‘Oh Yeah - is she a he-she?

Female to male Transgendered pupils in the formal and informal cultures of an English Secondary School

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Abstract

Recent research suggests that trans* pupils are subject to much trans-exclusionary practice in schools and finds little positive change despite statutory changes and greater recognition of trans* identities. This paper explores the ways in which two female to male trans* pupils in a London girls’ school were excluded in ways that were the result of both formal and informal policies, practices and cultures. First, I explore the use of school space, arguing that this was policed using processes of internment, refusal of recognition and bullying. This was implemented officially by the school and in pupil cultures. Second, these pupils also exposed how curriculum subjects are discursively cisgendered in schools, such that through their practices they inscribe gendered meanings on the body of the learner. Both pupils, therefore, had to negotiate learning gender conterminously with academic learning. Finally, I observe how staff saw these pupils as either abused or abusing. This research has implications for supporting trans* pupils in schools now.

Keywords: trans*; transgender; female-masculinity; learning; cisgenderism; exclusion

1. Introduction

> Oh Yeah - is she a he-she? …Is she gay? ... like I've never talked to her… I wouldn't hate her obviously … but does she dress like that deliberately? (Interview)

These questions were asked of me by a young woman in a girls' secondary school in London revealing her confusion and lack of understanding about one of her transgendered peers. The transgendered pupil she was referring to and another trans* pupil at the same school, form the focus of this paper. The data was collected as part of an ethnographic project in 2001-2 and 2002-3, whilst each young person was in their final year of compulsory schooling aged 15-16 (see section 2, below). It formed a chapter in a larger study exploring the links between girls' sexualities and educational patterns of achievement given the standards agenda at the school. Other chapters looked at different groups of girls including anxious (and sometime anorexic) high achievers, refugees, lesbians and Travellers (O'Flynn, 2007).

As recently as 2014, research in the UK and elsewhere has suggested that the discrimination faced by trans* pupils in schools is still very much in place. An investigation into transphobic bullying, commissioned by the Department for Education (DFE) and the UK Government Equalities Office (Mitchell 2014), noted that very little work is in place to tackle transphobic bullying in contrast, now, to homophobic bullying. This mirrors evidence that schools previously felt unable to deal with homophobic/heterosexist bullying (see O'Flynn et al 2003). The DFE and Equalities Office report argued that much more needs to be done 'in schools in order to reduce the view that the topic [trans*] is too challenging or too complex to deal with' (Mitchell 2014: 9). The New Zealand government commissioned the first

national youth survey on transgender, which found that 4% of young people were either unsure of their gender or transgender. Again these young people were at a higher risk of compromised mental health and personal safety and had more difficulty accessing appropriate health care (Clark et al. 2014) than their peers. Whilst these reports are interesting and important, they do not capture how the policies and practices of schools, including those about transphobic bullying and discriminatory practices, impact on the experiences of these pupils or their possibilities for education. This small-scale qualitative study shows the impact of different types of trans-exclusionary practice on the learning and well-being of two transgendered pupils as it happened. Such knowledge enