a transitory category, a medical condition that is treated and cured. Yet, the legal position of those who have transitioned from one gender to the other is such in the UK that Albert has felt it necessary to take up this identity for the purpose of campaigning for political change. The principal aim of *Press for Change* is to attain the right for transsexuals to change their birth certificates, thus achieving legal recognition for their claim to be male or female. It is somewhat ironic that the 'coming-out' of transsexuals, the means by which transsexual subjectivity is established, has been necessitated by the desire to gain the legal right to be positioned only *within* the binary gender system: making 'transsexual' a subject position in order to facilitate the erasure of that mode of subjectivity. In this legal context 'transsexual' *will*, perhaps, emerge as a transitory category: a transitional category of our time. If *Press For Change* do succeed in securing the legal right for transsexual individuals in the UK to align the sex category documented on their birth certificate with their new gender identities (and it looks increasingly likely that they will), their need to explain any incongruity will disappear - at least in the public sphere. Undoubtedly, the trauma caused when transsexual individuals are required to present their birth certificates in the more mundane activities of acquiring a mortgage or on the first day of new employment is an unnecessary mandate. But, the downside for those who wish to live more ambiguous modes of gender subjectivity is that this process, which seeks to establish 'transsexual' as a transitory category, also serves to reinstate and

regulate the binary gender system - where there are only two genders/sexes. The representation of 'transsexual as transitory' category is echoed in Ruben's claim:

R:...As far as I'm concerned you should be transsexual while you are being treated and afterwards you're just male. Well, I think it's best if you are one or the other (Ruben, FtM, 19, 2/20-22).

And, perhaps, it is best. Certainly it is for those who are currently trying to forge some form of self-cohesion. Why should transsexual individuals be expected to occupy the gender borderlands unable to take up the gender positions and associated rights that the rest of us take for granted (Rubin, 1998)? In a similar example, Artemis, who also resisted identifying as transsexual, suggests that to identify as 'transsexual' indicates being 'in-between', suspended between the two genders:

...I think it's the word trans which is difficult for me (K: right) because umm it implies that you're either going through a process of going from one to the other where as if you've already gone through that process then trans should be no longer operative. So if somebody were to umm (..) invent another word but drop trans then possibly I would identify with it (K: right) you know but umm I don't, I don't regard myself as in-between so I don't identify as (..) with a word that I believe implies that I'm in-between (Artemis, MtF, 50, 2/18-23).

It is hardly surprising that many of the participants resisted identifying as transsexual, preferring to see it as a transitory category on the way to becoming their 'true' gender. Furthermore, this construction also sits well with both Cartesian dualist and biological discourses of transsexualism: where each is underpinned by the assumption that there are only two sexes and the mind should match the physical sex unless there has been some aberration of the 'natural' order. But, however understandable the deployment of these discourses are for creating some semblance of order and coherence in self-narrative, these types of representations fail to provide a nuanced account of transsexual embodied subjectivity because they also require the denial of a differently gendered past.

5.2 (ii) Insisting upon transsexual identification

Not all of the participants were so eager to delete their gender history. Some, whilst acknowledging that their contemporaries might want to refuse a transsexual identification, insisted that to identify as transsexual permitted them to incorporate her or his gender story into their self-narratives. As Billy, a female-to-male participant states:

K: Is transsexual a term you identify with?

B: (.)I can't identify any other way because *I can't deny my past* (.) (K: ok). Some people might feel differently, some people do. Some people take a view er that once they've had hormone therapy and operations, they are a man, they are a woman. They're not transsexual any more. I feel differently (Billy, FtM, 44, 2/21-24).

This is strikingly different from the refusal of a transsexual identity in the accounts of Albert and Ruben, discussed in the previous section. In a similar fashion, Emily was also concerned to incorporate aspects of her past gender history within her self-narrative. At the same time she also points to a complex dilemma when identifying as either 'woman' or 'transsexual':

K: is it (transsexual) something you would identify as?

E: yes but I mean (...) I think there's a, again there's a categorization between pre-operative and post-operative transsexuals as to where they see they are and whether they feel themselves to be women or transsexuals, and I kind of think well (...) it's kind of somewhere in the middle. I kind of don't (...) I can't really draw that line that definitively and because *I don't want to ignore my past in terms of history* then I kind of think it's quite important to keep a relatively open mind. Yes, I'd be identified as, first and foremost as a woman, but secondly I wouldn't be frightened of the label transsexual (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/17-25).

Again, this excerpt illustrates Bolin's (1988) notion of 'transsexual rites of passage' where, as the individual moves from pre-operative to post-operative, they will drop the identification 'transsexual' in favour of their new gender identity 'woman'. However, Emily suggests that maintaining a transsexual identity, although less favourable to her than identifying as a woman, allows her to acknowledge her gendered past which was spent as a boy and a young man. Thus, it appeared that for some of the participants their willingness to embrace the identification 'transsexual' was related to their ability to incorporate their past experiences of a different gender existence within their biographical account. For example, the participant, Billy, recalled that much of his social history involved a long-standing commitment to the lesbian community, and he preferred to see his self-identity as part of the queer continuum (see Chapter Seven). Of course, there are many reasons for the denial of a past sense of self. As Foucault has suggested, this may be driven by the desire to become somebody you were not in the beginning (1988: 11, see Chapter Six for further discussion). Moreover, the anxiety created by previous feelings of disembodiment may impede many of those who might otherwise

attempt to confer some sense of continuity upon their self-narrative - as would other equally traumatic and perhaps discursively untranslatable experiences. Similarly, the age at which individuals begin transitioning may also have an impact upon their willingness and ability to take up an identity category that allows them a greater degree of ambivalence within their continuity of self-narrative. Billy and Elizabeth, who were concerned about incorporating their different gender past, were more willing to embrace a transsexual identification. But, being significantly older than Ruben and Karen, who began transitioning in their late teens, they had a larger chunk of self-narrative at risk of erasure.

5.3 Transgender identifications

Whilst the rejection of a transsexual identity in favour of identifying as male or female was a common theme in many of the participants' accounts, there was a mixed reaction in participants' willingness to embrace the more recent identity category 'transgendered'. In this section I explore the relationship between transsexual and transgender identity positions and the different ways in which this new subject position is deployed. Inevitably, this is dependent upon the variety of meanings and effects that this identity held for the participants.

5.3 (i) Identifying as transgendered

Some of both the MtF and FtM participants rejected the identity category 'transsexual' in favour of the term 'transgender'. For example, Neil illustrates this when he explains how he went about telling people he met through work about his intention to transition:

N:...I usually use certain phrases, you know, I usually say well, you know, I'm transgendered or (.) I'm under (.) I I'm transgendered and I'm now having treatment or (.) that's the kind of phrase that I use. *I never use the transsexual word* (Neil, FtM, 35, 3/521-523).

Of the participants who preferred the identification 'transgendered', most cited their reason as it gave a more accurate description of the process involved in their transition. As Neil describes:

N:...When I came across transgender I thought now that is a nice word because that sums it up (K: right) you're trans you're in motion yeah and er and gender is more accurate to me about what's going on than sexual. It's got nothing to do with sex. It's to do with ideas of gender (K: right) so that was the word that kind of I leapt on to describe me if you like (Neil, FtM, 35, 2/50-53).

Similar intimations can be found in the account of Caroline who suggested that the gender dysphoria of 'trans' individuals was misrepresented and slurred by association with the word 'sexual':

K: what other terms would you identify with?

C: umm (.....) transgendered (K: yeah) I think it's better than transsexual because straight away you've got sexual and it's it means a sexual thing and they try to say it's a sexual dysfunction thing it was like this when I came out to my doctor and (..) which it's not a sexual thing um for a start the hormones kill all the sex drive so if it is a sexual thing that's going to you know (h) it's going to go (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/45-49).

Thus, the identity category transgender permits the transsexual subject to disassociate themselves with any salacious connotations that maybe drawn from an identity that labels their condition as 'sexual' (see Chapter Seven for further discussion)

5.3 (ii) Resisting transgender identity

Given the potency of many of the informants' argument that the category 'transsexual' infers a perverse sexual identity, a number of the participants, somewhat surprisingly, rejected the 'transgendered' identity category that could potentially liberate them from this association. The following example is taken from an interview with Sam:

K: sure ok are there other terms that you prefer to identify as, other than transsexual?

S: the other's I sort of know are like person (hh) or bloke or something umm no I mean er presumably the obvious one there would be transgender and no I don't necessary. No I don't sort of see myself as transgendered in the way that a lot of people would seem to define it (Sam, FtM, 32, 2/88-91).

Here, Sam illustrates that those who deploy the identification term 'transsexual' frequently overlook the 'personhood' of the trans-subject. As I have already argued (see Chapter One and Chapter Three), this oversight is common in much research that attempts to theorize transsexualism conceptually, and is exemplified by Tamsin Wilton's claim that her "article is not 'about' transsexual *people*, but about medicalized *discourses*

of MTF transsex” (2000: 237, emphasis in original, see Chapter One for further discussion). But, as Stephen Whittle insisted in his paper on the current status and goals of *Press for Change*, “we are not transsexuals, we are transsexual *people*” (2000). Hence, in the above excerpt, Sam’s joking manner and the deployment of the terms ‘person’ and ‘bloke’, are very effective means of enveloping his experience with a sense of ordinariness. He then continues by explaining the meaning that transgender holds for him and why he feels it is not an accurate description of his own experience:

K: ok so how would you define transgender then?

S: I think transgender is more about er either (.) aiming towards a gender which is neither male or female or also a component of people experimenting with with gender (.) which can include more sort of er (.) drag kings and drag queens people that may wish to be perceived some of the time as a stereotype of (.) something other (..) So, I think that that is more more fluid, and (.) also to me it seems to contain an element of of continuing change and development, whereas transsexual tends to mean more sort of moving from one thing to something else and when you get there that’s it, whereas transgender is sort of well today I’ll be sort of this and tomorrow I’ll be that, and the following day I won’t necessarily define myself as anything at all because I just want to be a person that’s sort of genderless. I’m not quite sure how well that works. I think it’s very difficult. It’s possible for it to work on the individual level but it’s just it it’s a set of gears that don’t mesh with society’s gears unfortunately so I think I don’t quite know how people actually manage it in practice (Sam, FtM, 32, 2/92-103).

So again, within this extract, we see ‘transsexual’ represented as a transitory category, a moving from one gender to the other, where the journey ends. For Sam, in contrast to the category ‘transsexual’, ‘transgender’ implies a less ‘real’ gender performance - exemplified by drag or stereotypical representations; gender fluctuation; or aspirations to a genderless position. Sam also draws attention to the impossibility of being genderless, again illustrating (to paraphrase Prosser) the ongoing functional power that the categories of man and woman still carry for a sense of cultural belonging (Prosser, 1998: 11). However, whilst Sam might reject the degree of gender fluidity entailed in his interpretation of transgender, this interpretation has proved to be more liberating for others. Particularly for those who are unhappy with their current gender specification, yet unsure about how far they would like to take the major steps towards transitioning. As Cheryl describes:

C:...for me, I prefer the label transgendered because (.) the important thing for me is about gender not sex (K: uhum) or sexuality, and I see a big

difference between umm transsexual and transgendered, although the word transgendered in recent times has come to mean anyone who changes their gender in any way. It's got expanded or widened, whereas I I see it in a pure terms of some someone that's changing their gender, you know, if it's a male then they live as a woman, looks like a woman, talk and act like a woman but don't necessarily have genital surgery (K: uhum). I mean I have no problem with the concept of a woman with a penis (K: uhum right) (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 1/16-24).

Thus, Cheryl's interpretation of the identification 'transgendered' implies anyone who takes up the opposite gender role, but does not necessarily engage with medical practices of reassignment surgery. Cheryl's circumstances are substantially different from most of the other participants as she has been taking hormones for four years, but remains undecided about whether to transition full-time. She was the only participant who actively moved between the two gender positions; working in a male role and socializing in a female role. She also spoke warmly about recent shifts in the conceptualization of gender dysphoria within the medical profession that allowed her to do this. In her experience the clinical requirements to take up a singular gender position were no longer strictly adhered to - whether this entailed living in your birth sex, or undergoing reassignment surgery and living in your new gender role:

C:...I learnt and heard of, that there were different options, you know, you didn't you could be transgendered and not, not transsexual. You didn't have to be in one camp or the other (K: right) and I think the whole attitude of the medical profession, psychiatrists, psychologists has changed over the last decade (K: right) they largely dictated you were either one thing or the other where as I think nowadays they're more willing to accept inbetweens if you like, you know, different shades of gender dysphoria and I certainly know for a fact that if ten years ago I'd gone into Charing Cross Hospital they'd have kicked me out the back door because unless you go there, and it's still largely the same today, unless you go in there and say I'm a woman and I've always been a woman and I've worn dresses since I was five and I want the operation, if you don't say that script you don't get anything (K: right) (..) whereas I saw a private psychiatrist, explained what my situation was, said I don't know what I want to do ultimately but I do know I want to do things different but not continue as a man whereas that was ok and also through having a lot of counselling with some one which has been helpful made me accept that I can be something not exactly one thing or the other (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 3/102-126).

Several significant themes emerge from this extract. Firstly, the identity category 'transgendered', enables Cheryl to live as an 'in-betweenie', in an undecided state, precisely the type of existence that most of the other participants were so averse to.

Secondly, Cheryl suggests that there have been significant shifts in the clinical practices of professionals engaged in the treatment of gender dysphoria - although she suggests this has only taken place within the private sector. Cheryl see the NHS service as more dogmatic in its approach to gender reassignment, where candidates still have to fit their subjective experience with the transsexual script that so problematized practices of diagnoses in the 1970's. Yet the guidelines for clinical practice, as stated by the *Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association* (1998), have been substantially revised in recent years suggesting, as I have already argued, that transsexual subjectivity is not simply constituted through the discourses and practices of medical science (Billings & Urban, 1995; Hausman, 1995). Rather, I suggested that transgender politics have pushed clinical professionals into new directions for dealing with the trauma and suffering of individuals who experience a deep conflict between body and sense of self (see Chapter Two). Thus, it seems somewhat surprising that these changes should only take place within the private sector - unless, of course, these changes are more to do with the ongoing march of capitalism and consumerism. Perhaps, for those that can afford to pay for treatment the options are much wider and varied, whilst for those who are reliant on a cash-strapped National Health Service the options are to prove how worthy you are of this money and then wait. Finally, given Cheryl's investment in the term 'transgender' that permits her to live as an 'in-betweenie', it is interesting that the fundamental assumption that underpinned Cheryl's dislike of the terms 'transsexual' and 'sex-change' was her belief in the immutability of sex:

K:...you said before that there were other terms you preferred to identify as and you mentioned transgendered (C: transgendered yeah). What is it particularly

C: it's getting away from the emphasis on sex (K: yeah) people are always labelled sex change or transsexual and it's it's a fallacy because you can not change your sex. You can (..) if you're going male to female or female to male *you can have constructed a physical resemblance of the sex of your choice* but you're a male to female you will never have a womb and be able to conceive in a biological or sexual sense of the word or vice versa (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 2/32-37).

Like many of the other participants, exemplified in the accounts of Neil and Caroline, Cheryl also objects to the 'sexual' aspect in the term 'transsexual'. But, there are significant contradictions in the discourses deployed within Cheryl's account and between her account and the other participants. For Cheryl, her gender presentation is constructed as a representation of "the sex of your choice" - not a birth defect, or medical

condition, but a *choice*. Moreover, underpinning her assumption of gender transition is the notion that sex is a fixed biological certainty. Therefore, the male-to-female or female-to-male transsexual is a constructed version of a 'true' male or female, so she or he can never be a 'real' woman or man. However, the politicization of the transgender movement and the impact of its campaign on the professional conduct of many clinical practitioners working in the area of gender dysphoria, has been of consequential benefit for Cheryl's own experience. Taking up the identity transgender has enabled her to circumvent the singular path to gender reassignment so often found in the medical model of transsexualism. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, Cheryl lives as a 'gender warrior', in the 'gender borderlands' where her very existence challenges the monolithic status of the binary gender system - despite her personal belief in the biological realness of the two sex model. Perhaps, this is one aspect of the allure of a transgender identity. Whilst many of the participants' accounts fit well with the medical discourses of transsexualism, the replacement of this self-identity category with the more recent term 'transgender' affords some of them the benefits of a politicized identity. It can also enable them to resist any negative or perverse connotations that are often associated with the term 'sexual' (see Chapter Seven for further discussion).

As a final note, it is interesting to compare the diverse positions of those who construct transitioning in terms of either gender-reassignment or sex-reassignment. For example, as we have already seen, Cheryl resists a transsexual identification in favour of the identity category 'transgendered' because she believes in the impossibility of changing sex. This contrasts sharply with the account of Albert:

K: ok I was just thinking because there's some other terms which are being used more these days such as transgendered whether that's a term you'd ever use?

A: No. I don't think, I don't think as far as people in my condition, my situation, it is er relevant because I haven't changed my gender because my gender is my core identity and that has not changed. What has changed is my sex if anything has changed at all (K: uhum) because that was denoted by looking to see what I had physically (K; yeah) and that has been altered you know that's fair enough um umm. It is a shame to me that it had to be altered I wish it would have been as it is now in the first place (h) but it wasn't but I mean there is nothing I can do about that umm but now it's it's as I believe it should be umm to all intents and purposes and to the best of the ability of the surgeons and the surgeons have done umm, you know, I'm I'm perfectly happy with what's been done (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/63-74).

Albert constructs his 'condition' as a biological anomaly, yet this is underpinned by a fixed sense of a core male gender identity. Thus, although he has had to overcome some physical problems his investment in transsexualism as a medical/biological condition enables him to maintain a far more stable sense of a male identity. Albert *is* male, has always *been* a man but, unfortunately, he had to undergo some surgical reconstruction to alter his physical appearance. In contrast, Cheryl *wants to be* a woman:

C:...I suppose for the last couple of years I've thought continually about whether I want to change over full-time. Whether that is a viable option for me umm (..) I have a sort of psychological barrier in that although I've always wanted to be a woman, ever since I can remember, I've never particularly wanted to be a transsexual which is the kind of label and status that people seem to end up with (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 1/8-12).

C:...I have this thing about not wanting that label (transsexual) (K: right). You know, I want to be a woman but I know I can't. It's impossible (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 2/7-9).

Perhaps this contradiction tells us something about why Cheryl remains in a transient position, suspended between the two gender positions. Cheryl believes in the immutability of sex, the impossibility of being who she wants to be, of being a woman. Thus, whilst other participants manage to successfully transition and lead fairly cohesive lives, Cheryl is hindered by the notion that she will never be a 'real' woman - that she will always be a transsexual, marginalized and, ultimately, still 'gender displaced' (see Prosser, 1998: 2). Consequently, her motivations for taking up a transgendered identification are not political. She has no desire to disrupt the binary gender system, just an entrenched sense of self-fragmentation and gender dislocation – "the personal cost of not simply being a man or a woman" (Prosser, 1998: 12).

5.3 (iii) Alternative conceptions of transgender

As Ekins and King (1999, see Chapter One) described, the term 'transgender' is imbued with very different meanings and interpretations by these participants. To illustrate just how varied these can be a few more examples will be given in this next section. In the first extract Caroline describes transgender using the discourses of gender presentation:

C:...it's like the whole transgender thing, it's a very grey area and I mean you could be described as transgendered because you've got boots on and combats you know (K: mm) (Caroline, MtF, 29, 1/200-202).

Here, she is referring to the fact that during the interview I was not dressed in an archetypal feminine way: I could also be transgendered because I was wearing boots and combats. Whilst this may be so, my clothing style could also have been interpreted as 'lesbian', 'queer' or simply the fashion of the day. In the second extract, Albert constructs 'transgendered' in terms of gendered positions within same-sex relationships:

A:...but transgendered (..) as far as I see it would tend to as it as it as far as I know the definition would tend to denote anybody that's got (..) a gender problem in in the sense of (...) say bisexual people (..) Like, so they they live their lives as a particular gender but act or interact in a way at least sexually that encompasses acts of either gender (K: right). So that's what I would consider as transgender in their, in their social interaction with with partners they they might take on the role of one gender or the other at any time and alternate between the two or, you know, this is I I don't know whatever else, people who wish to dress as one gender or the other (K: right) er without actually wishing to to change their their sexual identity (K: right) you know like lesbians for instance er like like to interact with other women but there is no way in which they wish to be men or need to be men they are quite happy with whatever it is they are. It's just the interaction with women it seems which is different from well what society would expect (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/74-86).

Albert's stumbling and searching for words at the beginning of this quotation might imply that he is unsure about what 'transgender' means. However, he goes on to suggest that bisexuality is one brand of transgenderism. Rather than constructing bisexuality in terms of sexual desire, he describes this identity category as a "gender problem", where bisexuals may want to act out different gender positions within same, and opposite sex relations. Like Caroline, he also links transgenderism to gender appearance, referring to those who like "to dress as one gender or the other", but this is again related to sexual identity - particularly lesbianism. The final example, taken from an interview with Richard, illustrates the labyrinthine nature of these identification categories:

K: what about umm transgender?

R: transgender? When, if, if you say to someone you are transgendered, they want to know what the difference between transgender and transsexual is, and to be honest I'm not entirely sure. I think in strict terms of labelling I would be transsexual as opposed to transgendered because umm oh although I don't see myself as being a man, I'm I'm not a male woman if you see what I mean. I am a male entity but I'm not a male woman. I, I mean it's like I think it's umm transgenderism is where umm you can have a a man who is happy to be a man but identifies as woman as female as opposed to as a woman, but, but he's happy to be a man (K: ok). I mean it's quite

confusing to put, but I don't see where the line gets drawn you see (K; mm). I don't think anyone really knows what the true definition is, but if people ask I'll say I'm transsexual because it's it's easier, but I don't necessarily feel that I am (Richard, FtM, 24, 2/51-63).

This illustrates just how perplexing the identification categories that are generated by and circulate between the discourses of transsexualism have become - even for those who are positioned within them.

5.4 Multiple identities

Whilst the purpose of this research necessitated that gender identity became the focal point of discussion, at times it was not unusual for gender identity to be subsumed by other more pressing identifications and needs. For example, Ruben describes how his cerebral palsy also leaves him classified as disabled:

K: do you think that the media coverage you've seen gives an accurate portrayal of things that occur in your own life?

R: Not in mine because I'm I'm quite unusual in that I've got, I'm classed as disabled anyway (.) things like that so I get stigma from a lot of categories so I don't (.) fit into a normal transsexual as such but no not really (Ruben, FtM, 19, 1/112-114).

In the question I was assuming a singular identity of being transsexual. A better question would have been, "in what ways does the media portrayal of *transsexualism* provide a good representation of your own experience?" His response indicates that his transsexual status is not always the most pressing issue when he reflects on his self-experience. In a similar fashion, Sam describes hows she wants:

...to be seen as a person first and a transsexual is sort of something also that I happen to be umm and that includes you know a motorcyclist and a and a record collector and this that and the other. There's a lot of things that I am and and being transsexual is just one of them umm (.) it's part of what makes me up as a person. Certainly, if I hadn't been born transsexual I'd have been very different (Sam, FtM, 32, 2/56-60).

Here, Sam illustrates how we all have different and multiple identities. When one of these is a marginalized identity, for example being transsexual, transgendered, lesbian, gay or bisexual, it can have a profound effect upon day-to-day interactions within the social and cultural order. However, as he quite rightly points out, it is not all that you are - and it can be frustrating to be categorized so singularly. Billy provides a more

discerning example of how gender identity can be subsumed by more pressing needs. Billy spent much of his childhood in care and first presented at a gender identity clinic when he was eighteen years old. However, it was not until his forties that he managed to successfully transition full-time, despite undergoing a double mastectomy and hysterectomy during the interim period. As he describes:

B:...I mean one of the (.) strange things that happened to me and I I remember mentioning it last week on er when we spoke on the tape (.) Trying to sort of get my sort of self on my feet get some type of qualification so I could just get a job any job something decent umm. I went on a training course and I I said to you then, they wouldn't allow me to to go as as a man (K: yeah). They wouldn't accept it. So I *I've had this sort of er bit of a conflict or a bit of a strange situation where I've sort of flip flopped a bit* you know, although I don't suppose I looked any different. People still had a problem unless they knew, you know, I didn't have obviously as much hair on my face yeah (.). But, so, I've had to work as a woman for quite a a number of years and it got it it got to the point that I was being successful in my work and even I somehow didn't want to change it and didn't want to like rock the boat. Look hey! I'm earning money here you know I'm doing all right *I've finally got a bit of stability and security* do I really want to change (.) all this yeah?

K: so how old was that then when you were?

B: well it must have been about twenty-five yeah, twenty-four twenty-five (.) and er for about two or three (.) years, no, maybe a bit longer, I was working as a woman and then I basically couldn't hack it. I just went my own way and I set up a shop, and (.) did other things (K; right) for about eight years (.). I needed to get work again and and did it as a woman. I think with having such a bad experience with all the psychiatrists all the problems that I faced er and and all, and a sense of isolation because whilst I was ostensibly gay I I couldn't speak to (.) lesbians about it. Do you understand you know? Oh me (inaudible), it's kind of the way I am, you know, almost like a denial you know (.) So (.) ended up in my early thirties that my life was like such a mess you know been sort of like in danger of losing my home everything (K: mm), and *not having like family to fall back on and literally like nowhere to go* the the options weren't there (K: mm) for me to say ok I'm going to sort myself out emotionally. It wasn't, because *it's the practicalities of surviving* you know they have to take priority (Ben, FtM, 46, 3/151-166).

Earlier in this chapter we saw how Jason accounted for the delay in his transition by employing psychoanalytic discourses that drew on notions such as repression. Here, Billy accounts for his decision not to transition full-time, despite his profound gender dysphoria, because of his socio-economic position. His need for both financial and emotional security created immense conflict as he was aware that transitioning also requires sacrifices - losing his lesbian partner and his job:

...I wanted it all you know. I wanted to transition. I wanted to keep the job that I'd worked hard for, you know, I wanted to keep those sorts of things yeah and I wanted to transition and I wanted to keep the woman I was with and I was trying to (hh) you know what I mean yeah? But it didn't work out. (h) Yeah I wasn't prepared to give up any of it. (K: right) Yeah, I wasn't prepared to make that, at that time, that sacrifice because *I didn't want, you know I don't have a family I didn't want to be alone*. But I think it got to the stage that I had to be strong enough whoever I was, me, myself, even if I was going to be isolated for the rest of my life. When you die you die alone. Just you there, you sort of, you do er and I just had to go along with that in the end. So really that's basically what happened to me like four years ago (K: right) you know I just said to hell with it, this is this is what it boils down to (Billy, FtM, 46, 3/192-203).

5.5 Beyond Cartesian dualism

In this chapter I have traced the complex and at times contradictory processes of identification these transsexual participants have had to negotiate. The exploration of these processes supports the suggestion made in Chapter One that simply to document the use of a singular and omnipresent discourse, such as Cartesian dualism, gives an insufficient account of transsexual subjectivity. At the same time I have begun the task of suggesting why a sense of "wholeness of self" (Kundera, 1999: 43) is important for psychic health. However, for these participants there was no single route to either transitioning or a cohesive sense of self. Some believed that they had always known, and transitioned in their late teens. Others discovered a transsexual identification later in life, and drew on particular discourses to account for the delay in transition - given that they were "born with this condition". Still others lived in a transient position for many years because of their socio-economic status and personal fears. Within these various journeys the new gender was constructed as their core sense of self. Continuity of self within narrative accounts was to a varying degree achieved through divergent means. These included: incorporating a differently gendered past; accounting for the delay in transition through psychoanalytic concepts such as repression or socio-economic factors; whilst for others, a sense of self-fragmentation remained very real.

Thus, within this chapter I have moved beyond a Cartesian dualist account of transsexualism by providing examples of the respondents' deployment of alternative

discursive constructions in their accounts - drawn from equally persuasive biological, psychoanalytic and new-age discourses. Yet, undoubtedly, the power of a Cartesian dualist discourse to explain the participants' transsexual status is that it has the effect of validating the transsexual subject's claim to be man or woman. This is not a chosen gender, but the unfortunate result of a 'medical condition', such as a 'brain defect' and, ultimately, transsexualism is not transgressive but, instead, supports the binary gender system. Moreover, as Elliot & Roen have already argued, given the sheer complexity in the identification practices the transsexual subject has to negotiate, it is not surprising that "the Cartesian view of oneself as 'trapped in the wrong body' is of greatest comfort and therefore of immediate use" (1998: 273). In the next chapter, by focusing upon shifts in self-perception and embodied subjectivity I continue the task of illustrating how these participants attempt to account for continuity in self after a radical change in body morphology. This entails a focus on shifts in self-perception and embodied subjectivity.

6

Changing sex, changing self: transitions in embodied subjectivity

...you don't quite make it into full manhood, ever. Because you're also incredibly aware that you have none of that background.

Stephen Whittle, *Perfidious Man*, (Self & Gamble, 2000: 47-48)

In the aftermath...my old life was waiting to reclaim me. I should have known: no escape from past acquaintance. What you were is forever who you are.

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight Children*, (1982: 368)

This chapter explores themes pertaining to shifts in perceptions of self-identity made by the participants in this study. It was suggested in Chapter Four that one of the problems with accounts informed by poststructuralism is that, with their emphasis upon multiple subjectivity, they often fail to answer for continuity in the subject. In Chapter Five I began the task of attempting to theorize constructions of self-continuity in the light of radical changes in gender presentation. Here, under the rubric “changing sex, changing self”, I develop these ideas by contrasting two strategies that impact upon the notion of continuity in self-narrative: ‘being the same person’ and ‘being a new person’. In the next section I explore social practices through which the transsexual subject’s new gender identity is both affirmed and disavowed. Here, continuity in social relations, particularly the way in which family and friends relate to the participants, is highlighted as imperative

for the transsexual's new sense of gendered self. Unfortunately, past relations also create seepages and fractures within any newly achieved sense of gender confirmation.

The notion of the past, past selves, past relations and previous gender history is central to the arguments presented in this chapter. Consequently, in the section 'Becoming a different kind of a guy', I explore the way in which the experience of living as a female impacts upon the *type* of man the female-to-male participants wish to be, a *better* man. Less surprisingly, the notion that to be a man was not necessarily a valiant thing also appeared in the sentiments of the male-to-female participants. These are discussed in the section 'Who would want to be a man anyway?'

Following this, I explore the problems many of these male-to-female participants had in responding to questions about being a woman and being feminine. Drawing upon the work of Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2000), the complex positions outlined in this chapter are interpreted in terms of the notion of a *defended subject*. However, in this case, the defended subject is not formulated from a psychoanalytic reading of free association narrative interviews. Rather, I return to Hollway's (1989) original premise that the defended subject is a discursive position constructed through intersubjective relations within the interview setting. Accordingly, in this section I also explore the participants' rhetoric that relies upon the notion of the unique nature of 'being me'. It is argued that 'being me' is a powerful linguistic tool for avoiding questions which are, inevitably, anxiety provoking and challenging for those who have negotiated substantial shifts in gender identifications, particularly when potential responses appear to require some form of justification for changes in selfhood.

In the final part of this chapter, I engage with the task of trying to illuminate the complex and contradictory ways in which a dramatic change in morphology affects embodied subjectivity. Here, cultural practices of embodiment are documented, illustrating, for example, how some of the transsexual participants described learning the correct deportment for their newly acquired gender identity. The impact of the physical body, particularly as trace and marker of a previous embodied being, is also explored, as these subjects attempt to not only 'pass' and eventually 'become' the new gender, but also as they attempt to shake off those already well known and ingrained practices of gendered

embodiment. Thus, in the concluding comments I continue the task of theorizing transsexual embodied subjectivity as an ongoing process of *becoming* male or female.

6.1 Accounting for shifts in self-identity

Before his premature death in 1986 Michel Foucault began to engage with theorizing the problematic notions of subjectivity and practices of the self. Prior to this his central concern had been to envisage a historical analysis that identified forms of domination that operated through mechanisms of subjectification, objectification and normalization. His seemingly radical return to an aesthetics of self after declaring ‘the death of man’ has not always been greeted with enthusiasm (Sawicki, 1994). Yet, the shift from a genealogical approach that documented the anonymous processes by which individuals are constituted by one another, to a genealogy of self that engaged with the actual historical processes through which individuals establish a particular relationship to themselves, has been instrumental in new ways of theorizing subjectivity. Rejecting a Cartesian notion of subjectivity in favour of the historically located theses of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Foucault suggested that subjectivity is formulated through multiple ‘practices of self’ and is always undergoing significant change. Thus, as Jane Sawicki suggests:

Foucault brings to our attention historical transformations in practices of self formation in order to reveal their contingency and to free us for new possibilities of self-understanding, new modes of experience, new forms of subjectivity, authority, and political identity (Sawicki, 1994: 286).

Foucault’s method of self-interrogation was not to facilitate self-discovery, as the pseudo-psychoanalytic discourses deployed by the participant Jason in Chapter Five imply, but rather to facilitate self-refusal. As Foucault states: “The main interest in life is to become someone else that you were not at the beginning” (1988: 11, cited in Sawicki, 1994: 286). It is this type of sweeping separation from a previous self-conception that is represented in the discursive construct ‘being a new person’. But, whilst radical self-transformation is often possible and even desirable, the question remains of whether we are ever fully able to break free from our old selves. As the old adage goes, we may be through with our past but our past is not always through with us.

Two contradicting constructions of selfhood, in terms of ‘being the same person’ or ‘being a new person’, were elicited from interview accounts and were interpreted, in turn, as indicative of either stasis or flux in self-perception. Thus, in this section, these discursive positions are introduced as ways by which these transsexual participants attempted to either account for, or refuse, the notion of change in embodied subjectivity.

6.1 (i) Being the *same* person

In a discussion about perceived changes in sexual orientation, Billy draws on the discursive construction ‘being the same person’. However, inherent in this discursive position is an explicit denial of any change in personhood. For example, Billy states:

...I mean like I had girlfriends, you know, I I live with my partner now (h) still the same (hh) it’s just society now classifies me differently (K: right). You know, I was queer, I was lesbian, you know, now I’m transsexual and I’m straight, you know, but *I am the same person doing the same things* (Billy, FtM, 46, 2/78-81).

But, by accounting for continuity in self under the aegis of claiming to be “the same person doing the same things”, Billy denies the significance that a shift in embodiment has for his lived experience. Whilst Billy is open about his transsexual identity, he can also pass as male. The affects of testosterone have significantly marked his body to the extent that it is unlikely that he would ever be read as anything but male. Undoubtedly, this will impact upon all his social interactions, on a day-to-day basis. Equally, he may also be in the same sexual relationship as the one prior to transitioning, but that relationship will now be read as heterosexual. Inevitably, this allows for certain privileges that were unobtainable when he was in a lesbian relationship. Furthermore, identifying as transsexual and being quite open about this identification (as we saw in Chapter Five) will also have a profound effect on the inter-subjective relations that Billy forms.

In a similar fashion, Jason also suggests that contrary to other people’s expectations he has not changed at all:

K: in what ways do you feel you have changed?

J:...the thing you change is the fact in some ways you're not changing. I have always been male. Umm. It it wasn't recognized because people go on external, how you look externally (K: right) ok so they say oh you're changing, but you're not, you're not. And this is what I tried to make clear on Thursday for the documentary and I just hope it comes out is the fact that I haven't changed. All that's been recognized is is the maleness that was always there, but people couldn't recognize the signs for it (K: right). This society stuffs you in a box umm *so therefore what happens is you repress to some extent who you are* (Jason, FtM, 39, 1/136-144).

Within this extract we see Jason constructing his selfhood as unchanged - "you're not changing". Thus, for Jason, his self-perception remains static. Instead, what have changed are the perceptions of those around him - finally his 'true' male self has been recognized. This enables him to claim continuity in his gender identity. He was always male, but because he was born with a female body this went unrecognized. Certainly, in his social interactions he has, since birth, been perceived as female. His maleness went unnoticed by those around him, and himself, until he reached his late thirties. And again, as we saw in Chapter Five, he draws on the psychoanalytic concept 'repression' to account for the delay in transitioning to his 'true' gender. But, the discursive position 'being the same person' problematically assumes that his self-concept is immune to social and cultural factors, not to mention the effects of his day-to-day interactions and relations with others. Yet, shifts in subjectivity cannot simply be unidirectional. The individual cannot be assumed to be some pre-conceived given, immune to fluctuations in the external world as this problematically sets up the dualist construct of individual/society that poststructuralist theorist have attempted to dismantle. Rather, as Nikolas Rose suggests "the self is produced in the practicing of it" (Rose, 1998: 192). Undoubtedly, these practices of self can never be disengaged from changes in embodied experience.

6.1 (ii) Being a *new* person

Whilst 'being the same person' was a readily available discursive position within many of the participants' accounts, some participants, particularly the MtF respondents, drew upon an alternative and contrasting position - 'being a new person'. Inherent within this construction is an underlying notion that depicts a radical shift in personhood. As Caroline describes:

...I can't remember the week before I changed over but I can remember the first week, every day of the first week, after I changed over and I just remember the fact that all of a sudden *I'm a new person*...(Caroline, MtF, 29, 1/158-160).

In a later interview, when discussing her relationship with her family, Caroline again draws on the notion of being a new person:

...I'd rather just tell people I'm an orphan or, you know, my parents are dead because they are as good as (.). They never come and see me, they never, they're not there for me, they don't do the parent thing any more and they never were very good at that anyway so (..) and they don't accept the fact that I've got a life and *I'm a new person now*. They just ignore the fact that I just, the person I was is the person they remember and that person is dead and they won't even grieve which is part of the process of coming to terms with having somebody who is transsexual in the family. So you've got to grieve a little bit because the person you knew, right, never really existed like that, it was all an act and the person they knew is gone, is dead, will never be seen again, umm and they can't, they just can't be bothered to get to know me as I am now and that does hurt, it winds me up a bit umm (.....) (Caroline, MtF, 29, 3/917-927).

Within this extract we can see how Caroline's construction of herself as a new person is undermined by her problematic relationship with her parents. Her parents' apparent resistance to her new female identity is self-threatening and hurtful, and thus, she avoids contact with them. As we shall see later, continuity in social relations is an important factor in both affirming and disavowing a successful transition. In this case, Caroline avoids familial relations, preferring to "tell people I'm an orphan", as her parents, quite understandably, have had difficulties in coming to terms with their son's gender reassignment. Whilst her parents' feelings are not unusual, their inability to relate to Caroline as a woman, as their daughter, erodes her own certainty in her new gender role. Her inescapable male past, as a son and as a brother, is re-invoked in the course of family relations.

As I have already suggested, the notion of being a new person was more commonly found in the interview scripts of the MtF participants. However, two FtM participants also draw upon a similar idea of a perceived shift in personhood. For example, when discussing the current legal status of his birth certificate, Albert infers a split between two distinct states of being - who he originally was and who he is today:

...the Corbett case right brought about a situation where I had a birth certificate - still have a birth certificate - which is an absolutely worthless scrap scrap of paper as far as identification is concerned. It does not reflect who I am, it never has and it never bloody will. It may have appeared to apply to who I am originally but it was only in appearance, it was not in fact, it has absolutely nothing, nothing remotely to do with who I am today (Albert, FtM, 59, 3/833-838).

This account is slightly more tricky than the one provided by Caroline as the distinction made by Albert between an old self and a new self is not as clear cut. Albert's old self is conceived in terms of an 'appearance' rather than a 'fact'. However, whilst Caroline also described her old self as an 'act', there was a greater acknowledgement within her account of having *been* this person. In contrast, Albert's partial refusal of an old self enables him to construct a sense of continuity in his gender identity. The female birth certificate may have "appeared to apply to who I am", but it "does not reflect who I am, it never has". Thus, Albert, in contrast to Caroline's subsequent attempt to eradicate her old self, who is "gone, is dead, will never be seen again", implicitly claims that he was always male.

In a second example from the FtM participants, Ruben, when describing how he came to choose his name, also attempts to distinguish his current self-perception from a notion of him in the past:

K: and how did you come to choose Ruben?

R:...I wanted something that was totally different from my name before. It's like some people, like Nicola, they would have shortened it to Nick (K: yeah) you know, what I mean? But, I wanted something that was totally different so people wouldn't be able to sort of connect it to me from the past (K: right) so that's why I chose that (Ruben, FtM, 19, 3/357, 361-365).

Here, Ruben is seeking a radical shift in his sense of selfhood. As he quite rightly states, many transsexuals employ either the female or male version of their birth name after transitioning. However, Ruben would prefer to have no continuity in selfhood, no reference to his previous embodied being, incorporated in his name. Thus, whilst 'being the same person' negates shifts in embodied subjectivity, claiming to be a 'new person', with no recollection of self prior to transition, negates any continuity in self. The notion of 'becoming a new person' initially appears to be very liberating but, contentiously, it feeds into many of the medical discourses that used to require transsexuals to deny

having a differently gendered past. And, as we have already seen in Chapter Five, this is problematic for making the transsexual a subject as it erases transsexual subjectivity.

6.2 Seeing me differently: Affirmation and disavowal of gender identity through social relationships

Within many of the participants' accounts there was a profound need for affirmation of their new gender identity and, at the same time, examples of its frequent undermining by the reactions of past acquaintances. In the playful novel *Identity*, Milan Kundera suggests that the sole meaning of friendships is its indispensable role for the proper function of memory. He offers a somewhat cynical, and not entirely valid, interpretation of friendship as singularly facilitating the pampering of our narcissistic tendencies. Friends, he states, "are our mirror; our memory; we ask nothing of them but that they polish the mirror from time to time so we can look at ourselves in it" (1999: 43). While friendships, in my view, also serve many other purposes, the recounting of past stories with long term confidants does allow us to reflect on both where we've been and where we are going; it permits a certain degree of self-reflection and self-knowledge. What happens then to this process of self-reflection after a radical shift in self-identity? How does it feel when the mirror that is held up by friends or family members reflects a distorted, threatening image of a gendered self that the subject has been trying to shake off? Perhaps, the effect explains much of the discontinuity expressed in some of the transsexual participants' rhetoric around social relations. As we saw earlier, Caroline prefers to present herself as an orphan rather than to risk invoking an identity crisis through on-going problematic familial relations. Yet, there is also an expressed need for continuity in social relationships in order to provide affirmation for their decision to undergo gender reassignment: if family, friends, or colleagues assimilate the participant's gender shift this confirms that it was their 'true' gender all along. As Jason describes:

K: mm did you er confide in anybody when you first started thinking about transitioning?

J: well obviously my psychotherapist and I discussed it (h) (K: yeah) umm (..) the first person I told was a a close friend in Scotland who I've known for a number of years and er it's interesting, she's training to be a psychotherapist and a rare sort of being and she wasn't at all surprised and er she had recognized that in me, as other people were, subsequently said

they recognized that that in me, but had not formalized it into anything (Jason, FtM, 39, 3/98-104).

Thus, whilst Jason claims to have discovered his 'true' male identity in psychotherapy (see Chapter Five), the truth of this identification is apparently confirmed by the reactions of his friends. Moreover, for him, drawing attention to his friend's occupational status as a training psychotherapist enhances the validity of her acknowledgement. But, at the same time, attempting to maintain relationships with those people known prior to transition can raise anxieties about *how* they perceive you. As Karen so painfully describes:

KJ: How is your relationship with your parents now?

K:...my Dad, I can't help but get the feeling that he still regards me as male and that so umm so that's the problem really why I don't see them very often. It makes me uncomfortable and and and my parents occasionally both of them occasionally kind of use wrong pronouns or wrong name and that really upsets me and I just don't like it at all. I I don't say anything to them because I I just don't think its a nice thing to do. I mean they miss, you know, it would be very selfish and arrogant of me to not not to recognize that it's very difficult. It was very very difficult and traumatic for them and if I were to be (..) I don't know, kind of fascist about it I don't know that it's kind of my place to do that umm, but they, but umm and I would never correct them because it would make them uncomfortable and it would upset them and I can't see the point in doing it. I I don't want to hurt them umm and I don't want to be difficult umm and so, but but if they do do it as they, and it occurs less and less but it happens occasionally and just the way my Dad talks to me, relates to me, I feel uncomfortable with, so I don't go and see them very often because particularly when they say the wrong things about (.) I don't know, it makes me feel awful though. It just kind of takes away that of myself and it strips my confidence and it, I don't know, I kind of feel winded how they just (...) It really upsets me and so I don't go and see them for that reason, that I, you know, it's traumatic for me (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/601-618).

Hence, in a similar but more fully explicated fashion than Caroline, Karen narrates her fragile relationship with her parents, and her father in particular. Karen is more than aware of the difficulties her parents have had in coming to terms with her transition and is sympathetic to their confusion. But, her parents inability to embrace her as a daughter, as a woman, exemplified through their sometimes failure to use the correct pronoun is very painful for Karen. Consequently, the differently gendered past that she so desperately tries to escape by refusing to identify as transsexual or by disclosing her gender history comes crashing in. Their failure to recognize her as a woman does not just take away a part or a bit of herself, "it takes away *that* of myself". It eradicates her sense

of her self. Thus, not only, as Prosser (1998) has claimed (see Chapter Five), does identifying as transsexual undo the realness of the desired gender identity, the unravelling of the realness of a new gender identity also occurs when friends and loved ones fail to recognize the desired changes that have been made by the transsexual subject.

Perhaps the most distinctive example of how a new gender identity may be affirmed through social relations can be found in a recent publication by Will Self and David Gamble (2000). In *Perfidious Man*, Will Self deliberates upon one of gender theory's most pressing concerns of the moment: "this vexed question of masculinity, of what it is to be a man" (2000: 6). Embroiled in his own existential crisis, Self sets out in search of the elusive answers. He begins with a brutal, and often amusing, account of his maligned father, who seemingly offered "an inadequate specimen of manhood" (2000: 5). Finding no answers there, Self turns to one of the most perceptive points in this short essay - the insight that gender only becomes a conundrum when it is questioned. As Self states, he may feel ambivalent about what being a man means, but his own gender identity has neither been endorsed, nor disputed. Rather, it has always been accepted by those around him as a given (2000: 8). Thus, Self suggests that "[I]f I could talk to a person who, against all odds, had won through to proclaim themselves a man, then perhaps I'd find myself a little closer to knowing what it was to be one?" (2000: 8)

The rest of the book narrates the story of Stephen Whittle, a female-to-male transsexual, academic, leading political campaigner for *Press for Change*, founding member of the *FTM Network*, loving partner of Sarah and father of four. Stephen Whittle is often endorsed as an inspiration, by those who meet him and now, via this book, he will also be to those who have not had the pleasure. His story charts a determined, brave journey through gender confusion, and is not dissimilar from that of any of the other FtM participants' who took part in this research project. As such, there are also aspects of Whittle's account that I find problematic. His reliance upon biology as an explanation for transsexualism is, at once, understandable and disappointing. Despite his erudition in queer theory and feminist politics, Stephen Whittle is still a transsexual man, seeking the same legal rights as other men - particularly to be recognized in a legal sense as the father of his four children. And, in the current climate, the power of biological explanations for complex phenomena is not in their accuracy, but in their ability to appeal to the sympathies of the majority. Thus, Stephen Whittle's story often exemplified the same

type of discourses, discursive constructions and positions that were found throughout the interview scripts of the FtM participants who partook in this research. But, of most interest in Self's deliberations on the nature of masculinity is his conclusion that what makes Stephen a man is his *relationship to his family*:

Wherein does his masculinity consist? In all of him: in his appearance, his demeanour, his manner of expressing himself -- in his very quiddity; his quality of this-is-Stepheness. But still more importantly -- and this is why I've written about the family at all -- his manhood resides in his relationships with it, as a partner, as a father, as a patriarch. These aspects of Stephen's masculinity are far more important to me than whether he's big or small, bearded or clean shaven, let alone what kind of genitals he has (Self & Gamble, 2000: 14).

So, for Will Self, in the style of Judith Butler, his own existential anxieties seem to be answered by deciding that gender is a performance after all. Again, we see the disappearance of the body (despite its vivid significance in Self's memories of his father) and of the importance of physical markers that distinguish between the two sexes. In his conclusion, the penis is seen as the least important aspect of being a man. This is somewhat ironic, given his recollection of his father: who "pissed like a horse"; who's "penis was stubby and circumcised"; who's competitive drive made him feel "tiny-dicked, [how] unmanned" (2000: 3). Moreover, if Stephen Whittle, or any of the other FtM participants, had been born with a penis their maleness would never have been questioned. Instead, Self sees the crux of Stephen's maleness in the fact that Stephen's partner Sarah relates to him as a man. Thus, Stephen's maleness is evidenced by the fact that Self can assimilate Stephen and Sarah's relationship into an idealized configuration of a heterosexual relationship. Stephen provides a desirable model of masculinity - a caring, sharing, and present partner, provider and father. Stephen offers a model of masculinity that was absent in Self's own life, a model of fatherhood that Self might want to aspire to, rather than the disappointing and frustrating one provided by his own father. But, is this a compelling answer to Self's question of what it means to be a man? Certainly not. Stephen Whittle does not, after all, even claim to *be* a man. All it tells us is that to be a *better* man, a different kind of a guy, men's formative years should perhaps have been spent struggling with an uncomfortable female gender identity. As Stephen Whittle states:

And I think one of the things I've learnt through being a transsexual man, is that transsexual men, we've worked very hard to provide an alternative

model of masculinity, because we've inculcated those sorts of values, an awful lot of us have come out of the lesbian/feminist community; if nothing else, we sat and we discussed this *ad infinitum*: what were better values (Self & Gamble, 2000: 93).

6.3 Becoming a *different* kind of a guy

In a similar fashion, it was not uncommon for many of the FtM participants to construct their past gender history as giving them an insight into being a different, or better kind of a guy. As Sam describes:

...I (.) for me I will I will never be a stereotypical man. You can't go through that process and see things from the other side and all that kind of stuff and it not make you different somehow, but I consider a lot of that and given that it's now finished, and I'm very glad it's finished, it eh, what is left to me is actually a a positive difference umm it might have been a negative experience at the time, but what it's given me now is something which I consider to be positive and useful (..) umm (.....) (Sam, FtM, 32, 2/444-449).

So, although when Sam was living and being perceived as a woman his experiences felt 'negative', now that he has transitioned he is able to reflect upon his experiences of being female and reconstruct them as positive. Neil expresses similar sentiments when also rejecting stereotypical notions of manhood and macho behaviour:

...It can be quite uncomfortable if you get someone come along (to FTM London) who's (.) very macho (.) you know, macho in their posture and stuff or, you know, very straight, you know, in the sort of pure sense of the word and that's really, I don't like that in the same way that I don't really like coming across it in my everyday life actually, you know, I don't like it in sort of (..) you know (.) bio-boys as they call it any more than I like it in TS guys. Really it's more annoying in TS guys because you kind of think well, you know, you had a different experience. It's very boring to have gone through all that and turned out like some jerk that you'd find on any street corner. It seems a waste (Neil, FtM, 35, 3/597-604).

As Neil suggests, "it seems a waste" to have experienced one side of the gender divide and not use these experiences or insights to construct a better form of masculinity. Parallels can be drawn here to Judith Halberstam's argument that alternative forms of masculinity, female masculinity in particular, can subvert aspects of 'dominant masculinity' and thus de-naturalize the relationship between maleness and power

(Halberstam, 1998: 2). In stark contradiction to the belief that manhood is an inherent given, as the biological discourses employed by many of the participants (see Chapter Five) imply, the quest for an appropriate model of masculinity, coupled with the possibility of undermining dominant oppressive forms of masculinity via the creation of new variants, indicates the socially constructed nature of gender. Many of these FtM participants, in light of their female experiences, were embroiled in this process of gender construction as they sought out ways of being male that did not offend women. As Jason describes:

...one thing that umm (.....) which I suppose yes is is advantageous is that having seen what it's like to be in treated in a female role does give you an insight...but on the flip side, is wanting to to be able to display your masculinity but without making it sound if it's derogatory against women. No I wouldn't want to be taken as female but it's not (.....) (K: yeah?) to say female is a bad thing (K: right) and umm you do draw yourself up short about how, how you do you put it more carefully? About how you do display your masculinity so that it isn't seen to offend, but also that you don't go OTT that you don't try and put on a sort of masculinity cloak that um isn't yours (K: mm) in order just so that you make sure people take you as male (K: yeah) and I hope I don't. It would be interesting to to hear your opinion on how I'm coming over in terms of what you perceive masculinity to be umm (.....) and also in terms of, you know, getting a balanced attitude about people (K: mm) I say not not hooking up to an attitude that that will somehow make me feel better which is which is an attitude that really fits with me (....)

K: sorry can you say that last bit again?

J: (hh) well it's it's really you know say this cloak of masculine behaviour which some umm I have seen in a couple of transgender chaps put on I think cloaks of masculinity which aren't theirs purely you know (sighs) There is one chap who turned round and said umm I said I can't believe you said that, to his partner he said something oh it's it, you know, women nag nag nag sort of thing (hhh) you know guy's joke. How can he say that? I wouldn't ever want to be like that, just to try and fit into this male, you know, stereotypical behaviour. So I'd be interested to know if you think I'm going down that path but also saying how would you see my masculinity? (Jason, FtM, 39, 2/540-556).

Given his previous gender experience of living as a female, in this extract we see Jason stumbling between wanting to be masculine enough to be perceived as male and a desire not to offend women. Thus, his past experience that undoubtedly involved an awareness of sexist behaviour, gender inequality, and the power differentials between men and women, causes him concern - particularly for how he is now manifesting as a man. There appears to be an implicit belief within many of the FtM participants' accounts that to be

male is not necessarily a valiant thing. Constructing an alternative form of masculinity may have the potential to prise apart the profound relationship between masculinity and maleness (Halberstam, 1998). Yet, those aspects of dominant masculinity that the FtM transsexual might want to resist are precisely those cultural and material signifiers of maleness. This leaves the FtM transsexual in somewhat of a quandary. Thus, Jason is seeking confirmation from me, the interviewer, on two levels. Firstly, affirmation that he is successfully materializing and passing as male. And, more interestingly, that he is manifesting as an acceptable kind of guy - one who does not offend any feminist principles that I, and he, may value.

6.4 Who would want to be a man anyway?

The theme that to be a man or masculine was not necessarily a desirable thing was also, if less surprisingly, clearly apparent in the accounts of the MtF participants. As Karen describes:

...I find kind of masculine traits very alienating umm and I just think they're bad I mean I find them bad to deal with in myself. I find them bad to deal with kind of and I find they are hard to relate to, but also on a wider social level I just think they are bad things. *They make nasty aggressive people and selfish people* and I was going to say *all men are selfish* umm but they're not generally but those traits I find bad things they are negative qualities (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/315-320).

Given that masculinity is a trait traditionally ascribed to men, it would appear that it is men who make "nasty aggressive people and selfish people". However, Karen who would emphatically deny a male identity, also finds these traits difficult "to deal with in myself". Thus, this would suggest that Karen has either been marked in some fashion by her experience of being born male, or that masculine traits are free floating and not necessarily bound to a male identity. In contrast, Sarah describes how to be a man specifically entails manifesting as these masculine traits - to be competitive and aggressive, aspects that she felt she could never achieve:

K: what do you think it means to be a man?

S: (.....) ooh er competitiveness urm aggression (..) all the horrible qualities that that (...) seem to seemed to be placed on being being male. To appear, you have to appear successful and I I just don't care anymore. I'm

just like happy to be me. I know, I know it sounds really sort of like boring to keep saying I'm happy to be me but (..) when I was male I hated the competitive nature of the way you had to behave. I hated that you had to appear strong and competitive aggressive and it was like it just use to tire me out and I just couldn't do it (K: mm) umm probably one of the reasons I changed because I I don't have to be aggressive or competitive if I don't want to be. I can be quite quite chilled and passive but (...) I just don't like this macho nature that (..) that you have that you have to carry around with you to be to be man to be male so I don't (K: mmm) I don't think I ever did that in originally any way (Sarah, MtF, 37, 2/339-348).

In this extract, we see again how competitiveness and aggression are constructed as inherent traits of manhood. Yet, these are not singularly fixed to a male identity. Sarah notes that she can still be competitive or aggressive if she wants to. But, there is now more flexibility because she can also be "chilled and passive": a way of being that felt impossible and undesirable when she lived as a man. In another context, this extract might give some insight into the unconscious processes that eventually led Sarah to gender reassignment. Perhaps, a life-long sense of failure to live up to the image she held of what it meant to be a man - to be strong, to be aggressive, to be successful - are all represented as reasons for her transition. However, for others, there was a point blank refusal to even engage with questions about manhood. As Caroline illustrates:

K: ok all right what do you think it means to be a man?

C: a sad existence umm I don't know I've never been one (K: ok) umm no let's think about it (....) I don't know it's like me asking you that question umm I've only grown up amongst them (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/483-485).

Here, Caroline reinforces a female identity by identifying herself with me. It appears that to acknowledge even stereotypical conceptions of what she, and all of us, may think it means to be a man might imply that she had actually been one. Thus, she completely refused to engage with the question. In a similar, but slightly more self-reflexive tone, Emily also resisted answering questions about being a man or being masculine:

K: what do you think it means to be a man?

E: No. I think that's probably a bit too close really. I can't (..) I mean I umm I'm not sure whether it's, whether it's something I don't particularly want to think about, because it it touches too many nerves in me, or whether it's something that I'm not actually sure of (....) umm (.....)(Emily, MtF, 33, 2/500-505).

For Emily, to even consider the notion of manhood was too identity threatening: “It touches too many nerves”. Thus, it appeared that many of the questions that focused upon the meanings of particular gender manifestations were raising complex anxieties in these transsexual participants.

6.5 The defended subject and the impact of intersubjective gender relations within the interview setting

As we saw in Chapter Four, Wendy Hollway (1989) suggested the psychoanalytic concepts such as ‘splitting’ and ‘projection’ can be used to explain why subjects position themselves within certain discourses. Her subsequent book, co-authored with Tony Jefferson (2000), reiterates the notion that the self is, partly, forged from unconscious defenses against anxiety. Furthermore, they suggest that illuminating the way conflict and suffering impact upon the psyche will enable us to ascertain why individuals invest in particular discourses, rather than others. This premise forms the crux of their theory of the *defended subject* (see Chapter Four for further discussion). In this section I draw upon Hollway and Jefferson’s notion of the defended subject to account for the pervasive use of both the discursive construct ‘being me’ found in some of the participants’ responses to questions about gender identity, and the pattern of discursive positionings already presented.

6.5 (i) Being me

‘Being me’ emerged as a powerful linguistic tool for avoiding questions pertaining to gender identity that appeared to require some form of justification for changes in selfhood. This was generally employed far more in the accounts of the MtF participants and the accounts of those FtM participants who strongly resisted identifying as transsexual and rejected any notion of having a differently gendered past. Predominantly, this phrase was elicited in response to questions such as ‘what do you think it means to be a woman or man? Or what does it mean to be feminine or masculine? For example, Sarah responded:

...I'm just me. I'm not I'm not anything I'm trying to be or anything I'm not trying to be. I'm just me (Sarah, MtF, pre-op, 37, 2/284).

These questions are in all likelihood anxiety provoking, particularly for the MtF participants, when asked by me, someone who they may see as a 'real' woman and who may (but of course does not) know the answers to questions about womanhood. For example, in the following extract, I was surprised when Caroline turned the question "what does it mean to be a woman?" back on me:

K: right er (..) ok now the gender questions, these may seem quite difficult so if you can't answer them don't worry about it. Er, what do you think it means to be a woman?

C: OK. What do you think it means to be a woman?

K: what do I think? (C: yeah). It's a bit umm (C: that's it) This is what I'm saying because people go (..) I mean I've asked this question of lots of women and everybody goes umm (C: nobody knows. I don't know). But this is it. It's like, but what does it mean to you then to be a woman? (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/357-362)

Here, Caroline immediately turns the question around. I had hoped that by suggesting that these types of questions were often difficult to answer that I would allay some of the participants' concerns. However, this was clearly not the case here. In retrospect, after re-reading this extract, it is possible that Caroline was misled by my initial comment "these may seem quite difficult so if you can't answer them don't worry about it" - a failed attempt to put her at ease. Rather, it is possible she felt that I was challenging her female identity: that she might not be able to answer the question because she was not a 'real' woman. Somewhat stunned by becoming the focus of the interview I rather ineffectively stumble my way through the next few lines. I must have at some level been conscious that I had caused offence, however unintentional. Thus, in the next few sentences I attempt to include Caroline again within the impossibility of knowing what it means to be a woman. Once I have suggested that many women find this question difficult, she happily continues and provides an answer to a variation of the same question:

K:...what does it mean to you then to be a woman?

C: (.....) that is such a difficult question umm (..) to be quite honest I don't know. I just don't know what it is, what I could use to define you you know what it is to be a woman. It's probably something stupid like, you know, pee properly or something er or (..) I don't know. I think it's probably a lot of, because mentally I always was anyway so, but physically I think it's, to me being a woman it's the ultimate freedom. Because if I go into women's changing rooms and get changed and there is no one who bats an eyelid

right and (...) this might sound crazy but it's one of those things people take for granted but all of a sudden I can do it. So yeah, I suppose it's something like that using women's changing rooms and trying on clothes when you are out shopping ... (...) what is it to be a woman? I don't know. I don't know (K: ok) It would be easier to (inaudible) (K: sorry?) It would be easier to bottle happiness I think than to find out (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/362-374).

So, in this extract, we can see that Caroline's defensive anxieties are somewhat relinquished. It is now acceptable for her to not know what it means to be a woman. At the same time, she also reinstates her claim to a female identity by suggesting that "mentally I always was". And, she continues by suggesting that 'to be woman' is to pass, or be accepted unquestionably as female in the public physical display of women's changing rooms. In a similar vein, for those FtM participants who clung on ferociously to a male identity, yet positioned themselves within biological discourses such as having been born with a medical condition or birth defect, perhaps the idea of not knowing what 'being a man' meant was equally threatening. In the following extract, Richard attempts to resist all forms of gender identification:

...I don't think that I am transsexual umm (K: uhum) because I'm just now the way that I was if you know what I mean? But, it's like I don't see myself as being a man but I'm not a woman and the important thing was not to be perceived the whole time as female and as a woman. I am male but I wouldn't say that I was necessarily a man umm I don't really know why I say that because when people say that I'm a man I don't really give a shit. It it's that's fine. It's like a compliment but I don't actually set out to be a man. I'm just myself (Richard, 24, FtM, 2/16-21).

In this extract, Richard doesn't see himself as transsexual, because he feels he hasn't changed, "I'm just now the way I was". But, in an attempt to avoid claiming to be either a man or a woman, the only position left for Richard is the assertion that "I'm just myself". However, like those MtF participants who situated themselves within the discursive position of 'being me', 'being myself' implies that Richard is beyond the gender system - which, of course, he is not because he also claims to be male. Thus, a complicated linguistic game ensues that implies to be male is somehow different to being a man.

Thus, like Hollway & Jefferson (2000), I propose that 'being me', and phrases of its ilk, are used defensively to parry away questions that are anxiety provoking and challenging for those who have negotiated substantial shifts in gender identifications. This

interpretation led me to reflect upon how other discursive positions discussed so far in this chapter could have emerged from inter-subjective gender relations within the interview setting. Suddenly, the idea that the FtM participants should attempt to construct their past female gender experiences as insightful and enlightening in terms of ‘being a different kind of a guy’, made sense in light of my own female gender identity. Perhaps, they did not want to offend me, given that many of them shared a similar history to me having been informed by feminist politics, and having close affiliations with the lesbian community. Perhaps, if the MtF participants had spoken with a male interviewer their constructions of what it meant to be female may have been less defensive. The impact of gender relations within the interview setting are a well-known influencing factor (see Oakley, 1981; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and undoubtedly, the responses elicited here would not be immune to my own gender manifestation.

6.6 Accounting for shifts in gendered embodiment

Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) methodological approach provides a valuable way for theorizing subjectivity by attempting to account for why certain individuals position themselves within particular discourses and why they may be reluctant to give up these positions. It does not, however, make any specific methodological contribution to theorizing embodied subjectivity. Here, in order to begin the task of theorizing transsexual embodied subjectivity, I return to the recommendation made by Thomas J. Csordas (1998, see Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion). Csordas proposed researching from an embodiment standpoint which entails bringing an attention to ‘bodiliness to method’ in order to research the notion of being-in-the-world. Thus, embodiment is not simply about ‘the body’. As Alan Radley suggests “embodiment is also about social worlds, not just those which are material and extant, but also those that are ephemeral and possible” (1998: 14). Accordingly, in this section, I introduce four means for accounting for the way in which a dramatic change in corporeality affects embodied subjectivity.

6.6 (i) Bodies in transition

Emily, exemplifies the notion of bodies in transition by describing the often fraught early stages of transitioning, where:

E:...despite the fact you think you know where you're going umm you're just a fish out of water. You know, it's men in skirts, it really is men in skirts. It's bad drag, men in skirts umm (...) yeah it's grim (...) (h) it's really grim. Yeah, it's nasty, you know, sort of like big caked on make-up to try to hide a beard (Emily, MtF, 33, 1/182-186).

But, aided by the ingestion of hormones and the learning of cultural practices of embodiment for the new gender identity, the transsexual individual is able to move closer to embodying their female or male ideal. As Caroline describes, often there are remarkable changes in the transsexual people's fleshy physicality, which do not simply impact upon how the body is perceived, but also affect how the transsexual participant experiences her or himself as an embodied subject:

...my body feels right now and I don't have any concept of what it was like when it felt wrong. umm. It's sort of like this is me. I can't remember what I was before. I know I was something but I can't remember what it was like umm I mean the physically the changes have been immense umm (..) *and they're still going on*. I mean I'm still changing as a person umm I'm still coming to terms with my body the way it is umm (.) I like my body I'm quite happy with it (.) mark two (hh), (Caroline, MtF, 29, 3/608-614).

In the first line of this extract Caroline draws upon a Cartesian dualist discourse to construct the body as separate from the self, from the I. As she states: "my body feels right now and I don't have any concept of what it was like when it felt wrong". However, this must be due, at least in part, to the inherently dualistic nature of language. To speak of 'the body' immediately invokes a Cartesian dualist discourse that sets the body up as an observable entity in opposition to the self. Despite this, when she states "[I]t's sort of like this is me. I can't remember what I was like before", Caroline is able to construct a degree of embodied self, of satisfaction with her embodied being. Moreover, Caroline also refers to the ongoing process of transition - surgery results in a prominent change in body morphology but the daily intake of oestrogen has an ongoing effect of feminizing the male body over the life span. Yet, this transition, or ongoing process of change, is not only related to the body. As Caroline suggests, "I'm still changing as a person". Thus, we get a real sense of transsexual embodied subjectivity as an interactive and mutable

process, bound up with shifts in corporeality. It is as if with the passing of the years the male-to-female transsexual becomes more and more female.

6.6 (ii) Cultural practices of gendered embodiment

But, in order to become male or female, the transsexual subject also has to re-learn gender specific cultural practices of embodiment. Richard, a gay FtM participant, describes this process of needing to learn to enact the bodily practices of the new gender as one of the reasons why he goes cruising:

...one reason I go cruising it's a really really good way to to learn about men and about men's body language and how to understand sort of the subtleties of male body language (K: uhum) and I've learnt a lot through doing that. I mean you could say yes so now I've learnt everything I should stop but you know hey (h) (Richard, FtM, 24, 1/312-324).

Thus, observing and attempting to mimic the 'body language', the actions, gestures and postures of the men he meets whilst cruising provides Richard with a model of male embodiment to aspire to. Echoing these sentiments, Caroline also draws attention to the notion of gendered embodiment as a learnt cultural practice:

...Genetic females get taught from the moment they're born, you know, you dress boys in blue and girls in pink (.) They get trained for this this job which is being a woman and (...) all right, there's all the stereotypes and all that crap which I don't hold, but umm it does make you into a different person to boys and it's like (.) I had a female brain but a male upbringing and a male body and that hurts. That hurts. It's like the upbringing you take for granted, I don't know if you can sew or knit or anything, but where I grew up in Wales everyone either sewed or knitted. I got taught none of that and it's only after I changed over that all of a sudden I had to start learning it (Caroline, MtF, 29, 1/167-174).

Whilst Caroline claims to not hold stereotypical notions of what it means to be a woman, inevitably, like all of us, she does. This is demonstrated by her referral to an upbringing that did not provide her with what are traditionally seen as female skills. And, I might add, abilities that are certainly not within my repertoire. But, what this extract successfully illustrates is that despite Caroline's claim to have a female brain, the manifestation of a gender identity is formulated through an ability to imbue cultural practices of gendered embodiment. Whether these practices reinforce particular social roles or modes of physical deportment, girls "get trained for this job which is being a

woman...I got taught none of that and it's only after I changed over that all of a sudden I had to start learning it". Thus, comparing these extracts to those we saw in Chapter Five, we see evidence of a distinction between conceptions of gender identity and gendered being. Whilst these participants might claim that their gender identity is innate, or biologically determined, their ability to *be* this gender certainly is not.

6.6 (iii) Body as trace

Physical intervention via hormones and radical surgery coupled with the learning of cultural practices of gender embodiment promise to lead the transsexual into a newly found sense of embodied gendered subjectivity. Yet, the body is not completely malleable and there is always the risk for some transsexuals of never attaining their ideal. In the following extract Neil describes how he has not yet reached the privileged position of being able to pass as male:

K: right when did you start the hormones?

N: I started the hormones on, I think it was April the tenth last year, umm which was pretty initiatory as well. That was quite umm an amazing experience actually (.) umm (.) so I see myself as er being on hormones for a year and that's given me some good changes, but I I know that I'm still perceived as very in-between (.) That's something that a lot of people don't really like to admit very freely and I I feel don't always like to either, you know, like in the context of the (support) group (K: mm) umm (.) You know people aren't always that, people don't really like to mention too much when they don't pass. They don't seem to really talk about weird situations that happen because people can't quite tell what's going on (.) partly because it's upsetting (K: mm) you know it's sort of dislocating (Neil, FtM, 35, 3/109-117).

Only a year into transition, there is every chance that as the hormones begin to mark Neil's body, he will, one day, be able to pass as male. Currently his physicality is perceived as "very in-between", a body in transition, indicative of the transsexual's ongoing process of attempting to successfully appear as male or female. However, this point raises the important issue that 'passing' is a privilege and not all transsexuals achieve this status. As Stephen Whittle recounts:

...I became incredibly aware that passing was a great privilege. It was a privilege afforded to a few of us ... and most of my community, most of the people I loved, enjoyed the company of, could have the same crack with -- just didn't have that privilege (Self & Gamble, 2000: 64).

This is particularly the case for MtF transsexuals as the effects of testosterone on the male body are not always easy to erase. As Cheryl, a pre-operative MtF transsexual describes:

...I've always hated my body (K: right) I've always been uncomfortable with it because it's it's by and large a male body and *there's bits of it that I can't change and no hormones or surgery can change and I hate those bits* umm and I I'm more comfortable with it now because it's changed ever so slightly (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 3/521-524).

There is a profound distinction between the MtF and the FtM transsexual's ability to pass. For the MtF transsexual, the most pressing need is to undo the dramatic and, to them, ravaging effects that testosterone has upon their body over the years. Whilst changes imbued by oestrogen are more easily reversible, the effects of testosterone upon hair growth and voice are not. Thus, for the MtF a broken voice at puberty, the development of an Adam's apple and the thickening and coarsening of body hair present huge obstacles to overcome in order to pass as female. In contrast, for the FtM transsexual, the effects of testosterone in masculinizing their body can be dramatic. Within weeks their voice drops, muscles begin to thicken, even facial structure becomes squarer. Within a few years, most will have noticeable body and facial hair and even receding hairline patterns. Hence, for FtM transsexuals, passing is frequently more obtainable - at worse, they will be perceived as short men, or very much younger than their years. However, whilst passing in day-to-day interactions is often achievable, there is by no means the same degree of success in genital reconstruction surgery for the FtM transsexual. Vaginoplasty, the creation of a neo-vagina, is now a well-established technique for MtF transsexuals. Moreover, all the post-operative MtF transsexuals in this study reported both a high degree of satisfaction with their surgical results and the ability to orgasm. As Kate Bornstein quipped on the *Geraldo Rivera* show in response an audience member's question:

"Can you orgasm with that vagina?"

"Yah, the plumbing works and so does the electricity"

(Bornstein, 1994: 31)

In contrast, for FtM transsexuals, phalloplasty offers very poor results. The most recent surgical development, known as the *radial-forearm technique*, involves grafting a large

chunk of skin from the inner forearm and splicing it to the pelvic region. This is a very complicated procedure as the skin needs to remain constantly attached to a blood supply and it leaves horrific scarring on the arm. This scarring is exchanged for a penis like construction that enables the FtM transsexual to pee standing up and can be stiffened for sexual intercourse with the use of an implant that resembles a pipe cleaner. The surgical procedure is hugely expensive, rarely obtainable on the NHS, and fraught with side effects, which include urinary problems and damage to sexual sensation. Hence, not surprisingly, few FtM transsexuals opt for phalloplasty. However, this leaves the transman in the incongruous position of attempting to be a man with a vagina. As Jason states:

...so you've got this anger which umm you have to deal with umm (..) you *you're left with this sort of body that still isn't quite as it should have been* (Jason, FtM, 39, 2/54-56).

This is particularly difficult for negotiating sexual relationships. Even if the transsexual man is able to pass as male in every other situation, when embarking upon a new sexual relationship his transsexual status, exemplified through the lack of a functioning penis, will become a contentious issue. As Jason describes:

...sometimes you can be a bit a bit ultra sensitive about things really, sometimes you get a bit mixed up when you think of the past and you feel excluded (K: mm) a bit extra sensitive around some things (K: mm) (....)

K: so it doesn't go away

J: no you can't you can't make it go away you can never free yourself completely from it...the issues of if you do go into any relationship at some point you're going to have to say something. You can't not, it's the one time when it has to be relevant and er you know sort of when is the right time and all the issues around that and that can get you get you feeling low and as if going into a relationship isn't fraught enough (Jason, FtM, 39, 3/427-433, 440-444).

This extract supports the proposal that transsexuals can never be simply men or women. They are never free from being transsexual. When Jason thinks of his past, those aspects of gender history that he does not have, and when he wants to embark upon a sexual relationship, any sense that he has of himself as a man is unravelled. Thus, it is not simply biology, or being 'born in the wrong body', that undermines the transsexual subject's gender identity. It is also their history, a history spent as a differently embodied being. As Sally describes:

...Somebody who who is transsexual will have had gender dysphoria and then will start presenting at some point in their life as female. The earlier you do it the better (...) the the less history you have as, you know, as a genetic man with a sort of male history and male work patterns and and the acceptance of male privilege, you know the better it is to (.) umm to live as a woman (Sally, MtF, 35, 2/102-106).

The earlier a MtF transsexual begins transitioning the better. The better able they are to pass as female. This is not only to escape the masculinizing effects of testosterone that become more difficult to reverse the older the man is. But also to rid oneself of the cultural practices that inscribe an increasing indelible sense of gendered being.

6.6 (iv) Cultural practices of embodiment as trace

In the following extract, Emily explicitly refers to attempts made to shake off cultural practices of male embodiment that have become entrenched over many years of living as a man:

K: is it (a man) something you ever tried to be?

E: a man? (K: mm) umm (..) yes but I suppose I was a hopeless failure umm (.....) yeah I I mean in in terms of in terms of umm society yes you have to. You have to fall into one role or another and you know when you see a penis you and your mother calls you a boy and you have a boy's name umm then you have to try and adopt that role umm (.) Yes, undoubtedly, and that's why you know transsexuals spend years and years and years with speech therapy and with umm I don't know just er umm *trying to find appropriate ways to, to walk and move and listen and loll their heads* and you know all sorts of bizarre things because we've all, whether we've liked it or not, tried to be men (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/506-515).

Gender is more than positioning the self within particular discourses. Here, Emily gives credence to Bourdieu's comment that male-female differences are based upon "a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking...in posture, in the gestures and movements of the body" (Bourdieu, 1980: 70, cited in Sampson, 1998: 25). And, it is these culturally located bodily practices that define sexual difference in adulthood. Moreover, there are many shared cultural practices for displaying sexual difference. Consequently, the problem faced by many transsexuals, particularly in the aftermath of transitioning, is how to successfully enact these practices. Or, more explicitly, how to embody an alternative gendered being. As Alan Radley argues:

...socio-psychological life would not be what it is if it were not embodied through and through. This means, for example, that we are individuals who do not just happen to find ourselves in male or female bodies. Instead, our existence as sexual beings is involved in all aspects of our lives. This does not mean that sexuality is a blind factor in all life's equations, but that the ground from which an individual acts is a gendered ground, and that its features can be sought in the largest or in the smallest actions. Again, this is not meant to imply that sexuality is a natural characteristic: the marking and cultivation of physical difference is cultural and symbolic (Laqueur, 1990). The remaking or undoing of that difference in action is, however, an endorsement of the fact that we are differentiated in our being, not just in our social identities (1998: 14-15).

These transsexual individuals are not simply attempting to construct new social identities. Rather, they are engaged in the problematic task of becoming a differently gendered being. Moreover, this state of *being* will never be achieved through only realigning the physical body. Whilst certainly important gender is more than anatomical difference. Instead, gender is displayed and read through actions, postures, and embodied practices. As Laqueur (1990) and Judith Butler (1990; 1993) argue, these practices are, undoubtedly, culturally and symbolically mediated. Yet, it is through these readable actions that sexual difference is played out. And, for many transsexuals, their actions, postures, and gendered embodiment do not always sit well with the shared cultural meanings of sexual difference. Transsexuals do not always pass as male or female - some never pass. As, Radley has suggested the categories male and female are different in *being*, not just as social identities. Whilst transsexuals can never achieve the status of being male or female this is not to suggest that the rest of us do. Some (who knows how many?) biological males and females also have problems being read as male or female. But, for the transsexual subject, their past gender history seeps into their current gendered embodiment and many remain heavily marked by the biology and cultural practices of a previous embodied being. Hence, whilst non-transsexuals will at times feel ambivalent about their gender identities, transsexuals are faced with the more fraught existence of being more aware, more conscious and more at risk of the unshackling of gender certainty.

Thus, this chapter highlights the ways in which we are never free from our past, despite the exhilarating temptations of trying to construct a new sense of selfhood. Our conception of the past, like our biology, is not untransformable, but it is always waiting to cast a shadow, or less charitably, to stick a foot out, trip us up, unfasten any sense of

self assurance we have foolishly believed to have been accomplished. Our past is both of our making and our undoing. Consequently, for psychic health, it must be important both to accept and play with the inconsistencies in our self-narratives, rather than attempting to merely iron out the creases. Perhaps this is one reason why Stephen Whittle's story, documented in *Perfidious Man*, reads as such a successful one (Self & Gamble, 2000). In embracing his new transsexual embodied subjectivity, he exemplifies these principles as he articulates himself through a history of rampant bisexuality, radical lesbian separatism to a diligent, loyal and dedicated family trans-man. In the next chapter I turn to the relationship between sexual orientation and gender identity. I suggest that whilst the participants may attempt to distinguish between sexuality and identity identifications, their sexual relationships provide another site for creating anxieties about their new gender identities.

7

Transsexualism and Sexual Orientation: Exploring the relationship between gender and sexuality.

..the psychiatrists generally seemed to be interested very much more in (..) the hereditary factors. It was always questions about was there anybody in the family who was gay. I mean it was always sort of related to gay.

(Albert, FtM, 59, 3/198-202)

Sex, gender, sexuality: three terms whose usage relations and analytical relations are almost irremediably slippery.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemologies of the Closet*, (1990: 27)

As we have already seen, the concept 'transsexualism' emerged from theoretical accounts of homosexuality and transvestism produced by early sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld (1910) and Havelock Ellis (1936). In fact, gender identity construction has continuously been theorized in the light of sexuality. Although providing little sustainable evidence for the genesis of homosexuality, the fashion for hormonal studies during the 1930's (e.g. Wright, 1935; 1938) and the slightly more sophisticated studies that assessed the effects of sex hormones on the pre- and neo-natal brain (e.g. Meyer-Bahlburg, 1977), have also proved favourable with those attempting to

account for gender non-conformity (e.g. Money and Ehrhardt, 1972; Money and Tucker, 1975). Similar parallels can be drawn between the highly controversial work of Simon Le Vay (1991) whose research into a tiny area of the hypothalamus was misleadingly reported as the 'gay gene', and recent neurological studies of transsexualism. In a series of equally contentious findings published by Dick Swaab and colleagues (e.g. Swaab & Hoffman, 1995; Swaab et al, 1997; see Chapter Two), they also suggest a biological basis for transsexualism. This is supported by reports of brain differences between MtF transsexual's and 'normal' males in, again, a small area of the hypothalamus. Other correlational methods, which often have a closer resemblance to phrenology than biological science, have also received widespread media coverage in recent months. One such study, originating in the periodical *Nature* (Williams et al, 2000), reported that a lesbian sexual identity could be ascertained from the ratio between a woman's index finger and ring finger. If the index finger is shorter in length than the ring finger, as it is for most males, then the woman is likely to be a lesbian. The researchers found no correlation between finger length and male homosexuality, but they did find a relationship between homosexuality and birth order.

Inevitably, these types of 'spot the weirdo' studies, fraught with methodological and conceptual problems, are also being used to construct an index for transsexualism. For example, Richard Green (1999) is currently conducting a study at Charing Cross Gender Clinic to investigate the finger ridge markings and birth order of those who present as transsexual. What happens when someone who identifies as transsexual does not meet the finger ridge criteria is just one of the problems with this type of approach. What is interesting for the purpose of this chapter is that, first of all, we are still seeing attempts to root lesbian sexual identity in male gender, as in the mannish-woman. Secondly, whilst the same tools and approaches that are applied to the etiological study of homosexuality are consistently refuted, they are expected to yield an etiological grounding for transsexualism. In much clinical research, homosexuality and gender identity non-conformity are still viewed as inherently related and biological in nature. Yet, even in socio-cultural accounts the relationship between gender and sexuality seems unavoidable.

Chapter Three provided a detailed account of Judith Butler's theoretical critique of heteronormativity (1991; 1993) and the major influence it has had on subsequent

accounts of transsexualism, transgenderism and other queer debates in the last decade. In this chapter I examine some of the troubling themes which surface when the participants talked about their own gender identities and sexual orientations. I begin by illustrating how so many of the participants dismissed the notion of an interconnection between gender and sexuality, primarily to avoid 'perverse' and sensationalist connotations that the term 'sexual' appears to imply. However, in discussions about their sexual encounters and relationships, they revealed how sexuality often instigated profound frustrations, anxieties and fears about their gender identities. In the final section, I argue that whilst a distinction between gay/lesbian identities and transsexual identity may prove productive on a personal level, as it reinforces and protects a fragile gender identity, the ongoing fragmentation of the queer community through the perpetuation of separate categories of identity is problematic for political aims.

7.1 Gender as separate from sexuality

Within both the MtF and FtM participants' accounts there were attempts to draw a distinction between gender and sexuality identifications. For example, Emily states:

...obviously the sexuality of an individual is completely separate from the gender (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/60).

And Richard agrees:

K: uhum ok umm how important is your sexuality to your identity?

R: it's not (K: right) it's independent of it totally...I don't know *I mean sexuality and identity that's er for me two different things* (K: right) it's not it's not important (Richard, FtM, 24, 2/290-291, 302-303).

Having already outlined the inter-conceptual nature of *theoretical* accounts of gender and sexual identity construction, we might ask what is the purpose of these participants' attempts to dislodge this relationship. Albert, whilst describing his objection to the term 'transsexual', provides one explanation which focuses on the way transsexualism is regularly subjected to sensationalism:

...I don't think it's (transsexual's) a very good term. I actually hate the term simply because it's like so many of these terms it's got the word sex incorporated in it and of course the general public the moment that, well umm most people including me I suppose, the moment that word comes up sort of the the brain goes into overdrive doesn't it? You know, sex, oh what do they do? You know, er, which is absolutely nothing to do with the actual condition because it's not to do with what you do or even who you do but to do with your own core identity...I think any label attached to any person that includes an emotive word like sex immediately gives the wrong signal about that particular condition. That it's to do with sex, you know, what you do rather than who you are umm so so I I really do dislike the the term all together (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/14-19, 23-26).

As well as stressing his dislike for the way the term 'sex' has the effect of sensationalizing the transsexual condition, Albert also draws an important distinction between 'identity' and 'practice'. The ways and implications of some of the other participants' attempts to distinguish between sexual identity and sexual practice will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. In Albert's case, he sees gender identity as central to an individual's subjectivity, whilst he tends to represent 'sex' as an act that takes place but has little bearing on how the person constructs their sense of self. Not surprisingly, Albert strongly identifies as heterosexual. Arguably, sexual identities are primarily formed in either moral or political opposition to the 'norm'. Hence, it is less likely that 'straight' or 'heterosexual' will ever be mobilized as a sexual identity (Lance & Tanesini, 2000). Thus, it appears reasonable that for those who are heterosexual in practice, gender identity should be valorized as a crucial component of subjectivity over and above sexuality.

Caroline, describing the outcome of a visit to her local GP, builds on Albert's account by taking her objections to the understanding of transsexualism in sexualized terms one step further:

...my doctor...er he was going to send me to a sexual dysfunction clinic which is completely wrong because it's not a sexual thing being transsexual that's why I don't like the term transsexual (K; yeah) it's nothing to do with sexuality or anything it's a gender thing (Caroline, MtF, 29, 3/273, 275-278).

Here, distinguishing between sexuality and gender facilitates the refusal of attempts to conceptualize transsexualism as a 'sexual perversion'. Both Albert and Caroline

acknowledge their dislike for and alienation from the label transsexual on precisely these grounds. Resistance to a transsexual identity in favour of the more recent transgender identity has already been discussed as a means to reclaim and de-pathologize the participants' gender experience (see Chapter Five). One can now add another layer to this process of reclamation: resistance to 'sexual perversion' connotations that are linguistically represented in the label 'transsexual'.

A second reason for attempting to separate the relationship between gender and sexual orientation is to challenge the earlier psychiatric policy of refusing treatment to those who would, post-transition, engage in same-sex relations (see Chapter Two). Albert, who transitioned over thirty years ago, recalls:

K:...did your sexual orientation have any influence on your reassignment process?

A: (...) yes I believe it did. Not from my point of view necessarily but from the point of view of the medical practitioners because that was, at that, it may not be now but certainly at that time, you know, it was asked about partners you know what partners you had and whether you had a relationship and you know they were most interested to know about that. But then you know in those days umm homosexuality was still illegal had only had only just been made legal I think umm so you still had this ethos of homosexuality is wrong umm so *therefore I think what they were looking for was to was to (.) er fulfill their own wishes in bringing about somebody who was heterosexual as it were* umm but it may have changed now (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/182-192).

Certainly, there have been moves in recent years by clinicians to acknowledge that many post-operative transsexuals will engage in same-sex relations (see Chapter Two). However, the relationship is far more complex. Whilst the psychiatric definition of transsexualism (Roberto, 1983, see Chapter One) that included being heterosexual may have changed, it leaves a particular legacy of heterosexuality that needs to be negotiated when some transsexuals question their gender and sexual orientation identifications. Caroline illustrates this process here:

K: right have you, do you ever question your sexual orientation?

C: mm no no umm (..) and I don't think I ever have actually. The only time I ever questioned it was was that I had these feelings that I wanted to be a woman and (...) I'm still attracted to women and sort of I analyzed myself. I analyzed my sexual orientation because it thought I was gay and I thought well I can't be gay because I fancy women, but I can't be straight either.

What's happening, what's happening? And it actually stopped me changing sex for about three years because *I didn't realize you could be a transsexual and still find women attractive* (K; right) which umm which did my head in for a while and everyone was going you can't be a transsexual, you know, you've always got a girlfriend in tow, you know, you've got the choice of the girls and so I thought sort of yeah I know but it (.) it's not the relationship I want with a girl it wasn't that type of relationship (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/184-193).

Interestingly, Caroline positions her 'self' as distinct from her sexual orientation by creating a sexual orientation with its own agency: 'it' thought she was gay rather than 'I' thought. This has the effect of carefully keeping any identity threatening references to 'gay man' away from her 'self'. So, in this case, the pre- and post-transition object of Caroline's sexual desire, 'woman', has remained the same. However, her sexual orientation/gender identity has shifted from heterosexual man to lesbian woman. She goes on to define her confusion in the early part of the reassignment process in terms of the possibility of being gay, despite the fact that she was attracted to women. The questioning of sexual orientation prior to gender identity is not uncommon and many of the respondents, both MtF and FtM, expressed that for a time they thought they might be gay or lesbian, rather than transsexual, simply because they felt 'different':

...I sort of said I was gay because *I knew I was different* but I didn't know how I was different (K; right) and I thought that would just shut people up temporarily just to say (h) say gay that's fine just gay but I never said I was a lesbian. I was always gay because lesbian for some reason it just sounded completely wrong but gay was acceptable because it you can be a gay man, you can be a gay woman, *gay just means different* (Richard, FtM, 24, 2/36-42).

In this excerpt Richard describes his feelings of 'being different' and how identifying as gay, rather than lesbian (which would denote a female gender identity as well as 'difference'), temporarily labelled these feelings. Similarly, Sarah describes the process she went through to discover her gender and sexual orientation identifications. Again, for a time she thought she was gay because she felt 'different':

...I just thought I was gay 'cos I, *I knew I was different*. I just thought I was gay so I just had to go and find this out and (..) my first experience with a man was err god that's disgusting it was like no I didn't want to go there umm (...) so I just it just sort of like put me off men sexually (.) quite easily really umm (..) I think I'm I think I'm more at home with women so I

suppose I would identify as being lesbian but (..) yeah quite strongly lesbian yeah (Sarah, MtF, 37, 2/50-57).

Despite attempts to refute the relationship between gender and sexual orientation identifications because of 'sexual perversion' connotations, sexuality *has* played an important role in these respondents' identity constructions. They have all, to varying degrees, had to negotiate either a homosexual self-identification or sexual encounters where their partner, at least, has read the experience as homosexual. These experiences play a significant role in constructing the participants' subjectivities. Hence, over the next four sections, further consideration will be given to the relationship between sexual orientation and transsexual identity and its potential effect upon transsexual subjectivity.

7.2 Heterosexuality and Male-to-Female Transsexuality

Of the MtF transsexual participants, six identified as lesbian and one, Karen, identified as heterosexual. Given that heterosexuality is taken as the norm, Karen is, unsurprisingly, far more categorical in her sexual orientation identification, providing just a simple one word response to the question:

KJ: how would you describe your sexual orientation?

K: heterosexual (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/60).

When asked if she had ever had cause to question her sexual orientation she responded:

...I was aware of my gender dysphoria before I was aware of any kind of sexual feelings (K: right) and so when they came I was able to understand them as they were, not as sexual not not not not as gay sexuality, it was a straight sexuality (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/64-67).

Karen is able to define her sexual orientation as 'heterosexual' because of her self-awareness of being gender dysphoric prior to the onset of sexual desire, which also allowed her to side-step any issues or questions of homosexuality. However, in a later interview she discusses her explorations and experiences of sexual encounters on the gay male scene:

KJ: mmm (...) ok um were you sexually active before you began the process of reassignment?

K: er not hugely umm (...) I had a couple of snogs and (...) faltering sex umm never at school in the holidays in kind of er in the gay scene in London but it (..) it always upset me and I never felt comfortable with it and in the end I, it was doing me, it was upsetting me more than anything good it was doing for me or anything. I was getting dysphoric because I was (..) people were relating to me in a way I couldn't er it was dreadful and I felt deeply ashamed and self conscious in my body and it just wasn't anything I wanted. I didn't feel it was what I wanted umm I didn't feel happy (..) umm and I didn't feel it was the right environment and I felt in a way also I was I was deceiving people with whom I was kind of having sex and it was just none of it was right. It just felt as alien to me as having a relationship with a women would have done so no not really (Karen, MtF, 23, 3/619-631).

So, although Karen was looking to have sexual encounters with men, these partners, on the basis of Karen's male embodiment, read the situation as constituting gay male sex. In effect, her male embodiment resulted in her being positioned as a gay man whilst she identified as a heterosexual female. This caused Karen a great deal of distress because she was uncomfortable with the identity her male partners inferred upon her. Thus, she attempts to erase her prior sexual experience from her self-narrative through the response 'no, not really', whilst at the same time expressing that she had had some very negative sexual experiences prior to transition. However, post-transition, after completing gender reassignment surgery, Karen is now able to successfully 'pass' as female and her identity as 'heterosexual female' is recognized and reinforced in her day-to-day interactions.

Interestingly, whilst being the only heterosexual MtF participant, Karen was also the only participant to maintain a complete silence about her transsexual status. Whilst happy to discuss her experiences for the research interviews (perhaps because she had no place else to discuss them), she vehemently rejected the notion of being identified as transsexual in the public sphere. During most interactions, where personal histories are of low-key importance, this was not problematic. However, resisting a differently gendered past did cause her profound concern and consternation with regards to forming emotional relations:

...I am (...) slow to get into relationships and nervous when I'm in them (KJ: right) (..) umm and again I don't tell my mother about any of my relationships because I know she just wouldn't want to know umm (..) and so that's maybe that sounds mutinous but that (..) is a big deal I mean it's not it's not a huge deal but it's just again it's another little pain and also

again I can't I can't (.) I have to be very careful when I'm in a relationship with somebody who I introduce them to and I have to kind of prepare the ground for because you know I can't take the risk of anyone saying anything inappropriate so in that sense it's a problem in that I I can't be (..) unthinking about it and I can't be relaxed about it (KJ: mm) I have to think very hard about it and I do (.) which is a bummer in every sense (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/91-100).

In this and the following extract Karen professes a profound fear of discovery. Since transitioning, Karen has successfully managed to maintain some continuity in her friendships, by staying in touch with a few friends from school and with her family, albeit an often strained relationship (see Chapter Six). However, these relationships create weak links in her story, as their memories of her are tainted by her childhood manifestation where they all related to her as a boy. The possibility that someone may, even accidentally, reveal her 'secret' horrifies her as she doesn't want anybody, let alone a romantic partner, perceiving her as a 'weirdo', or making her feel 'weird' in the way transsexuals are so often represented in media accounts (see Chapter One). Yet, Karen was also aware that it is unlikely that anyone could maintain a successful relationship without at some point broaching the subject of their childhood or introducing their partner to their parents and friends:

KJ:...but I suppose if you meet someone who you want to be with long term then you're going to eventually have to broach the subject?

K: (....) I suppose so umm it's just a horrible thought for me I just, it's very cowardly I don't really want to face it umm (..) I've worked so hard and been through so much (.) hassle pain (.) to get to the stage where I'm happy and where I and where I feel normal and I just don't want to take that away from myself for anything (KJ: mm) I don't want to put myself back in a box where I feel like a weirdo (KJ: mm) and I don't want anyone else thinking I'm a weirdo either (....) umm I don't think I'm, well I I mean while I think that my circumstances are unusual but I'm also aware that it's not my fault and (..) I just don't want I just don't want anyone looking at me and questioning anything about me (KJ: mm) I just don't want to feel that (Karen, MtF, 23, 2/124-134).

Karen desperately wants to position herself and be perceived by others as a heterosexual female. Sadly, her differently gendered past challenges the security of this positioning. Whilst she has faith in herself to maintain a successful veil of secrecy, she is haunted by the possibility that others will give her away. The alternative, revealing her past, is also too painful. Even constructing her transsexual status as 'not her fault' (the result of a birth defect/disorder in the brain, see Chapter Five for further discussion) fails to disperse

the feeling that people may try to look through her, in search of some male essence. Thus, again we see how the past impacts upon intersubjective relations and how they have a profound effect upon transsexual subjectivity in their potential ability to undo a secure sense of gendered self.

Karen's identificationary processes - in both her early onset transsexuality and heterosexuality - position her firmly within the clinical definition of 'primary transsexual'. Primary transsexualism has been used within the clinical literature to distinguish those MtF transsexuals who report an early onset of gender dysphoria and transition in their late teens from those who come to see themselves as transsexual much later in life. Emily, who identifies as lesbian, draws upon this distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' transsexuals (Person & Ovesey, 1974a; Person & Ovesey, 1974b) to explain the sexual orientation identification of some MtF transsexuals:

...there seems to be the the thought that there aren't many transsexual lesbians or lesbian transsexuals umm but the reality is there's loads and loads and loads and it seems that the vast majority of male to female transsexuals are lesbian as long as they're over a certain age and I think this is where you get into the sort of um streaming of 'a' grade transsexuals, 'b' grade transsexuals and er I think all the 'a' grade streamists have a much greater propensity to be heterosexual once they've changed (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/169-175).

By distinguishing between 'A' grade and 'B' grade transsexuals rather than 'primary' and 'secondary' transsexuals; Emily is far more damning in her construction of the 'older' transsexual as the young heterosexual transsexual's less favourable sister. Certainly, those who transition later in life are to a greater degree physically marked by their years of male embodiment. For those, like Karen, who transitioned at the age of eighteen, there is little or no indication of the testosterone that previously provided their hormone base, whilst the skin of many of those who began later in life shows signs of the effects of the male hormone. Yet, whilst the effects of hormones on physical appearance may determine how well an individual 'fits' with the discourses of appearance for their gender identity (i.e. do they meet the subscribed appearance in order to be read as female?), they do not account for why specific sexual orientation identifications are made. Here, Emily points to how a female gender identity can be confirmed by

positioning oneself within the structures of heterosexuality to explain why many MtF transsexuals identify as heterosexual:

...societal expectations for people to be heterosexual, regardless umm of transsexuality, are really quite you know quite strong with the media imagery and everything else it all leads in that direction and for a lot of transsexuals of course it means umm (...) an added strength of having a man on your arm and therefore umm definitely being the feminine female partner within a relationship umm (...) you know that's great if that's what people want I I just feel that a lot of transsexuals are suckered into what is essentially a lie and I think generally whatever your sexual orientation was before you change over is likely to be the truth of what it should be after you change (...) (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/99-107).

Emily is clearly tapping into what Judith Butler (1991) has described as the 'heterosexual matrix'. Being positioned as a woman in a heterosexual relationship emphasizes the MtF transsexual's femininity, which, in turn, provides confirmation for her female identity. This is constructed as positive for the MtF transsexual because she cannot be perceived as anything but 'woman' when in a heterosexual relationship with a biological man. Yet, we have already seen the flip-side to this story where Karen lives in fear that her male sexual partner, knowing her gender history, will question her femaleness. Perhaps even worse, her fear of him doing so leads her to feel anxious and alienated from her own sense of being female. Despite differing outcomes, which can be interpreted as positive or negative for the MtF transsexual's security in her female identity, both of these scenarios have the effect of re-affirming a relationship between gender identity and sexual orientation. But, there is more to sexual orientation identification and practice than slotting in to the normative discourses of heterosexuality in order to confirm a female gender identity. As Emily has already implied many post-operative MtF transsexuals identify as lesbian. In fact, estimates have put the number in the region of 50% (Nataf, 1996).

7.3 Lesbianism and Male-to-Female Transsexuality

Within the accounts of the six participants who identified as lesbian there are two distinct forms of identity construction: Lesbianism as a 'lifestyle identity' and lesbianism as a result of 'sexual practice'. For example, Caroline states:

...I might identify or label myself as a lesbian all right because that's the lifestyle I chose to live. (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/163).

Whilst Sally and Emily construct their lesbianism as a default sexual orientation based on sexual desire:

...I'm a lesbian I don't fancy you know 99.99% of men (.) there's probably about you know 25% of women that you know are physically attractive to me therefore I must be a lesbian (..) (Sally, MtF, 35, 2/138-139).

...when I was living as a man I only slept with women I only had umm desire for women and (...) now I still have desire for women so that makes me lesbian (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/94-96).

In the last two accounts the participants assume gender as their primary identification, in this case 'woman', whilst their sexual orientation identification 'lesbian' becomes almost incidental. Certainly, in this instance at least, their sexual orientation is not constructed upon the basis of any affiliation with lesbianism as a 'lifestyle' or 'political' identity. In contrast, Caroline's engagement with a 'lifestyle' sexual identity has led her to construct her gender identity in terms of being a *particular kind of woman*:

K: does it (being lesbian) also have an influence where you go, who you, where you socialize things like that?

C: mm (..) very much so umm (..) because I go out on the gay scene umm (..) and the sort of pubs you go to, the food you end up eating. I don't know it's it's it's strange it's (...) I mean you could have a look through my wardrobe and I've got virtually nothing, nothing which is really really butch I mean you can go in there and find sort of dungarees or anything er a lot of combats a lot of hiking boots a lot of trainers a lot of very androgynous sort of stuff umm very few skirts or rubbish like that umm yeah *it does very much influence you know where I go or what I am* (..) umm but I actually went on the straight scene for eighteen months (..) umm (...) because I changed over I changed over virtually on the gay scene umm I hung out with the only women I hung around with were gay women right and at the end of the day no matter how they were dressing then they had been through a time where they'd worn skirts they'd worn make up you know they'd gone through all that umm and as a result I decided to go on the straight scene for a couple of months because *I wanted to learn how to act and be accepted as a straight woman and as a result it makes me a better gay woman* if you know what I mean? (h) It helps me understand what they went through as well, you know, you go down a straight pub and there's guys leching after you ... you know it's been good for me to go through that

because now I can understand what (h) what gay women have had to put up with for years (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/267-285).

Caroline draws reference to how her identity as lesbian is constructed via what Michel Foucault (1985) describes as 'techniques of self'. For example, she talks about how her appearance as lesbian is constituted through various *gendered* styles of clothing, such as 'butch' and 'androgynous', her diet, which will inevitably effect her embodiment and sense of being-in-the-world, and the social spaces she interacts in. Even more interestingly, she also describes her attempt to construct a similar *history* to lesbian women. Caroline describes how she needed to learn how to perform within the discourses of heterosexuality, particularly in terms of 'appearing as heterosexual', before she felt she would make an authentic lesbian.

Another distinguishing factor between these two approaches to defining as lesbian is the participants' acknowledgement of sexual desire. In the accounts of Sally and Emily their orientation as lesbian is based purely on the fact that they found women sexually attractive. In many respects their responses are reminiscent of an older concept of homosexuality, pre-identity politics, where homosexuality is simply regarded as a sexual act that takes place in a same-sex liaison. Moreover, Sally and Emily employ a style of rhetoric similar to that used by Karen and Albert, who identify as heterosexual. This style stands in stark contrast to Caroline's account where she draws no recourse to sexual desire at all. Instead, Caroline explains how she learnt to 'be' lesbian by re-enacting specific experiences that she believed would have fed into the construction of a biological lesbian woman's subjectivity.

7.3 (i) Is a lesbian a woman?

Having demarcated some of the effects sexual orientation can have upon a MtF transsexual's gender identity, and given that six of the seven MtF participants identified as lesbian, I now turn in more detail to the relationship between 'woman' and 'lesbian'. In the following section I address how this relationship can affect the lesbian MtF participants' sense of being female.

Lesbianism has a far more ambiguous history than the history of women per se, as, like the 'transsexual', the 'lesbian' is a culturally constructed subject who did not exist in *identity* terms prior to the medical and psychiatric discourse of the late 1800's. More recently, as 'lesbian' has emerged as a political identity, as well as indicative of sexual desire, there has been some consternation regarding whether a de-essentialized feminist theorizing of 'woman' results in the disappearance of the lesbian under the sign 'different woman'. Hence, one of the most frequently cited objections to the feminist concept of 'woman-identified-woman' is that this image desexualizes the lesbian. In Celia Kitzinger's (1987) analysis of lesbian identity some lesbians argued that they were just a 'person' who happened to be attracted to someone of the same-sex. This identity-resistant discourse illustrates that same-sex desire can exist alongside a denial of lesbian difference purely because same-sex desire does not necessarily provide a representation of lesbian identity. However, Cheshire Calhoun suggests it is also problematic to ask the question "who is a lesbian?" This invokes assumptions that to be a lesbian is fixed; that one definitely is a lesbian and always will be; that to be a 'real' lesbian is to be distinct from any traces of heterosexuality; all of which confound the constructed status of the lesbian subject. Instead, Calhoun suggests that lesbian difference can be best shown in response to the question "who *represents* the lesbian".

Lesbian difference was originally made conceivable by sexologists (e.g. Kraft-Ebbing, 1886) who conceptualized the 'lesbian' in various forms as not-man, not-woman. Thus, again we return to the relationship between gender and sexuality as the 'lesbian' was born out of a reconfiguration of gender presentation to one that falls outside of the binary gender constructions that follow directly from anatomical sex. In a development of Judith Butler's notion of "the logic inversion" (1991) where what first appears as feminine in the femme inverts into masculine, and Joan Nestle's (1987), description of femme sexual power, Biddy Martin (1992), reads femme (and butch) sexuality as resisting categorization into the unambiguously feminine (and masculine). Historically, women who have best represented the lesbian have been those involved in the act of cross-dressing, such as Marlene Dietrich (Garber, 1992), and undoubtedly, it is the 'butch' lesbian that has been successful in representing 'lesbian', through the calling into question of the sex/gender distinction. From Butler's assertion of a heterosexual matrix, 'femininity' is the gender expression of the 'female', thus the feminine lesbian disappears beneath a veil of heterosexuality whilst the 'butch' lesbian, by subverting her

gender appearance, is successful in representing 'lesbian' by generating the question "To which sex does she belong". Thus:

[T]he more vigorously one attempts to read the cross-dressed or mannish female for signs that she is unambiguously a woman, the less powerful becomes cross-dressing and mannishness as symbols for the lesbian. Similarly the more vigorously one attempts to read femme lesbian sexuality for sex/gender ambiguity, the more powerful femme sexuality figures the lesbian (Calhoun, 1996: 222).

So, within Calhoun's argument, to appropriate the lesbian as 'woman' is to look through her lesbian difference to a gender that only serves to underestimate her. Therefore, when some feminists welcomed lesbians under the sign 'woman', the specificity of lesbian portrayal can be said to have disappeared under the representation of 'women with a different sexuality'. Hence, Monique Wittig's (1992) proposal that 'a lesbian is not a woman' and Judith Butler's (1991) redeployment of this in the assertion that the category 'woman' is only stable within the structures of heterosexuality, have received widespread acclaim.

This is all very well, but what happens when the subject who is positioning herself as lesbian used to be, however personally distressing, identified as a heterosexual man? How do those MtF transsexuals who have struggled for so long to be identified as female negotiate a sexual orientation identity that could lead them back to a position that is outside of the binary gender system they so desperately want to belong to?

Caroline, rather than interpreting her lesbianism as positioning herself outside of the heterosexual matrix, interprets her lesbianism as a vital representation of womanhood:

...I think being lesbian actually expresses yourself as a woman because men can't be lesbians only women can be lesbians and be accepted as a lesbian yeah that's one of the defining things it's sort of yeah *I've sort of arrived now*. Does that freak you when I say things like that? (hh) (K: no) good (Caroline, MtF, 29, 2/379-382).

Constructing lesbianism as an exclusively female experience is employed as a means to reinstate Caroline's gender identity as female. Being accepted as a lesbian means that Caroline has completed her journey to where she is recognized as a lesbian and therefore

as a woman. But, at the same time, when she and some of the other MtF participants have positioned themselves as 'lesbian' rather than confirming their identities as 'woman', it has resulted in a threat to their female identification:

...I met one or two lesbians that don't like transgendered women umm their argument being that as you've not been brought up a woman so you don't understand umm it's quite hurtful er I can see where they're coming from I can understand understand their point of view but even so (..) it's still a bit hard to accept. It's probably happened a couple of times really but as I say most people are quite accepting of of me as a woman and they don't they don't actually I don't think they actually question whether I am or I aren't umm I think they just assume I must be a woman I think they just assume that (Sarah, MtF, 36, 2/189-195).

Sarah's identity as 'woman' has, in this case, been questioned by some lesbians she has met, under the frequently cited, radical feminist, mantra 'MtF transsexuals cannot be women because they do not have the historical suffering of women' (see Janice Raymond, 1980). However, this response does not necessarily pertain to just lesbian women - all biological women have the potential to reject Sarah's status as 'woman' on a similar basis, if they so choose. But, the lesbian MtF respondent's female identity *is* called into question more acutely if their female sexual partner begins to question their *own* sexual orientation. As Caroline describes:

(...) I think I would like a relationship but it's just all the shit telling people the way they perceive you afterwards the way they talk to you (...) and you spend about three hours on the does this make me gay or straight conversation with a girl and it's that really fucks me off (..) you know what do I look like? Do I look like a bloke or do I look like a woman? You look like a woman. Right, ok. You're attracted to me. Right, ok. So you're attracted me and I look like a woman so what does that make you? Lesbian. right good one (h) but it's just their own insecurities coming out you know because they have to forge an identity for themselves as being a gay woman the fact that they meet someone who they're attracted to who for legal reasons is still a guy and any way and physically used to be a guy and *physically will never really be a woman, you sort of look like a woman a scientifically created artificial woman* (h) (Caroline, MtF, 29, 3/960-971).

In this case her sexual partner is looking through her more recent gender presentation to see the 'real' gender, 'man', that supposedly lurks behind the female façade (Garber, 1992). Here, Caroline's response is to construct her identity as woman in terms of appearance: I look like a woman therefore I am a woman, you are attracted to me so you

are a lesbian. In this process she shifts from deploying the ‘lesbian as lifestyle’ identity we saw her use earlier. Now that her gender identity is under threat her identity as ‘woman’, determined by her appearance, becomes her primary identification. But, at the same time, she in effect colludes with her girlfriend’s doubts by calling into question the ‘realness’ of her own claim to be ‘woman’ by describing herself as “a scientifically created artificial woman”.

7.4 Gay Identity and Female-to-Male Sexual Orientation

Of the seven FtM participants none identified as exclusively ‘gay’. However, Richard frequently engaged in transient sexual relations with men and cruising in the local churchyard constituted a central theme in his interview scripts. For Richard, cruising has a two-fold effect; not only for enjoyable sexual encounters but also as a means to learn how to be a man (see Chapter Six for further discussion).

...do you say I’m a man but because I don’t have a penis I’m going to use the ladies because I find the gents a threat (K: mm). Or, do you go cruising and learn how to how to read the body language and learn how to keep your eyes down and go, you know, which is one reason I go cruising it’s a really really good way to to learn about men and about men’s body language and how to understand sort of the subtleties of male body language (Richard, FtM, 24, 1/315-321).

In this extract we see Richard raise the issue of whether his identity as male, and therefore his ability to use the ‘gents’ toilets, could be negated on the basis of ‘not having a penis’. The penis is a central signifier of ‘man’ in the binary gender system but, as we saw in Chapter Six, there are other cultural practices of male embodiment that need to be mastered in order to pass as ‘male’. Through the sexual practice of ‘cruising’ Richard conducts a specific gay male apprenticeship, mimicking the behaviours, postures and stances of the men he meets for sex in his quest to cement his own male gender identity. Returning to sexual identity, what is unusual here is that Richard’s previous, albeit limited, sexual history was with women. He was the only participant whose object of sexual desire changed as he moved from desiring women to desiring men, after transition. However, other FtM participants expressed that they now felt more open to the *possibility* of having sexual relations with men:

K: yeah right sexuality, how would you describe your sexual orientation?

N: umm basically er it's women that do it for me really umm (.) I mean I can definitely appreciate and find guys sexy er (.) and oh I don't know that I would really have a sexual sort of thing with a guy particularly umm you know. At one time I would have said oh definitely not but to just allowing myself the possibility to think about these things which I do feel more free in a way to think about these things at one time I wouldn't even, you know, I'd police myself. Oh no you can't think about that. Click. You know shutters down. Now I have been asking myself the question what it or, you know, what does it mean, you know? (Neil, FtM, 35, 2/58-65)

Here, Neil acknowledges that there may be a little more fluidity around his sexual desire since transitioning. Whilst it remains unlikely that he would ever act upon this, it does raise the question of why he should now feel more able to engage in the possibility of a sexual relation with a man. Richard goes further and makes explicit that his re-orientation towards engaging in sexual relations with men is facilitated by a shift in the gender/power dynamics: sex is possible with men when he is not being “fucked as a woman”:

...its kind of umm the more male I become or the more I pass as male the the easier it is to be with a man because I realize that I'm not umm *I'm not being fucked as a woman* so to speak, to be polite about it, umm I don't know (..) if I was umm I think before with with a man umm there was something which I wasn't confident in myself which stopped me from ever doing it and I I had a serious umm I didn't hate men but I didn't like the way that they always drew attention to their penises and had to er lycra cycling shorts and stuff like that (Richard, 24, FtM, 2/224-235).

It seems that post-transition the change in gender dynamics is such that Richard feels confident enough in himself to engage in sexual relations with men and is no longer ‘threatened’ by their penises. Yet, despite wishing to avoid detracting from his own processes of empowerment, it would be a misrepresentation not to draw reference to the time when Richard was ‘fucked as a woman’. On several occasions during the interviews Richard graphically described a brutal rape that he was subjected to whilst a female student. Undoubtedly, there are some very complex gender and sexual orientation identification issues at play in Richard's narrative. Yet, by deploying a ‘gay’ or ‘queer’ identification, Richard manages to avoid some of the gender identity anxieties that can be triggered when embarking in heterosexual relations.

7.5 Heterosexuality and Female-to-Male Transsexualism

The other six FtM participants were all sexually orientated towards women, although some of them resisted the identification 'straight'. The variation in their willingness to position themselves as 'heterosexual' seemed to depend upon their previous attachment to a lesbian identity before transitioning (this will be discussed in more detail in the next section). Albert, the eldest of the participants, was the most categorical in his identification as heterosexual:

K: umm are there any other terms you would prefer to identify as?

A: male heterosexual (..) end of story (hh) (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/61-62).

Here, Albert's identification as 'heterosexual male' subsumes any transsexual identification. I draw attention to his age as an important factor because Albert positions himself within traditional discourses of heterosexuality where relations between men and women are only fully recognized in wed-lock, and he often cited 'my generation' as a discursive construction to account for his conservative stance on particular issues:

...I can't marry a woman because they (legally) say I'm not a man umm now how does that impact on my life? Well I've lost more relationships because of this anomaly than anything because the one thing people want is to belong to society to be part of it and to belong to the system which society has. Now, if you're outside that system then you feel like a foreigner and it doesn't just affect me but it affects those partners that I might have because they also cannot be in the system...going back to my experience, so I've lost quite a few relationships because of this this one thing umm and I feel very strongly that that's that it's (...) how can I put it (...) I I find it very very difficult to make relationships because I feel that it's not fair of me to to get somebody into a relationship which is outside of society (..) umm I'm not saying that I haven't you know I I've had quite a few but I (..) I feel that it's very difficult umm and at the first sign of there being difficulties because people want to be be part of society not outside of it umm and I think it's better for them that they are (Albert, FtM, 59, 1/343-349, 375-382).

His legal position causes him significant distress as well as a feeling of alienation because, as the law stands in the UK with regard to birth certificates, he will always be 'female'. Thus, he can never commit to a woman in the way that he wants or the way that many of his generation deem necessary for their relationship to be regarded as 'respectable'. Hence, any relationship that Albert has with a woman will call into

question his identity as male. Even though he feels, very strongly, that he has done everything within his power to justify being accepted as male - including many operations to construct a phallus - the legal position of 'transsexual' refuses him the rights that every other heterosexual male takes for granted. And whilst at many times in his life legal discourses have had little real effect, for example on his employment experience, when he meets a prospective romantic partner, they bring his claim to the identity 'man' into question.

The legal discourses that fail to recognize Albert's shift in gender identity is a less pressing concern for the other FtM participants. Unlike Albert, none of the other respondents have undergone surgery to construct a phalloplasty. Hence, for them it is their physical gender presentation, encapsulated in their lack of male genitalia, that calls into question their identity as male when engaging in heterosexual relations. Jason describes how he experienced this when answering relationship questions in a local television documentary:

J:...the relationship one was sort of like about how you know *if you can't have a relationship as a man*, something like that it was sort of negative umm and probably what I might have been tempted to do if I'd really listened to the question was to to head into well you know *of course I'm a man* and you know just because and I could have got a bit heated so I found it quite a difficult balance to umm not get too hung up by trying to prove I'm a man because I've got nothing to prove (K: right) so it was a sort of a balancing act of getting the points across but not getting it to the point where people, if they think I'm trying to prove something, it shows I'm, it might be that I'm not sure about it because I've got to prove to other people (K; right) and that was really hard so (...) What, what I said I think was well *everybody has unique relationships where people have different styles* (K; mm) anyhow. You can't, basically you can't judge because what I said was a relevant statement umm (...) and it was something you could have said umm. Certainly what I would say say now about that is the the emphasis on you know *as a man I would chose well I said I would chose to have a relationship with a woman umm and that would be unique to me and that person*. I think I would just throw that in but very casually (K: mm) (Jason, FtM, 39, 1/187-202).

Attention is drawn to how Jason could or would function sexually in a 'normal' heterosexual relationship given that he has no penis. Jason feels pushed into defending his identity as male but, at the same time, is worried about appearing insecure in his male identity if he emphasizes the point too strongly. Instead, he tries to counter the perceived

attack on his male identity by constructing his lack of a penis as a sexual anomaly that he and any potential girlfriend would have to negotiate. Given the dominant view that penis-penetrating-vagina constitutes 'normal sex', being heterosexual and having no penis has been given a great deal of consideration by Jason, particularly in terms of the implications for his male identity. Yet, when questioned, he feels that he is required to be fairly 'casual' in his response so as not to provoke further querying of his claim to be male.

Meanwhile, Ruben positions himself firmly within the belief that a man needs to have a fully functioning penis in order to engage in 'normal' sexual relations with a woman. In fact, lacking a penis whilst in a heterosexual relationship provides such a threat to his male identity that he refuses to have a sexual relationship until he has had phalloplasty surgery:

K: were you sexually active before you began the process of reassignment?

R: no that's one thing I've always decided I don't want to do

K: right until you're?

R: it's not fair on the person I was having a relationship with because if I'm in a relationship with a woman they obviously want a man and I can't be quite what they want to be, or if they if they did even if they did say yes I want to see you still I wouldn't believe that they were doing it for the right reasons (K: right) so I prefer to not do it (Ruben, FtM, 19, 3/653-660).

As Ruben constructs 'man' in terms of having a penis, or at the very least a phalloplasty, even the possibility of having a heterosexual relationship emphasizes his lack, and therefore his sense of not being male. This feeling of 'not being male' is mediated through two concerns. Firstly, his disquiet that he cannot be the erect, penetrating man his sexual partner would want him to be and secondly, fear that his partner, on the basis of having sex with a man with a vagina, will begin to question her own sexual identity:

K: so would you, would you consider having a relationship in the future even if you can't have phalloplasty for a long time?

R: at some point then obviously I if I knew that would happen then I'd have to but I would be very very careful in my choice of partners (...) because like some people could go out with someone not knowing they have this condition, they might be a bit funny about it, or *they might think they're like think they are lesbian or something because it's like, it must be a bit weird for them if you know what I mean* (K: right) but I yes I would have to find someone who I would be (.) on very sort of funny terms or very sort of

arranged terms as I (..) if you know what I mean (Ruben, FtM, 19, 3/679-687).

Here we can see parallels with the gender anxieties that are brought into play in some of the MtF transsexuals' accounts. Ruben, like Karen, is worried that his transsexual status will result in his sexual partner seeing through his maleness to a 'true' female essence and, like Caroline, is concerned that this will result in them questioning their own sexual orientation. However, in contrast to these MtF transsexuals, this disquiet is likely to be emphasized if the FtM transsexual's sexual partner still has physical signs of femaleness. Whilst still having female genitalia, Ruben can never be sure how his female sexual partners are relating to him. Although it is unlikely, the possibility that his heterosexual female partner could be relating to him as a lesbian threatens his identity as male.

Despite the earlier well-founded claims by the participants that sexuality and gender should be seen as distinct, inter-personal sexual relations, whether these are heterosexual, lesbian, or gay, are incendiary in the creation of fears, anxieties and frustrations pertaining to the participants' gender identification and sense of gendered embodiment. As it was argued in Chapter Six, we again see how intersubjective relations have the potential to both confirm and disavow transsexual subject's claim to a new gender identity. Some theorizing of sexuality has usefully highlighted the way in which sexual relations can provide the opportunity for unconsciously desired gender transgressions (e.g. Segal, 1994). However, for those who have struggled to be recognized in a gender that is not backed up by their physical appearance or given any legal accountability, acknowledging fluidity in their gender identifications is highly improbable (see Chapter Five). Yet, there is a surprising amount of fluidity in many of the participants' sexual orientation identifications, if not, practices.

7.6 Sexual orientation identifications and practice - fixed or fluid

Within both the MtF and FtM participants' accounts rhetoric was used to construct their sexual orientation as mutable. For example, Ruben, who was incredibly rigid about constructing a male identity in terms of having a penis, responded to the question:

K: (..) how would you describe your sexual orientation?

R: straight at the minute, obvious things can't can change you can never be totally sure things like that but (.) straight now (Ruben, FtM, 19, 2/86-88).

As did Sally:

K: have you ever questioned that (being a lesbian)?

S: yes I have. I question it every day (.) because I don't think anybody umm can say with any degree of certainty whilst they're you know sexually active I'm one thing or I'm another thing ... as a as a generalization and just because something is a generalization doesn't mean to say that it's not true you know women have personalities that I can get on with a lot better umm (..) you know an emotional openness which is absent in in most men and an aesthetic standard which is completely absent in as I said 99.99% of men (.) you know there's one or two I I could name but (..) you know it's very very rare (.) but to say that the you know somebody is one thing or another completely and utterly and and I will not it's (..) it just isn't accurate (Sally, MtF, 35, 2/140-142, 149-155).

This illustrates a difference in the identification practices for gender and sexual orientation. Gender is seen as central - the core identity - and therefore immutable, whilst sexual orientation tallies with what you do, and is therefore more open to potential change. However, this fluidity around sexual orientation is principally constructed in terms of 'possibilities' rather than 'practice'. As we have already seen the participants' object of sexual desire tends to stay the same after transition, although this is not true in all cases. We have seen Richard shift from desiring women (lesbian) to desiring men (gay) after transition but, as he fully acknowledges, his prior sexual experience and degree of identification was limited and he is still very much engaged in the process of exploring both his sexual and gender identities. Cheryl offers another example of this type of shift in sexuality. She describes how some transsexuals become orientated towards a particular *sexual orientation*, rather than a specifically gendered partner:

...I guess it's if you are brought up as a man and to see women as the opposite sex even when you change sex or gender yourself your mind set still sees women as the (..) attractive partner or opposite in some way (K; right) I don't know and yet I've met some transsexuals who before as men they went out as women and never fancied men and yet after the operation started going out with men and enjoying sex with men but that felt right for them because that was still heterosexual if you like (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 3/584-590).

Certainly, in the aftermath of 'identity politics', sexual orientation has a greater effect on many of the participants' lifestyles than simply who they have sex with. Heterosexuality brings with it a degree of privilege and all but one of the MtF participants now found their sexual experiences were no longer located within the discourses of heterosexuality. For some this was surprising and even disappointing, as Sarah describes:

...I'm now a gay female (K: mm) so my sexuality's [object of desire's] not changed (K: it's not changed no) yeah I thought it would (K; right) I expected it to and it didn't (hh) so I think, a lot of it, I think I was quite disappointed really that I wouldn't end up straight female because I think straight females probably get an easier time than gay females (K; right) umm (...) but looking back on the last eighteen months I'm quite happy to identify as a gay female (hh) most of my friends are gay females (K; right) so umm I suppose I'm quite happy along with, quite happy along with them really yeah (Sarah, MtF, 37, 2/59-65).

It seems obvious why these transsexual women may initially be wary of being identified as lesbian but, surprisingly, within most of the FtM participants' accounts there is an even stronger resistance to being positioned as 'straight':

...a lot of umm transsexuals don't feel that they're queer. Quite often they were er straight before and then and if they're they're still of the same sexual persuasion afterwards they actually become queer (K: right) umm I'm in the position where I was lesbian before and now I've become straight (K: right) you would think so but no I haven't because I have a queer mentality so I strongly identify with that yeah (Billy, FtM, 46, 2/43-47).

Billy draws attention to the fact that previous life trajectories will continue to impact upon lifestyle after transition. Having spent 25 years living on the margins of society, in and around the lesbian community, it is unlikely that the many facets of self that have been constructed through this existence will change simply because his new gender presentation repatriates him with the mainstream structures of heterosexuality. Thus, in the accounts of those who have passed through a lesbian identity 'to be straight' means much more than engaging in heterosexual relations.

In the following extract, Neil acutely distinguishes between a sexual orientation based on 'lifestyle' and 'sexual practice' identifications:

K: so would you so you'd identify as straight then?

N: well (..) no because that's a a silly word, do you know what I mean? Because straight it's like (..) anything with the word straight in it is not the word for me, it's (..) umm but I suppose you, you know, I can't handily think of some better word for it. I'm sure there is a better word for it because you said, as soon as you talk, you know, say the word straight it's got er a sort of negative quality about it, do you see what I mean? (K: uhum) Straight. The word straight doesn't allow for options. It doesn't allow for flexibility. It doesn't allow for interest and you see they're the qualities that are primarily seen as being a a lesbian and gay or queer experience which is bollocks...one isn't better than the other *it's just a different way of being* (K: mm) and you can be a complete bullshit, very straight gay person the same way as you can be a cosmic and groovy (..) psychedelic straight person. Do you know what I mean? (K: yeah) It's in the way that you do something not who you do it with (Neil, FtM, 35, 2/85-92,98-101).

For Billy, 'queer' is a 'way-of-thinking', whilst for Neil 'straight' is a 'way-of-being'. For both of them these identities are something above and beyond sexual practice. So, for Neil 'straight' is an identity, although it is more likely to be placed on others as a form of insult, rather than taken up by oneself. Furthermore, instead of interpreting 'straight' as an identity based on sexuality, 'to be straight' constitutes a particular way of life that is usually seen as dull and conservative. Whilst Neil's new identity as male, coupled with his sexual desire for women, might determine his sexual orientation as heterosexual, he strongly resists the notion that he will come to live his life in a way that he could easily reject when he used to identify as lesbian. Although he doesn't actually define himself as 'queer', Neil's account could be interpreted as essentially 'queer' in nature. Richard, like Billy, uses the term 'queer' to define himself, as he finds it useful for resisting the way others make identity judgments about him on the basis of either his gendered appearance or sexual practice:

K: what about the term queer is that one that you've ever used?

R: sometimes, I don't see it as being derogatory I mean it can be it depends how it's said (K: mm) umm but I do see myself as sort of queer. It's far easier to say oh I'm just queer umm because it cuts out the gay side as well because umm people say are you gay or straight er well I'm just queer you know, I can be with a man and it will seem like gay sex and actually might have heterosexual sex so to speak, or I could be with a woman and look like a heterosexual couple and we'd be having lesbian sex more or less you know kind of thing but, so I mean, what the hell does a label mean? You know, there's a there's a problem with the labels with because it it depends whether you go by what you look like to everybody else or what you are in bed (Richard, FtM, 24, 2/105-114).

Interestingly, Richard makes no attempt to resist the signification of his female genitals. Many FtM transsexuals live in long-term relations with women without having genital reconstruction to create a phalloplasty yet, as Jason's account early implied, they would never construct their sexual relations with their partner as 'lesbian'. In contrast, Richard states that his vagina may be used to determine the type of sex he is having - over and above his own gender identification. If he has penetrative vaginal sex with a man, he describes how this could be either determined as heterosexual sex - as penis in vagina equals 'normal' heterosexual sex - or, on the basis of how Richard looks, it could be interpreted as two men having sex - gay sex. Hence, he uses the identity 'queer' to counteract the incongruity between his genital and gender appearance when engaging in sexual encounters.

There is certainly a greater degree of questioning around sexual orientation identifications in the accounts of the FtM participants than the MtF participants. I propose that this may be because all the FtM participants have had to negotiate, to varying degrees, a level of lesbian identification on their way to a FtM identity. In contrast, all but one of the MtF participants moved from a heterosexual orientation into a lesbian identification after transitioning. Again, we can see that the individual trajectories through earlier sexual orientation identities colour the way participants later negotiate their positionings in terms of both gender and sexual orientation identities.

7.7 Fragmented identities -- Frustrated Politics

In this chapter I have documented the ways in which the sexual orientation and gender identifications of these participants intersect, and the fears and anxieties they can provoke for a gendered sense of self. As we have seen in Chapter Three, the advent of queer theory promised the deconstruction of identity via the bringing to account of sex and sexuality (Sedgwick, 1991). Like those *queer* theorists in the early 1990's, many of the participants attempted to distinguish between 'sexuality' and 'gender'. However, whilst early proponents of *queer*, such as Gayle Rubin (1984), were motivated by the claim that the power relations of 'sexuality' cannot be reduced to that of 'gender' (Segal, 1999), these participants were more concerned with counteracting any sexual 'perversion' connotations that are associated with the term transsexual. In this final

section I examine the difficult position transsexual has in relation to queer, discuss the, at times, uneasy connections between transsexuals, transvestites and the lesbian and gay community, and argue that it is impossible as well as politically undesirable to sever ties between these gender and sexual identities.

Historically, members of the 'trans' community are intrinsically linked to members of the lesbian and gay community - both identities, at least, being born out of the work of early sexologists. More recently, 'trans' identities have been incorporated into the celebratory realms of *different sexualities* under the rubric 'queer'. At its most exciting, queer promised to "transcend[s] any gender, any sexual persuasion and philosophy" (Jasper Laybutt, "male lesbian" cited in Grosz, 1995: 207), whilst at its most mundane it offered a new but trendy synonym for gay and lesbian studies. As a political movement, particularly in the US, queer offered a radical challenge to identity politics and came to represent anybody who was 'anti-straight'. As Alexander Doty suggests queer sets out:

...to question the cultural demarcation between the queer and the straight...by pointing out the queerness of and in straights and straight cultures, as well as that of individuals and groups who have been told they inhabit the boundaries between the binaries of gender and sexuality: transsexuals, bisexuals, transvestites, and other binary outlaws" (1993, xv-xvi, cited in Walters, 1996).

Yet, it is as a political movement that 'queer' has been most seriously criticized. Suzanna Danuta Walter asks the question:

If queer becomes the new reigning subjectivity for hip activists and intellectuals alike, what kinds of politics and theories then become "transcended," moved through and over in the construction of the queer hegemony? (1996: 837)

Her particular concern is that feminism and lesbian-feminism are becoming marginalized and demonized by this 'transcendence'. Likewise, Tim Edwards (1998) is concerned that queer politics have resulted in a *lifestyle* politics that lacks substance and whilst focusing on difference is unable to serve as a productive means of fighting minority oppression. He argues for:

...a gay and lesbian studies that is far more materially grounded and aware of sexual, racial and gendered differentials, to mention only some, than is catered for in a post-structural discourse of so-called 'radical' pluralism of 'beyond' this or that (1998: 481).

So, the flip side to queer's potential for radical and subversive sexual and gender play is that it makes it very difficult to maintain a political campaign for a certain group when that group does not have a cohesive identity (Hekman, 2000). Of course, the whole point of queer was to celebrate difference thus, it is counter-intuitive to suggest that those who fall within the remit of 'queer' would mobilize under a singular banner or sustain a monadic identity. Yet, some serious issues have been raised about queer's suitability for fighting oppression. The debate that circles around which sexual subjectivities constitute 'queer' and the suitability of queer as a political movement, often emphasizes what could be seen as an undesirable split between the transsexual community and the lesbian and gay community.

As 'queer' has come to be seen as primarily representing a gay and lesbian agenda, transsexual activists have begun to mobilize under their own banners: *Press For Change* in the UK and *Transsexual Menace* in the US. Their prime motivations have been to achieve improved health care and legal rights for 'trans'-people (Halberstam, 1998; Press for Change Newsletter, Aug. 1999). It would be an oversight to fail to acknowledge the profound differences between the experience of same-sex desire and the experience of being transsexual, and the occasional need to mobilize on specific issues that may only pertain to one aspect of a broad community. However, I believe that it would be detrimental to *all* to negate the sibling type relationship these sexual identities have with one another. The gay and lesbian community has frequently provided a respite for those exploring their gender questions, and it also provides a home for many of those who have reached the end of their individual trans-gender journeys. For example, all of the FtM participants in this study passed through, with varying degrees of attachment to, a lesbian identity. And, like six of the seven MtF participants in this study, many MtF transsexuals end up socializing within the lesbian and gay community. It could be argued that those MtF transsexuals who identify as heterosexual would have no connection with this community, but even Karen - who resisted any kind of association with homosexuality - responded to an advert for this research that had been placed in the gay community press:

The Pink Paper. For others, trying on different but associated identities was a necessary procedure on their way to becoming transsexual. As Sarah describes:

K:...you were saying that you didn't know whether you were a gay man or a lesbian so did that did that have any effect on when and how you went about starting reassignment?

S: no (...) no (...) I don't know I suppose it all went hand in hand really with discovering who I am (K; right) umm the sexuality side came later. I'd already decided that I wasn't a gay man and then I next decided I wasn't a transvestite umm (...) umm and that's when I seriously had counselling with people and that's when I had counselling about for about six to twelve months before I actually started hormone therapy so it was (...) that was a separate process, and actually discovering I was a gay female has come since I changed over. Since I've I've I've lived in the full time role and been accepted basically by by women that I know (Sarah, MtF, 37, 2/110-119).

Sarah spoke of a process of exploring various gender and sexual orientation positions in order to 'discover who she was'. This involved moving through the identities gay man, transvestite, transsexual woman and finally lesbian. In the light of these experiences one might expect to find a tight knit community based on understanding for and reciprocity between related but distinct minority groups. Unfortunately, this often is not the case. Identity conflict can be a regular occurrence on the lesbian and gay scene as Sarah reported:

K: in what ways have you found members of the lesbian and gay scene to be supportive of transsexuals?

S: mm (..) pretty good really (..) on on the surface I suppose. Yeah. But I mean I think um, I don't know. I think we all have our own little flags and own, own little pigeon holes to go and sit in occasionally and (..) I think that's quite divisive (...) because I think, I mean one of my one of my theories about this is gay, lesbian, transgendered people have all come sort of through a process of finding out about their sexuality or their gender, and my argument is they should all stand shoulder to shoulder but they don't (.) and lesbians shout at the guys, the guys shout at the lesbians, the lesbians and and the guys shout at the trannies and the trannies shout back and it's all, it's all the same. Everybody slags each other off (Sarah, MtF, 37, 2/168-175).

Inevitably, the queer community (and I mean that in its broadest sense) does not always provide for a 'community' spirit and can sometimes end up with disaffected factions arguing for rights over community space and the protection of their hard fought for identities. This is exacerbated by the onset of a post-modern fragmentation of identities

in an attempt to counteract essentialism (e.g. Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1995). Resistance to essentialist thinking has been of particular importance in the conception of 'queer' sexuality that celebrates difference and the subsequent influx of new and ever-shifting ways for individuals to present themselves. Cheryl provides a good example of this when she describes her sexual identity:

...I've slept with women I've slept with pre-op transsexuals umm which I quite enjoyed to be honest umm but I've never slept with a man and I think if if I ever did have surgery or if I ever did live full time as a woman I would probably be a lesbian. I'm a closet lesbian. (K: right) I'm a I'm an unfulfilled, frustrated, closet lesbian she-male. (hh) (K: ok) (Cheryl, MtF, 41, 2/131-135).

Here is a clear example of the 'multiplicity' of identity. Cheryl, who at times identifies as transgendered or transsexual, takes oestrogen, lives as a woman in a social sphere yet works as a man, and identifies, in this case, as a closet lesbian she-male.

As such, one of the problems for community cohesion is that it has not proved possible to speak of 'transsexual' experience, let alone shape some kind of unity between transsexual, transgender, transvestite, lesbian, gay or bisexual narratives. This is particularly the case when, as has been documented in this chapter, the intersections between sexual desire and gender identifications are often instrumental in the perforation of a secure sense of gendered self.

As I have suggested throughout this thesis, a more nuanced analysis of transsexual experience must pay heed to the differences between the transitional processes of MtF and FtM transsexuals, the possibilities for embodied subjectivity and accessibility to the new gender position they take up, as well as their individual life trajectories. For now, however, I want to illustrate how some MtF and FtM transsexuals have different, but equally problematic, relations with other identities - in this case transvestite and lesbian - that also fall under the general rubric 'queer'.

7.7 (i) Borderline identity battles

One of the dominant discursive constructions to emerge from the MtF transsexuals' accounts was that transsexualism was distinct from transvestism. As Emily describes:

...I don't really like definitions too much (K: mm) I mean obviously I I'd be particularly keen to divorce (..) drag and transvestites and transsexuals and have those clearly defined as as you know separate entities (K: mm) because obviously the larger perceptions, public perception is that they are kind of inter-linked (....) but then you know no one likes to be misunderstood and I suppose there's a sort of there's a fear of being lumped in and labelled with something that you're not (K: mm) (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/32-38).

When considering the distinction between transsexual and transgender Emily resisted "defining things too tightly", but stressed that there should be a clear distinction between transsexuals and transvestites on the basis that "no one likes to be misunderstood". Perhaps this is because Emily did feel misunderstood for many years. Here, she explains her confusion over misdiagnosis:

...I kind kind of had doctors telling me I was a transvestite and umm and then you'd read sort of quack medical histories that would say umm transsexuals aren't sexually turned on by umm women's clothing, cross-dressing. Well, so you start to believe all these different points and I was utterly utterly repulsed umm by erections having erections and um (.) so I use to have erections when I was crossed-dressed and umm that was kind of, you know, drove me into this sort of transvestite thing and you think you're transvestite and umm it use to the the whole notion of being sexually aroused by (..) by the clothing umm just utterly repulsed me in the same way as you know transvestites have um female names they they chose names for themselves and (.) I could never do that it's just such false it's so wrong and like having false breasts and stuff you know *if it's not part of you then (..) then you're kind of deluding yourself* (Emily, MtF, 33, 2/488-499).

Emily was obviously traumatized by being positioned as a transvestite as she was 'repulsed' by her own sexual arousal when she used to experience erections whilst wearing female clothing. At the *Third International Conference on Sex and Gender*, Herbert Bower (1998) gave a paper in which he suggested that psychiatrists no longer see sexual arousal as indicative of only a transvestite 'condition'. Rather, he proposed that some transsexuals also become sexual aroused when dressed in female attire. But for Emily, the idea that her subjectivity is somehow the same as a transvestite's is abhorrent. For her, taking hormones and developing her own breasts realizes her status as woman, whilst the transvestite is 'false' and 'deluding themselves'.

This distinction between transsexual 'being woman', and transvestite 'playing woman' and therefore somehow trivializing transsexual experience, was commonly found in many of the other MtF participants' accounts. Sarah spoke of transvestites as *devaluing* transsexual experience:

...I use to go to a T TS support group in A Local Town and er it just seemed to be that it was another night where transvestites could go and get dressed up (..) that's what I felt it was it was quite *it was really phoney* (K: right) umm but I've spoke to I spoke about doing this (support) group and (..) what I want to try and do is keep it exclusively TS rather than have trannies there (K: right) (..) um because *it just drags it down it it devalues the whole the whole night* (K: right) and you can actually talk about issues that are important to people rather than just oh I like your dress it really suits you your hair and stuff like that a big wig or something (hh) so I'd like to try and keep anything I did in the future like exclusively TS (Sarah, MtF, 37, 3/400-413).

Transvestites are seen as 'phoney' women who devalue Sarah's female subjectivity. Perhaps the notion of men dressing up as women is too close to her own story. To associate with transvestites runs the risks for Sarah of also being seen as a man who is 'playing woman' which would, undoubtedly, cause great anxiety for her sense of gendered self. This may be exacerbated by the fact that, as she said earlier, Sarah actually moved through identifying as transvestite as part of the process of 'discovering who she was'. Caroline, whilst agreeing with this hierarchical construction of the transsexual's claim to the status 'woman' over and above the transvestite's, also notes that MtF transsexuals' relationships with transvestite spaces are often important during transition:

...they (transvestites) don't understand because to them being a woman is just putting a dress on (K: mm) and because it to them it's a different thing. It's more play. That's that's enough for them. For me it wasn't. Its sort of, I am a woman and I'm stuck in the wrong body that kind of thing. I mean they are men pretending to be women. I must sound so condescending. Its not meant to sound like that umm but (..) it's a completely different thing umm and I mean a lot of transsexuals go through that because when you're in that transition stage it's a very safe environment to hang around in (Caroline, MtF, 29, 3/236-245).

So again, although insecurities and anxieties about who, and what, they are can be sparked and inflamed by the tensions between MtF transsexual and transvestite

identifications, the boundaries between them are sometimes rather fuzzy. Often the transvestite scene permits the MtF transsexual time to explore their gender questions in a relatively safe and accommodating environment, and they may even for some of this time identify as transvestite.

In a similar vein, there is contention over where to draw a distinction between FtM transsexuals and lesbians. In a recent edition of the FTM Network's newsletter (Boys Own, April 2000) a list entitled *10 Most Damaging Myths about Transmen and FTM's* was presented. Again we see the problem of further fragmenting identities as we must assume that representing both FTM's and Transmen indicates a difference between these two categories. I am unsure of how to quantify the difference between these two possible modes of subjectivity but perhaps, at times, they are used to represent one and the same person. In this case, it is apparent in at least four of the myths that together FTM's and Transmen differ from lesbians, although there is no indication that they are different from one another. For example, the two most common myths about Transmen and FTM's are described as:

1. Transmen are really just butch lesbians who change sex to justify same-sex relationships or to avoid harassment.
2. Historically, all women only chose to live as men to pursue careers that were otherwise unavailable to them, to seek economic opportunities, or to justify lesbian relationships. (Boys Own, April 2000: 9)

In a series of papers entitled *Butch/FTM Border Wars* Judith Halberstam and C. Jacob Hale (1998) debate these two recurring themes that are employed to distinguish FtM identity from 'butch lesbian'. Both caution against trying to stabilize terms such as *transsexual*, *transgender* and *butch* and challenge "the practice of predicating an identity politics on the dead bodies of people who cannot answer for their own complexities" (1998: 285). The search for FtM and butch lesbian narratives that are grounded historically can be particularly problematic. The need for 'role models' or simply the delight that can be gained from recognizing your own experience in someone else's, is understandable. But, to re-claim figures and attempt to shape them into an FTM transsexual - as has happened with the jazz musician Billy Tipton and the Nebraskan teenager 'Brandon Teena/Teena Brandon' (see Chapter Three) - often results in an inaccurate portrayal of an individual's life. Equally, Halberstam (1998) argues there is

nothing to substantiate a lesbian reappropriation of these individuals' experiences within lesbian history. Here, their lives are often rationalized as lesbians who lack access to a liberating lesbian discourse, as is pointed out in the second most insidious myth to FtM's and Transmen. But, importantly, Halberstam warns that:

[W]hile a distinction between lesbian and FTM positions might be an important one to sketch out, there is always a danger that the effort to mark the territory of FTM subjectivity might fall into homophobic assertions about lesbians and sexist formulations of women generally (Halberstam, 1998: 297).

And I agree. Efforts need to be made to avoid falling into the trap of alienating would be supporters by becoming caught up in a battle to chalk out regulatory lines for gender and sexuality identifications. It may seem that queer theory and politics have little to offer the transsexual subject who is trying to gain both legal and social recognition in their new gender presentation. Politically, in the UK, members of the 'trans'-community tend to draw upon the biological discourses of transsexualism and heterosexual normativity in order to achieve the long campaigned for right to change their birth certificates. Thus, many transsexuals may feel, that an affiliation with 'queer' is, at best, unhelpful, whilst they fight a 'legitimate' battle to challenge oppression on the basis of a biological birth defect.

Whilst I acknowledge the reasons why some transsexuals and transgenderists attempt to branch away from any affiliation with the lesbian and gay community, I believe that mutual support would prove a more politically effective philosophy. In terms of numbers alone, the transsexual/transgender community is very small - and it could disintegrate further as we begin to see fractures between those who identify as transsexual and those who identify as transgendered. Instead, perhaps an analogy for a more politically productive relationship between the trans and gay/lesbian communities can be drawn from Rita Felski's writing about 'hybridity' in the case of post-colonialism and the nomadic subject. As she states:

Metaphors of hybridity and the like not only recognize differences within the subject, fracturing and complicating holistic notions of identity, but also address connections between subjects by recognizing affiliations, cross-pollinations, echoes, and repetitions, thereby unseating difference from a position of absolute privilege. Instead of endorsing a drift toward an ever

greater atomization of identity, such metaphors allow us to conceive of multiple, interconnecting axes of affiliation and differentiation. Affiliation, I would stress, does not preclude disagreement but, rather, provides its precondition; it is only in the context of shared premises, beliefs, and vocabularies that dissent becomes possible (Felski, 1997: 12).

Thus, her argument is not to valorize or essentialize hybridity as a new formulation for the radical or subversive, but to recognize 'cultural impurity as the inescapable backdrop of all contemporary struggles' (1997: 15). Perhaps then, the most effective political aim for the trans-community would be to actively engage in challenging heterosexist and normative gender epistemologies, rather than concentrating efforts on attempting to demarcate the infinitely blurred ontological boundaries between gender and sexuality.

In the next, and final, chapter I draw together the themes that have been discussed throughout this thesis, making conclusions and recommendations for future research and political practice.

8

Conclusions, critical reflections and developments

...the ability of traditional gender systems to absorb, or even require, such forms of gender-crossing as transsexualism leads us to a more sophisticated appreciation of the power of gender as a principle of social and cultural order. While transsexualism reveals that a society's gender system is a trick done with mirrors, those mirrors are the walls of our species' very real and only home.

Judith Shapiro, *Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex*, (1991: 24)

We all tell stories. The participants in this study told stories that involved immense change, movements from one embodied gender to the other. Some had completed their journey, whilst others were only just beginning. One had decided to occupy an alternative space, for now at least, undecided about how willing she was to embrace the requisite shifts in body morphology and social status. Some held on rigidly, defensively even, to their new found liberation, contrasting sharply with those who wanted to incorporate notions of gender transgression, self-fluidity, ideas and feelings about their previous embodied selves into their self-narratives. And, all of these stories were both tainted and enlightened by experiences of their previous gender manifestation. Unequivocally, these participants' lives are scarred by the tragedy and bitterness inherent in profound self-confusion; social stigma; dislocation; non-conformity provoked anxiety and a failed

sense of belonging to the world. However, while their long hard struggles were frequently marked by loss - of familial relations, friends and lovers - their stories were also peppered with references to hope, happiness and the future. That future offered the resurgence of a life sutured together in a style reminiscent of their surgically altered bodies. These are bodies that are marked by past life, past gender and past suffering: yet also bodies that provide for new lived experiences that are now beginning to work for them. We all tell stories. But, perhaps, our most difficult task is to formulate a story that will make our lives that little bit easier to live. In this final chapter, I draw together the disparate strands of the thesis, critically reflect upon the themes that emerged from the analysis, making recommendations for future research and political practice.

In Chapter One I traced the emergence of transsexual identity from the auspices of sexology during the last century. Thus, transsexualism has always been symbiotically tied to the medical conceptualization of homosexuality, albeit more dependent upon the medical establishment for hormones and surgical treatment. Critics of the medical construction of transsexualism argue medical discourses of transsexualism simply regulate the binary gender system (Hausman, 1995; Wilton, 2000), rather than provide a “language adequate to express the disparate and diverse desires which lead them to body mutilation” (Billing & Urban, 1995: 112). But, whilst transsexualism lacks any degree of etiological grounding there will always be issues around diagnosis. Encouragingly, in recent times, it appears that the medical professions have responded to transgender politics revising clinical practice (Bockting & Coleman, 1992). The diagnostic criteria for transsexualism has undergone significant change since Billing and Urban first launched their blistering critique in 1982. As part of this process the emphasis is no longer upon surgical intervention as a cure-all for gender dysphoria. Yet, for those individuals set upon undertaking gender reassignment, the clinical and medical professions remain in the position of ‘gate-keeper’, regulating their passage to new gender identities. However, I believe attempts to regulate and control access to surgical intervention have increasingly been underpinned by a genuine concern to provide the gender dysphoric individual with choices and strategies for living with a complex and fragmented gender identification (Di Ceglie & Freeman, 1999).

Psychotherapy encompasses some of these strategies. Certainly, there is little evidence to suggest that psychotherapy can ‘cure’ gender dysphoria (Stoller, 1975). But gender

dysphoric feelings, and the complexities of life that ensue for the transgendered or transsexual individual, can be addressed in a psychotherapeutic setting. *The Standards of Care For Gender Identity Disorders* (HBIGDA, 1998) recommends that each individual presenting with gender dysphoria undergoes at least a six month period of psychotherapy before commencing any other form of treatment such as hormone therapy. It is of particular concern that only a few of the participants in this study met this criterion. Whilst many had had contact with mental health professions at some point in their life, this was rarely with a practitioner who specialized in gender issues. After deciding to transition, most approached a private psychiatrist and, of these, all were prescribed hormones on either their first or second visit. Unless a system is in place for gender dysphoric individuals to discuss the options available to them with a therapist skilled in gender issues, reassignment surgery will remain the dominant trajectory. Moreover, psychotherapy currently has an undervalued role for these individuals post-transition. As we have seen in previous chapters, many transsexuals cannot simply 'disappear' into their new gender identities. The aftermath of a radical shift in gendered embodiment unleashes its own set of problems; particularly the questions of how to negotiate previous gender history and past social relations and how to live in the new gender role when you do not always 'pass'. These types of issues raise very real anxieties in the transsexual subject and ongoing access to psychotherapy may facilitate some degree of relief from these stresses.

In Chapter Two I documented the twists and turns in gender theory from Simone de Beauvoir (1949) to present day accounts that attempt to theorize transsexual subjectivity. Judith Butler's (1990) notion of performativity has been central to these latter developments, precipitating both an outburst of 'queer' texts and the emergence of a new discipline 'trans-studies'. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler formulated a challenge against the ontological status of gender, arguing that 'being' is reducible to the form of 'appearing'. There is no ontological 'truth' to being male or female. Rather, every aspect of gender is performed. In her subsequent book, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993) re-addressed the notion of gender construction by focusing upon the materialization of 'sex'. Here, Butler argued that the process of materialization "*stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (1993: 9, emphasis in original). Thus, there is no 'real' male or female body, only an unattainable ideal to aspire to become. An ideal that is maintained through the reiteration and embodiment of gender norms cemented

together by heterosexuality. Following Butler's contention that all of our claims to 'be male' or 'be female' are a fiction, I argue that transsexuals are embroiled in much the same process of attaining a 'sex' as non-transsexuals. Namely, *Being Transsexual* entails the ongoing process of *becoming* male or female – although more work must be put into unbecoming the sex which they wish to reject.

However, some critics have continually raised the issue of Butler's apparent failure to acknowledge the limitations of the body, as well as its potential (e.g. Martin, 1992). This is particularly crucial in the case of transsexualism. As we saw in Chapter Six, transsexual subjects are disadvantaged in their quest to perform gender 'realness'. This is because they are marked as previously embodied and biological beings. Whilst this may be traumatic for those individuals in their day-to-day interactions not 'passing', or even refusing to 'pass', it has opened up the possibility for new subjectivities. Bordo suggests that cultural transformation can only be affected by "real, historical changes in the relations of power, modes of subjectivity, the organization of life" (1993: 41). The concept 'transsexualism' is certainly one such means of invoking cultural transformation: challenging the polarized gender system; offering new modes of gendered subjectivity and even new models of masculinity that will impact on present day power differentials of gender relations (Halberstam, 1998; Self, 2000). But, some transgender theorists (e.g. Rubin, 1998) have, legitimately, asked why transsexuals should be expected to challenge the binary gender system when so few of the rest of us do. Some feminists, like Raymond (1994) and Wilton (2000), are right to critique the medical concept transsexualism for upholding the binary gender system. But, transsexuals are also individuals trying to make sense of their own gender confusions; trying to create a sense of cultural belonging when gender remains a principal ordering factor (Shapiro, 1991). It is not *their* aim to knock down gender assumptions and it would be unrealistic for feminist and gender theorists to expect them to do so.

More sympathetic to the plight of transsexuals are those theorists who are also themselves transgendered. Sandy Stone recognizes the fear that would, undoubtedly, be invoked in many transsexuals if they were to make themselves more visible, or embrace the notion of 'being transsexual' and forgo attempts at 'passing'. However, by the early 1990's, she had championed the deconstruction of transsexuals seeming collusion with the binary gender system:

To deconstruct the necessity for passing implies that transsexuals must take responsibility for *all* their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body (Stone, 1991: 298).

As we have seen from complex identification practices and discursive positions of some of the participants in this study, steps are beginning to be made, if only by a few, towards the incorporation of a differently gendered past within self-narratives. This has to be welcomed, for both the lived experience of individual transsexuals and the state of wider gender relations.

Like Sandy Stone (1991), I am wary of the political ramifications of the desire to 'pass', but I am sympathetic to the day-to-day existence of those who resist 'coming-out' or, as Jay Prosser (1998) describes it, 'undoing the realness' of the gender to which they have aspired. As was evident from the material presented in Chapter Five, many of these participants are attempting to construct a sense of 'wholeness'. As Susan Hekman argued, "unity of self is both a difficult achievement and a necessary requirement for leading any version of a good and satisfying life" (2000: 299). Moreover, for a variety of social and economic reasons, it is not always possible and nor should it be expected that every trans-person inhabit the gender-borderlands, as 'gender outlaws' as Kate Bornstein (1994) has suggested. Yet, the making 'visible', the refusal to 'pass' and the refusal to deny a differently gendered history, is the very route not only to understanding transsexual subjectivity, but also to *making* the transsexual *a* subject.

Sifting through gender theory debates that frequently focused upon de-essentializing the ontological status of 'woman' and 'man', but then refused point blank to recognize the male or female transsexual's claim to these categories, has been vexing. Henry Rubin succinctly wrote that it is hardly surprising that "feminist and queer critiques of 'trans' phenomena have coincided with generally acknowledged dead ends in debates on subjectivity and embodiment" (1998: 279). Perhaps one of the best examples of this can be drawn from Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) extremely informative text *Volatile Bodies*. A consistent thread in Grosz's (1994; 1995) argument is her concern with counteracting essentialist accounts of gender and ahistorical or biologically determined notions of the

body. Certainly, her phenomenological reading provides a nuanced, interesting and influential thesis for theorizing embodiment beyond a Cartesian dualist account. Yet, in one short paragraph where she discusses transsexualism *conceptually*, she reneges on her own principles by employing an essentialist account of sex differences to deny the male-to-female transsexual's claim to be woman:

Men, contrary to the fantasy of the transsexual, can never, even with surgical intervention, feel or experience what it is like to be, to live, as woman. At best the transsexual can live out his fantasy of femininity - a fantasy that in itself is usually disappointed with the rather crude transformations effected by surgical and chemical intervention. The transsexual may look like a woman but can never feel like or be a woman. The one sex, whether male or female or some other term, can only experience, live, according to (and hopefully in excess of) the cultural significations of the sexually specific body. The problematic of sexual difference entails a certain failure of knowledge to bridge the gap, the interval, between the sexes. There remains something ungraspable, something outside, unpredictable, and uncontainable, about the other sex for each sex (1994: 207-208).

Like Henry Rubin (1998), Grosz's seeming retreat under the epistemological mantle of essentialism surprised me. In this extract, contrary to her general thesis, the transsexual woman's failure to ever "feel like or be a woman" implies an inherent female 'essence' that is only available to biological women. Grosz argues that this is inconsistent with the "fantasy" of the male-to-female transsexual who, wrongly, assumes that they "experience what it is like to be, to live, as woman". Rubin is correct to "object to Grosz's misrepresentation of transsexual projects and the easy way that transsexuals are criticized for using essentializing strategies, while she deploys her own essentialisms freely to support her feminist agenda" (1998: 275). As was illustrated in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, the participants' relationship to the categories 'male' and 'female' were not so straightforward. Certainly, some of them did claim to 'be male', or 'be female'. But, for many of the participants, a conscious awareness of the fragility of their claim to a new gender identity was evident in their narrative accounts. The following extract taken from an interview with Emily reiterates this point:

We're not umm, in the case of male-to-female, we're not natural born women nor will we ever be so and the kind of sense and feeling of womanhood is the closest approximation to how er we are ourselves rather than actually being a woman (K: right) and so from that context I kind of feel that (..) we should as a body kind of accept and understand ourselves as

transsexual rather than necessarily as women (..) because we're never quite there and you know, I can't tell you what it feels like to be a woman, all I know is that's the closest association umm in rigid gender terms (Emily, MtF, 33, 1/99-106).

As I have continually stressed throughout this thesis, all too often many feminists are quick to theorize transsexualism conceptually, and slow to engage with the actual experiences of those who identify as transsexual. The emergence of 'trans-studies' has begun to provide much needed nuanced accounts of the experiences of those who live, often uncomfortably, at the gender margins. Feminist theorists have traditionally been at the forefront of gender research constructing anti-essentialist, anti-biologically reductive, historically and culturally located accounts of sex and gender. But, if they are to remain there, they need to actually engage with the phenomena they write so well about. In the light of recent theoretical developments, it should no longer be acceptable to read crude accounts that group together "cosmetic surgery, transsexual surgery, dieting and high-heel shoes" as practices of self-mutilation (Jeffreys, 2000: 410) - one example amongst many.

Feminist psychologists have a particular role to play in this process. Whilst sexual politics are important, as psychologists, I believe it is also important to engage with and attempt to theorize 'psychological' phenomena that may not necessarily fit with our own political agendas. As I suggested in Chapter Three, perhaps the paucity of research by feminists investigating the experience of being transsexual is due, at least in part, to the impact of radical feminist politics. However, I am convinced the narrative accounts of those who identify as transsexual or transgendered will continue to provide a fruitful site for addressing many of the most pressing issues for feminist psychologists: questions of 'sex', 'gender' and 'sexuality'; as well as 'subjectivity', 'embodiment' and 'intersubjective gender relations'. I believe this thesis contributes to this process.

The notion of researching and theorizing embodied subjectivity became a central concern when formulating an appropriate methodological approach for this research. Certainly, most of the dilemmas incurred during this project resulted from trying to attend to the complexities of embodied subjectivity and the notion of an interior life, a psyche, whilst using a discursive methodology. In Chapter Four I discussed the merits and limitations of a discursive analysis for researching embodied subjectivities. Like those theorists I have

subsequently come to critique, I began the research with the intention of concentrating on identifying discourses that construct transsexualism (e.g. Hausman, 1995; Wilton, 2000). However, during the analysis I was continually struck by the richness of the interview accounts, and how difficult it was to deconstruct these without losing the transsexual subject. Attempting to theorize embodied subjectivity using a methodological tool that, in most of its guises, quite openly denies any interest in internal states can be hugely frustrating. At this point I began to draw upon alternative methodological approaches, incorporating aspects of phenomenology (Csordas, 1999), and psychoanalysis (Hollway, 1989; Hollway & Jefferson; 2000) into the analytic procedure.

If I were to start this project again I would, in all likelihood, move further towards a narrative analysis. This is not to suggest that a narrative analysis would be problem free. As Naomi Scheman (1997) points out:

People do not remember everything that happens to them, and culturally available story lines help give shape to the stuff of some lives (make them “memorable”) while leaving others gappy and jerky. Narrativity *per se* may be humanly important, but we have no access to narrativity *per se*: What we have are culturally specific narratives, which facilitate the smooth telling of some lives and straitjacket, distort, or fracture others (Naomi Scheman, 1997: 126).

Many of these participants' lives are straitjacketed, distorted and fractured by their radical swing across gender identifications. Whilst, for most of us, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations are accepted as sometimes ephemeral, the one aspect of self-narrative that is expected to always cohere is our gender identity. Thus, for the transsexual, this often involves denying a differently gendered past. Or, as we saw in Chapter Five, if they wish to include aspects of their gender history into their self-narrative, this entails drawing upon powerful discourses, be they Cartesian dualist, biological or psychoanalytic, to account for continuity in self. A discourse analytic method is beneficial as it provides insight into the multiple and contradictory ways individuals use cultural concepts to make sense of their social world. However, Harriet Bjerrum Nielson asks, “whether one can grasp the other side of the dialectic between the individual and the social without a *psychological* perspective”. This would entail not only attending to “how people make use of cultural concepts to construct themselves and their social world, but also how such

personal constructions may give rise to cultural and social change" (1999: 46-47, my emphasis).

Nielson argues that when we create specific texts we do not only make sense of what goes on around us: we also make sense of our internal, unconscious passions and sufferings (1999:50). Thus, she incorporates a psychoanalytic reading alongside a deep-hermeneutic cultural interpretation of narrative accounts, seeking out "'black holes' as sites for self-constructions". Drawing upon others, Nielson distinguishes between a psychotherapeutic interpretation in therapy (which aims to provide insight and change the analysand) and the eliciting of unconscious structures that permeate symbolic forms in order to "understand how unconscious desires and cultural activity are intertwined" (1999: 71). Our lives may indeed be constructed to conform to a particular historical time, but this self-construction is always underpinned by emotions, dreams, desires and fantasies. Furthermore, she argues social constructionist accounts that concentrate solely on discourse, theorizing how discourse mediates change in 'conceptions of self', will fail to grasp that subjectivity is also open to temporal change. Thus, in a style not that dissimilar from Hollway and Jefferson (2000), Nielson suggests that subjectivity can only be properly theorized through attention to unconscious structures. Consequently, autobiographical accounts may provide an insight into how a narrator can contribute to cultural transformation via the impact of their symbolic behaviours, which can be elicited from story telling or embodied practices.

My frustrations with discursive psychology led me to examine psychoanalytic theory during the final stages of this thesis. My understanding of the diverse range of approaches remains slight. However, it seems likely that future research which draws to a greater degree upon psychoanalytic conceptions may provide a fruitful means for illuminating the discursively *inaccessible* processes at play in transsexual subjectivity, and the potentials these pose for the cultural transformation of gender relations. As Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen suggest:

...sexuality and psychic life cannot be understood with historical tools alone. To do so is to produce a limited reading that cannot adequately theorize a given subject's relation to his/her own embodiment, to unconscious desire, and to the particular history of a subject's own psychic life. Psychoanalysis offers us the tools for another kind of reading, a reading that does not make

other readings irrelevant or wrong but that does pose other sorts of questions (Elliot & Roen, 1998: 246).

To reiterate Adam Phillips, “[P]sychoanalysis, as theory and therapy, can never be useful...as a way of putting us closer to the Truth. But it can be useful in the way it adds to our repertoire of ways of thinking about the past” (1994: 67). And, I might add, the future.

8.1 Implications for political practice

These are, predominantly, apolitical times. But, the politicization of the ‘trans’ movement has resulted in an increased profile and, I believe, to some degree, a greater awareness of the phenomenon ‘transsexualism’. However, the political strategies employed by *Press for Change* in the UK are underpinned with a deep conservatism. This has implications for a more nuanced understanding of transsexual embodied subjectivity.

Throughout the thesis I have illustrated how Cartesian dualist discursive constructions permeate the representations of transsexualism found in both media and individual participants’ accounts. It has been argued that the effect of deploying ‘born in the wrong body’ and ‘having the brain of the other gender’ as explanatory accounts for transsexualism serve to reinforce and reinstate that there are only two genders, male-masculine, female-feminine and that everyone must ascribe to one and only one of them (see Chapters One, Three and Five). Thus, transsexualism in these accounts is not radical or transgressive. Rather, it is the result of an unfortunate medical condition and reassignment surgery is available, not only to cure, but also to regulate a binary gender system. I have also endeavoured to show how transsexuals themselves attempt to move beyond Cartesian dualist explanations. For example in Chapter One, when asked if she was ‘born in the wrong body’, Jackie attempted to explain that ‘it wasn’t that simple’. Alternative formations of transsexualism (see Chapter Five) and instances when transsexual subjectivity resists Cartesian dualist conceptions through practices such as incorporation gender history into self-narrative and refusing to ‘pass’ have been suggested as effective ways to undermine the binary gender system.

However, the notion that transsexualism supports heteronormative gender relations can also be discerned from campaign material that aims to assure the right to change the birth certificate for those that identify as transsexual (see Chapter Four). Another excellent example of the deployment of 'conservative discourse as political strategy' is exemplified in the media coverage that surrounded Stephen Whittle's 1996 case at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Stephen Whittle fought, and eventually lost, a convoluted legal case at the European Court that attempted to secure his right to be recognized as the legal father of his partner's biological children, who were conceived after artificial insemination. The legal issue pivots on the notion that Stephen cannot be recognized as male whilst his birth certificate reads female. Whilst recommendations were made to the UK government to address this issue, the case was rejected because the European Court viewed it as a matter for the member state. The point here is certainly not to question Stephen's claim to be legally recognized as the guardian of his children. He has been there for them since they were born, he picks them up from school and plays a vital role in their upbringing (Self, 2000). However, I want to look at the way this case was represented in some media sources, and outline what it can tell us about how 'transsexualism' is constructed, evaluating the discourses that are being mobilized in order to achieve political reform.

In an article that is worthy of a far more detailed analysis than I have the space for here, Sarah Rutherford, Stephen Whittle's partner, provides an account of their situation:

Both of us wanted children and a normal family life. Yet it seemed impossible... I never stopped loving Stephen, but I hated the complications he had brought to my life. What I disliked most of all was the feeling that society did not recognise our relationship... All Stephen and I want now - for our children's sake more than our own - is the right to marry one another. ...I, too, feel I am being forced into being a common law wife when I would like to be a proper one. Stephen has lived as a man and is now a father. Why can't he also be my husband? (Clare Campbell, *Daily Mail*, 9 October 1996)

This article is illustrated with two photos: one of Stephen and Sarah, and one of Stephen cradling their baby daughter. The caption reads "Sarah Rutherford and Stephen Whittle: Battling to have a normal family life". Stephen and Sarah's loving relationship and secure family home is deployed to appeal to the sensibilities of middle England in an attempt to attain political change. In *this* account, in contrast to parts of his self-narrative

he divulged to Will Self (2000), Stephen Whittle is the male version of Hayley in Coronation Street: inoffensive; conformist; an upholder of family values. But, this representation negates the complexities of many transsexuals situation. Instead, it reinforces the dominant heteronormative hegemonies, restricts the possibility of creating more ambiguous forms of gender subjectivity and keeps 'unrecognized' relationships well and truly hidden.

Similar trends towards a 'media friendly' conservative style of campaigning for relationship recognition and sexual equality have also emerged from the gay community, under the banner of 'virtually normal' (e.g. Sullivan, 1995). As Toby Manning laments:

Rather than challenge the thinking behind taxonomies of 'deviant' and 'normal', the gay response has been to try and prove its 'normality' ... In order for these 'positive images' of gayness to be easily understood by the 'straight' world, all 'difficult' aspects of homosexuality are glossed over, and those whose lives place them slap in the middle of these difficulties are marginalized accordingly. Taken at random these difficulties include: sadomasochism, male promiscuity, transsexuality, bisexuality, tensions between lesbians and gay men, lesbian penis fantasies, and, simple self-loathing (1996: 100)

As was shown in Chapter Seven, some transsexuals may object to being positioned as one aspect of homosexuality, preferring instead to aspire to fixing a claim upon the privileges of heteronormativity. Rather than join forces with the other "'difficult' aspects of homosexuality" or, more accurately, those marginalized individuals whose subjectivity falls outside of heteronormative hegemonies, some transsexuals, in the UK particularly, have begun to fight their own battles under the same 'nearly normal' banner (see also Chapter Four).

Whilst I understand the motivations behind *Press for Change*'s style of campaigning, the opportunistic use of heteronormative discourses that fail accurately to represent the experiences of most trans-people may, in the long term, only serve to regulate modes of subjectivity for those with ambiguous gender subjectivities. This type of political strategy is as restrictive as those medical discourses of transsexualism that seek to fix gender ambiguity by pushing the gender dysphoric individual to identify as either male or female. By failing to represent the particularities of transsexual subjectivity, *Press for*

Change misses the opportunity to challenge the very structures of 'normativity' which make gender ambiguity an unlivable zone. With such criticisms in mind, Ángel Juan Gordo López has argued:

...it is not enough to identify practices which regulate the body and gender. Coalitions and alternative alliances with people who participate in these practices should be strengthened. A high degree of coordination is needed to organize and mobilize those 'cultural unintelligible categories' such as those people who want to retain their ambiguous sexual/gender identities within gender reassignment programmes. To legitimize these sort of locations we need stronger networks and relational analytical devices to mediate and free-associate in more efficient ways (1996: 191).

In Chapter Seven, I argue for stronger political alliances between transgendered and gay and lesbian communities. This was, firstly, to provide an accommodating space where non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities can be tried on and played out, and, secondly, to facilitate a more effective challenge against heterosexist and normative hegemonies that regulate the permissible modes of gendered subjectivity for us all. I am aware that transsexual men and women do not have the same legal rights as biological men and women and that the success of political campaigns is often dependent upon a single political goal underpinned by the illusion of representing a monadic identity category. As Susan Hekman argues: "[A]mbiguous, fluid identities don't fly in the political world or in courts of law. Thus, far from problematizing the connection between identity and politics as the theorists had hoped, identity politics has instead made embracing a specific, fixed identity a precondition for political action" (Hekman, 2000: 297). However, like Wendy Brown (1995), I am wary of the ramifications if, and when, identity categories become tied to legal definitions. Undoubtedly, if transsexuals secure the right to change their birth certificate, this right will be predicated upon particular conditions. Most obviously, as is the case in other countries, this will entail having completed gender reassignment surgery. This leaves little room for ambiguity and has significant implications for the choices and gender trajectories open to gender dysphoric individuals.

8.2 Concluding overview

In this thesis I have argued that *Being Transsexual* involves the ongoing process of *becoming* male or female. As illustrated in Chapter Six, shifts in embodied gendered subjectivities can be profound, but memories of a past existence, often lying dormant, are never far from casting long shadows of doubt over seemingly secure identifications. An old photograph, a random meeting with a past acquaintance, a slip of pronoun by a life-long friend, not to mention the physical markings of a previous embodied being can all violently unpick a new found sense of self. But, these other selves need not always be our undoing as they can also facilitate our understanding of both selves in transition and the politics that underpin this. As Adrienne Rich elegantly scribed:

It can be difficult to be generous to earlier selves... Yet how, except through ourselves, do we discover what moves other people to change? ... A more politicized life ought to sharpen both the senses and the memory (Rich, 1986: 223).

Yet, throughout the chapters of this thesis I have traced the appeal of biological explanations for transsexualism that perpetuate conservative politics and implicitly deny any notion of a prior gendered self. But, as Gayle Rubin argued in 1984:

...human sexuality is not comprehensible in purely biological terms. Human organisms with human brains are necessary for human cultures, but no examination of the body or its parts can explain the nature and variety of human social systems. The belly's hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine. The body, the brain, the genitalia, and the capacity for language are all necessary for human sexuality. But they do not determine its content, its experiences, or its institutional forms. Moreover, we never encounter the body unmediated by the meanings that cultures give to it (Rubin, 1984: 276).

Seventeen years later, this begs the question why are we *still* puzzling over the same critiques. Gender is not innate, nor biologically determined. The evidence from this thesis illustrates that gender identity is played out through social, cultural and material practices. In order to manifest as their desired gender identity these participants had both to learn new ways and shake off old habits of gendered embodiment. They were not simply born that way: they had not always been male or been female. Furthermore, many recognized the impossibility of ever achieving their desired male or female identity. What this tells us is something of the cultural force of gender. Some of us are in the

privileged position of only occasionally feeling ambivalent about our gender identities. Whilst, for others, gender proves an unlivable zone. But, more than this, it illustrates how gender, as a cultural ordering factor, has come to dominate the current social and historical landscape.

Perhaps, this is why the phenomenon 'transsexualism' is, to many, both abhorrent and fascinating. Transsexualism opens up the possibility of a different gender position for us all. Moreover, as Will Self (2000) and some of the FtM participants argued, it might even lead to *better* gender relations by offering, in this case, a different model of masculinity. Certainly, as those critics of the medical construction of transsexualism argue, transsexualism does aid in the maintenance of a polarized binary gender system. But, and this is an important but, in its very existence it also undoes our certainty in the immutability of our pre-destined gendered being. Perhaps, and it already seems imminent, we will see increasing numbers of men presenting for reassignment surgery (Press for Change, 2000). This is not because of an epidemic of supposed birth defects, but because of the ongoing investment in and valorizing of dominant images of masculinity and some men's increasing, and rarely spoken, anxieties about their ability to meet these. Likewise, for FtM transsexuals, whose gender anxieties must also have been unconsciously mediated by their ability to slot into the social and cultural structures of femininity, always and already filtered through power differentials, explanations that attempt to ground transsexualism within biological discourses remain the most popular. This is because biological explanations reinscribe a *feeling* of gender certainty. Conversely, for the non-transsexual, the practice of representing the transsexual as a 'freak', 'weirdo' or 'psycho' allays our own gender anxieties that the mere existence of the phenomenon unleashes. As Milan Kundera suggests, "*possibility* shadows every single person and changes the nature of his [sic] life; for... any new possibility that existence acquires, even the least likely, *transforms everything about existence*" (1996: 36, my emphasis).

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Appendices

1 Recruitment material

1(a) Recruitment Leaflet distributed at *2nd International Transgender Film Festival*

GENDER RESEARCH PROJECT

Calling MtF and FtM transsexuals who would like to partake in a research study that aims to provide an informative and diverse account of transsexual experience.

If you are interested in discussing your own personal account of transition, as well as more general notions of masculinity, femininity, manhood and womanhood

then contact

Katherine Johnson
Middlesex University, Enfield, EN3 4SF
Tel: 0181-362654 (work)
Tel: 0181-8027603 (home)
or email: K.Johnson@mdx.ac.uk

1(b) Advertisement slip in FM newsletter, *Boys Own*

I am a PhD student at Middlesex University currently researching transgendered/transsexual identity. I would like to discuss with both gay and heterosexual identified F-T-M's topics including: experiences of the reassignment process; gender terminology and sexual orientation; and finally perceptions of how TG/TS identity is represented in the media. If you would be interested in taking part, please contact Katherine Johnson, tel: (work) 0181 3626654, (home) 0181 8027603; or email me at K.Johnson@mdx.ac.uk

1(c) Advert in *The Pink Paper*

Transsexual/Transgender Research Project:
PhD researcher needs to hear from
MtF/FtM TS's/TG's. Please call Katherine
for more information, 0181 8027603.
Email: K.Johnson@mdx.ac.uk

2 Semi-structured interview schedules

2(a) Interview 1: Media and Legal representations

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about your experience of being transsexual. Our conversation will be tape recorded and then transcribed. Your name will be changed in order to protect anonymity. You are welcome to choose your own name for the purpose of this study, or I will pick one for you. If, for any reason, you would rather not answer one or some of the questions, please say so and we will leave them out. Similarly, if at any point you would like to terminate the discussion just say so. I may use some material from the transcripts for publication and, of course, you are welcome to have copies.

Introduction

How old are you?

How long has it been since you had reassignment surgery?

Transsexuals in Society - Media and Legal representation

Media

What is your favourite television programme?

Why?

What newspapers and/or magazines do you read?

What is about them that you like?

Can you remember and describe any newspaper articles about transsexuals that you have particularly liked?

Why did you like them?

Did you feel they related to your own experience in anyway? (can you explain how?)

Have there been any newspaper articles about transsexuals that you have particularly disliked, or objected to?

What was it in particular that you objected to/disliked/upset you?

How did it make you feel?

In what ways would you have liked to change the article?

Can you remember and describe any television programmes about transsexuals that you have particularly enjoyed?

What was it about them that you liked?

Did you feel they related to your own experience in anyway? (can you explain how?)

Can you describe any television programmes about transsexuals that you have particularly dislike?

What was it in particular that you objected to/disliked/upset you?

How did it make you feel?

In what ways would you have liked to change the programme?

How do you think transsexuals are portrayed in the media?

Do you think the media coverage of transsexualism increases peoples understanding of transsexuals? *(in what ways? can you give any specific examples?)*

Do you think that the media coverage of transsexuals is an accurate portrayal of things that occur in your own life? *(in what ways? can you give any specific examples?)*

Can you think of ways any media coverage has been of particular benefit to you? *(in what ways? can you give any specific examples?)*

Has there been any coverage you feel has had a detrimental effect on you or your experiences? *(in what ways? can you give any specific examples?)*

Law

What is your understanding of the legal position of transsexuals?

What affect does this have on your life?

Have you had any detrimental experiences due to the legal positioning of transsexuals?

Can you describe what happened? How did you feel?

What aspects of the law would you like to see changed? *(birth certificates, marriage, parenting?)*

What involvement do you have with groups such as Press for Change?

Does their work have an important affect on your life?

2(b) Interview 2: Changing Identities MtF participants

Transsexualism

What do you think it means to be a transsexual?

What does the term transsexual mean to you?

Is it a term you identify with? (why/why not?)

Are there any situations in which you would prefer NOT to identify as transsexual?
(why?)

Do you think to identify as a transsexual gives a full enough representation of yourself?

Are there any other terms you would prefer to identify as?

What does the term gender dysphoric mean to you?

In what ways do you feel it differentiates from the term 'transsexual'?

Is it a term you have, or would use to represent yourself?

When? In what situations?

Sexuality

Can you describe your first crush?

Can you describe when you first became aware of sexual feelings?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Have you ever questioned that?

In what ways?

Has your sexual orientation changed since your reassignment?

How do you feel about that?

Is your sexuality important to your identity in any ways?

Do you feel your sexual orientation has any influence on your life?

Has your sexual orientation been affected by being a transsexual in any way?

Did your sexual orientation have influence on your reassignment process?

Is your identity as a transsexual affected by your sexual orientation in any way?

For those who identify as lesbian

Is it something that you are openly out about?

In all situations?

What situations are you less comfortable about being out?

Do you socialise much in the lesbian scene?

In what ways have you found members of the lesbian/gay scene to be supportive/accepting of transsexuals?

Have you had any un-supportive or non-accepting experiences with members of the lesbian/gay scene?

Do you or would you use methods to divert attention from your sexuality?

If so what/why?

How do you feel about this?

M-T-F's on women

What do you think it means to be a woman?

What does it mean to you to be a woman?

In what ways do you express yourself as a woman?

What do you think it means to be feminine?

How important do you think femininity is to being a woman?

In what ways?

How important do you believe appearance is to femininity? (e.g. clothes, make-up, physique)

In what ways do you feel you express femininity?

In what ways is being perceived as feminine important to your identity?

Do you ever take your femininity for granted?

Do you ever feel unfeminine?

In what ways?

Is it something that concerns you?

Do you ever feel masculine?

In what ways?

Is it something that concerns you?

How do you view femininity in others?

Is it something you find attractive/unattractive, like/dislike?

Do you see femininity as a positive/negative quality? Why?

In what ways do you feel women might reject femininity?

How do you feel about women who do?

M-T-F's on men

What do you think it means to be a man?

Have you ever felt that you were a man?

In what ways?

Have you ever tried to be a man?

How? In what ways?

Do you think it was effective?

How did this make you feel?

What do you think it means to be masculine?

How important do you think masculinity is to being a man?

In what ways?

How important do you believe appearance is to masculinity? (e.g. clothes, physique)

Do you think you have ever been masculine?

In what ways?

How do you view masculinity in others?

Is it something you find attractive/unattractive, like/dislike?

Do you see masculinity as a positive/negative quality? Why?

In what ways do you feel men might reject masculinity?

How do you feel about men who do?

2(c) Interview 2: Changing Identities FtM participants

Transsexualism

What do you think it means to be a transsexual?

What does the term transsexual mean to you?

Is it a term you identify with? (*why/why not?*)

Are there any situations in which you would prefer NOT to identify as transsexual?
(*why?*)

Do you think to identify as transsexual gives a full enough representation of yourself?

Are there any other terms you would prefer to identify as?

What does the term gender dysphoric mean to you?

In what ways do you feel it differentiates from the term 'transsexual'?

Is gender dysphoric a term you have or would use to represent yourself?

When? In what situations?

Sexuality

Can you describe your first crush or when you first became sexually aware?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Have you ever questioned that?

In what ways?

Has your sexual orientation changed since your reassignment?

How do you feel about that?

How important is your sexuality to your identity?

What influences do you feel your sexual orientation has on your life?

Is your sexual orientation affected by being a transsexual?

Did your sexual orientation have an influence on your reassignment process?

Is your identity as a transsexual affected by your sexual orientation in any way?

For those who identify as gay

Is it something that you are openly out about?

In all situations?

What situations are you less comfortable about being out?

Do you socialise much in the gay scene?

In what ways have you found members of the gay/lesbian scene to be supportive/accepting of transsexuals?

Have you had any un-supportive or non-accepting experiences with members of the lesbian/gay scene?

Do you or would you use methods to divert attention from your sexuality?
If so what/why? How do you feel about this?

F-T-M's on men

What do you think it means to be a man?
What does it mean to you to be a man?
In what ways do you express yourself as a man?

What do you think it means to be masculine?

How important do you think masculinity is to being a man?
In what ways?

How important do you believe appearance is to masculinity? (e.g. clothes, physique)

In what ways do you feel you express masculinity?

In what ways is being perceived as masculine important to your identity?

Do you ever take your masculinity for granted?

Do you ever feel unmasculine?
In what ways?
Is it something that concerns you?

Do you ever feel feminine?
In what ways?
Is it something that concerns you?

How do you view masculinity in others?
Is it something you find attractive/unattractive, like/dislike?
Do you see masculinity as a positive/negative quality? Why?

In what ways do you feel men might reject masculinity?
How do you feel about men who do?

F-T-M's on women

What do you think it means to be a woman?

Have you ever felt that you are a woman?

In what way?

Have you ever tried to be a woman?

How? In what ways?

Do you think it was effective?

How did this make you feel?

What do you think it means to be feminine?

How important do you think femininity is to being a woman?

In what ways?

How important do you believe appearance is to femininity? (e.g. clothes, make-up)

Have you ever tried to be feminine?

In what ways?

How do you view femininity in others?

Is it something you find attractive/unattractive, like/dislike?

Do you see femininity as a positive/negative quality? Why?

In what ways do you feel women might reject femininity?

How do you feel about women who do?

2(d) Interview 3: Autobiography - Telling your story

The process of change

Do you remember when you first heard the term 'transsexual'?

What did it mean to you?

How did you feel?

How old were you when you first thought it might relate to how you were feeling?

How did you feel?

Did you confide in anyone?

Did you read many books about transsexuals?

Were there any that had a particular effect on you?

How long after this was it that you began the reassignment process?

What did you do in this time?

How did you cope with your feelings?

How long did reassignment take you?

Can you describe for me the stages you had to go through in order to get where you are now?

How long did you have to live as a woman/man before you were allowed to have surgery?

How often did you meet with clinical and medical staff?

When did you begin hormones and how did they make you feel?

What exactly did your surgical procedure involve?

What was the most crucial part of the reassignment process for you?

Can you describe the relationship you had with the psychiatrists involved in your reassignment?

Were they supportive/understanding?

Can you describe the relationship you had with the surgeons who did the operations?

Were they supportive/understanding?

Can you describe how you feel about your body now?

What aspects of the surgery were you most pleased with?

What aspects of the surgery are you most disappointed about?

Do you plan to have anymore surgery?

Can you describe the ways in which you feel you have changed since your reassignment?

In what ways do you feel the sex reassignment has affected your health?

Psychologically? Physically?

Social Networks

Employment

Were you working before you began the reassignment process?

What did you do?

Did you enjoy it?

Are you working now?

Do you enjoy your work?

If not, how do you feel about that?

Did you stay in your job during the reassignment process?

Can you describe to me the reactions you received from your employer?

Can you describe to me how your work colleagues reacted to your proposed reassignment?

OR

When did you stop working and why?

Did you manage to find alternative employment?

In what ways do you think reassigning has affected your employment prospects?

Has your income been affected since having sex-reassignment?

Has your career path been affected by having sex-reassignment?

How does that make you feel?

Friendships

Do you know many other transsexuals?

What kind of relationship do you have with them?

Do you belong to any support groups?

Which ones? Would you like to?

In what ways was belonging to a support group important to you during your process of change?

Is it as important to you now?

Do you have many friends who are not transsexuals?

Are some of these friends people who knew you before your reassignment?

Can you describe to me how you went about telling them of your plans to reassign?

What were their reactions?

Are you open about being a transsexual with the friends you have made post-operatively?

Can you describe to me how you went about telling them?

What were their reactions like?

Are there friends that you have lost because of your transsexualism?

How does this make you feel?

Lovers

Were you sexually active before you began the process of sex reassignment?

In what ways did your perception of your body affect your sexual desire?

Did you like having sex?

Why?/Why not?

Have you been sexually active since your reassignment?

In what ways does your perception of your body as it is now affect your sexual desire?

Do you enjoy having sex now?

Why?/Why not?

Were you in a relationship before you began the process of reassignment?

Can you tell me about this relationship?

What happened to the relationship?

How do you feel about that?

Are you in a relationship now?

Can you tell me about this relationship?

How do you feel about it?

Would you like to be in a relationship?

Why/why not?

Can you describe to me the type of relationship you would like to have?

In what ways do you feel being a transsexual affects your ability to meet potential partners (for sex or relationship)?

Early life

Can you describe your earliest childhood memory?

Do you remember your childhood as a happy time?

In what ways?/Why not?

Can you tell me about the time you spent at school?

Did you enjoy it?

Can you describe to me your experience of puberty?

Can you describe how you felt about your body?

Family

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

What was your relationship like with them as children?

How about now? How has your reassignment affected your relationship with them?

What is your earliest memory of your mother?

What is your earliest memory of your father?

Can you describe the relationship you had with your parents as a child?

What affect has your reassignment had on your relationship with your mother/your father?

Have they been supportive/un-supportive at all?

Is there anything about the relationship you have with your family now that you would particularly like to change?

Is there anything about the relationship you have with your family now that you are particularly happy with?

Do you ever have any doubts or regrets about having reassigned?

Is there anything else you would have liked me to ask you about?

3 Transcription Notes

- (i) K: interviewer, occasionally referred to as KJ.
- (ii) (Albert, FtM, 59, 2/23-26). This string indicates that the participant was Albert, he is 59 years old and that the extract was taken from interview 2, lines 23-26.
- (iii) (...) pause in speech, each full stop indicates one second.
- (iv) so words that are underlined are emphasized in speech.
- (v) (hhh) represents laughter, the h's the longer the length of laugh.
- (vi) ... indicates omitted text.
- (vii) *italics* represents my emphasis.

4 Coding Frames

(a) Coding Frame for MtF Interview analysis

1 Transsexualism

A What does it mean to be TS?

To be Transsexual = born in the wrong body
 Transsexuals = brain/mind body dualism
 Transsexual = freak/weirdo/abnormal
 Transsexualism as distinct from transvestism
 TS= not a choice
 Transsexual as biological/birth defect/chromosomes
 Transsexual = psychological condition/non psychological
 Transsexual = medical condition
 To be transsexual = to be straight
 To be transsexual = to be gay
 Transsexual as cross-gender identification
 Transsexual as transitory category
 Transsexualism as ongoing process of change

B Negotiating process of TS identification

Identifying as Transsexual
 Resisting Transsexual identification
 Identifying as Transgendered
 Resisting identifying as Transgendered
 What does it mean to be transgendered?
 Identifying as Gender Dysphoric
 Resisting identifying as Gender Dysphoric
 Gender Dysphoria = transsexual
 Gender Dysphoria as distinct from Transsexualism

C Her/History

Realising/Discovering transsexualism
 Always known
 Acknowledging a differently gendered past
 Resisting a differently gendered past
 Reconceptualizing the past
 Accounting for delay in transition
 Cross-gender comparisons
 Distress

2 Sexual orientation

A Transsexualism and sexuality

Identifying as straight
 Identifying as gay/lesbian
 Identifying as bisexual

B Transsexualism and heterosexuality

C Transsexualism and lesbianism

Problems of identifying as TS lesbian
 Doing lesbian

3 Gender

Gender determined by brain
 Gender determined by body/sex
 Gender determined socially/interpersonal relations/perceptions of others
 Childhood as un-gendered
 Rigid gender codes
 Gender conformity
 Gender as separate from sexual orientation
 Femininity/masculinity as traits separate from gender

A What does it mean to be woman?

Woman = to be me
 Woman = appearance
 Woman = to be emotional
 To be woman 'in your head'
 To be woman defined by interpersonal relations

B Becoming woman

Identifying as woman
 Not being woman
 A mental transition
 Physical transition/embodying 'woman'
 Social role
 Appearing/passing as woman

C To be feminine

Femininity and woman
 Femininity and sexual orientation
 Femininity and appearance
 Femininity as a bodily practice

Femininity as innate - the natural state of 'woman'
 Subscribing to dominant images of femininity

D What does it mean to be male?

Male = penis/biology/physicality
 male = social role
 male = masculine

E To be masculine

masculine = power
 masculine = bodily practice

F On being male

Identifying as male
 Refusing male identity

G On being masculine

Rejecting masculinity

4 Self and identity

Being me
 Changing 'selves' - new person

5 The Body

On the body
 Puberty
 Hormones/biological changes
 Cultural practices of embodiment

6 Social Relations

Relating to other Transsexuals
 Support Groups - Transsexual & others
 Friendships
 Sexual relationships

7 Media Portrayal of Transsexuals

Sensationalising/simplistic representations
 Conservative discourses

8 Medical/Psychiatric

4(b) Coding Frame for FtM Interview analysis

1 Transsexualism

A What does it mean to be TS?

To be TS= born in the wrong body
 TS = brain/mind body dualism
 TS = in-between
 TS = freak/weirdo/abnormal
 TS= not a choice
 TS as biological/birth defect/chromosomes
 TS =psychological condition/non psychological
 TS = medical condition
 Transsexualism as a spiritual quest
 To be TS = to be straight
 To be TS = to be gay
 TS as cross-gender identification
 TS as transitory category
 TS as ongoing process

B Negotiating process of TS identification

Identifying as TS
 Resisting TS identification
 Identifying as Transgendered
 Resisting identifying as Transgendered
 What does it mean to be transgendered?
 Identifying as Gender Dysphoric
 Resisting identifying as Gender Dysphoric
 Gender Dysphoria = transsexual
 Gender Dysphoria as distinct from Transsexualism
 Gender dysphoria = confused about gender

C Her/History

Realising/Discovering transsexualism
 Always known
 Acknowledging a differently gendered past
 Resisting a differently gendered past
 Reconceptualizing past
 Accounting for delay in transition
 Cross gender comparisons
 Distress

2 Sexual orientation

A FtM Transsexualism and sexuality

- Identifying as straight
- Identifying as gay/lesbian/queer
- Identifying as bisexual
- Questioning sexual orientation

B Transsexualism and heterosexuality

- negotiating heterosexual relationships

C Transsexualism and lesbianism

D FtM Transsexualism and gay identity

- negotiating gay male relations

3 Gender

- Gender determined by brain
- Gender determined by body/sex
- Gender determined socially/interpersonal relations/perceptions of others
- Childhood as ungendered
- Rigid gender codes
- Gender conformity
- Gender separate from sexual orientation
- Femininity/masculinity as traits separate from gender
- Gender a choice

B Becoming male

- Identifying as male
- Not being male
- mental transition
- physical transition
- transition in social role
- appearing/passing as male
- Embodying male

C To be masculine

- masculinity = to appear male
- masculinity and sexual orientation
- masculinity and appearance
- masculine = to be protective
- masculinity and bodily practice
- masculinity and hormones
- masculinity as innate - natural state of male
- subscribing to dominant images of masculinity
- resisting dominant images of masculinity

D What does it mean to be woman

Don't know
 woman = not me
 woman = to be feminine
 woman = social role

E On being woman**F On being feminine**

Femininity and appearance
 Femininity and sexual orientation

4 Self and identity

Being me
 Changing 'selves'- new person
 Being the same person
 Questioning self identity
 Other identities

5 The Body

On the body
 Puberty
 Hormones/biological changes
 Surgery and desired physical changes to the body
 Cultural practices of embodiment

6 Social Relations

Relating to other Transsexuals
 Support Groups - TS & others
 Other Friendships
 Sexual relationships

7 Media Portrayal of Transsexuals

Sensationalising/simplistic representations
 Conservative discourses
 Media as informative

8 Medical/ psychiatric

201

Psychology and Cognitive Science Curriculum Group
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

Name of principal investigator:

KATHERINE JOHNSON

Name(s) of staff and student collaborator(s), if any:

SUPERVISORS
LYNNE SEZAL + CARLA WILLIG

Title of study:

A sex/gender distinction: Theorizing transsexual representations

1. Please give a brief description of the nature of the study, including details of experimental procedures:

Interested in discursive constructions of gender identity. Involves taped interviews with 6-8 participants who identify as either transsexual men or women. After transcription the text is analysed by employing Discourse Analysis (POTTER & WETHERELL 1987). Interviews take place in the participants' own home. They have the option to skip questions and terminate the interview at any point.

2. If any procedures involve the possibility of adverse physical reactions, will a registered First Aider be present?

N/A
Yes/No

3. Will deception be involved?

~~Yes~~/No

If yes, please give details:

4. Is any information to be withheld?

~~Yes~~/No

If Yes, please specify:

5. Approx. No. of Participants: Students: _____ Other (please specify): 8

If 'Other', includes school children, hospital patients etc. then please indicate how consent is to be obtained (e.g. parent, Head teacher, GP etc.)

6. Will you be obtaining written informed consent?

~~Yes~~/No

If no, please specify why not:

Participants give consent by volunteering for the interviews - They have no option to not answer at any point. To ask for written consent could detract from

Are participants to be paid? Yes/No

If yes, please state amount:

Length of session for an individual participant (if more than one session, please give number and nature of sessions and amount of time for each):

3 interviews each approx 1 hr

Will you inform your participants of their right to withdraw from the research? Yes/No

Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase? Yes/No

Will the debriefing include discussion with the participants to monitor any unforeseen negative effects or misconceptions? Yes/No

Will you guarantee confidentiality of information concerning your participants? Yes/No

Will it be possible to relate specific data to named individuals? Yes/No

If 'Yes', then please indicate what safeguards will be present to ensure no data can be used without the full knowledge and understanding of the principal investigator named above (e.g. coding of participant identity, storage of data under lock and key, registration with Data Protection Agency)

changing their name + any names they mention in the transcript, destroying tape recording after analysis

Have you read and understood the paper entitled 'Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants' published by the British Psychological Society? Yes/No

Are there any ethical issues which concern you about this particular piece of research? Yes/No

If Yes, please specify:

Signed: K Johnson

Date: 26/5/98

PLEASE SUBMIT THIS FORM TO THE CHAIR OF THE ETHICS COMMITTEE.

DO NOT COMMENCE YOUR RESEARCH UNTIL APPROVAL HAS BEEN OBTAINED.

PASSED BY ETHICS COMMITTEE

Name: Mike Carson

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 26.5.98

6 Glossary¹

Bilateral (double) mastectomy: surgical removal of both breasts

Cross-dressing: dressing in clothing appropriate to the opposite sex

Drag king: FTM cross-dresser, often **packing** (see)

Ethinyl-oestrogen: synthetic female sex hormone

FTM: female-to-male transsexual or transgenderist

Gender bender: anyone crossing the gender line who is not concerned about appearing 'convincing'. Also **gender fuck:** politicized cross-dressing, in both directions, emphasizing gender ambiguity and challenging traditional gender concepts

Gender dysphoria: the condition of feeling uncomfortable with one's gender/sex

Gender identity: one's sense of belonging to the male or female sex

Hypothalamus: part of the brain above the pituitary gland

Hysterectomy: surgical removal of the uterus (womb)

Intersex: born with the (full or partial) sex organs of both anatomical genders or with underdeveloped or ambiguous sex organs. (Replaces the politically incorrect term hermaphrodite)

MTF: male-to-female transsexual or transgenderist

Packing: wearing a dildo or penile prosthesis

Pass: to be seen as convincing in your preferred gender image

Penectomy: surgical removal of the penis

Phalloplasty: plastic or reparative surgery of the penis

Read: when someone detects that an individual is transgendered

Reassignment: procedure of gradual transformation from one gender role to the other; to usually takes several years and often culminates in surgical reassignment of the genital organs

Transgender (TG): originally used to refer to full-time cross-dressers or non-surgical transsexuals, people who live and work in the opposite (of their physical anatomical) gender continuously. Now it is also used to refer to the group of all people who cross gender lines. Sometimes it is used as a synonym for transsexual.

¹ This glossary has been constructed from the glossaries found in Nataf (1996) and Walters & Ross (1986).

Transsexual (TS): anyone who wants to have, or has had, a sex-change operation.

Transsexual's want to appear convincing in their new gender roles

Transsexualism: Attempts of an individual to assume the physical characteristics of the opposite sex – the symptom complex of gender dysphoria

- **primary** transsexualism: arising in childhood without any other underlying psychological or physical cause
- **secondary** transsexualism: arising later in life, usually in late adolescence or early adulthood and secondary to some underlying psychological or physical condition

Transvestism (TV): dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex, often associated with sexual excitement

Vaginoplasty: construction of a neo-vagina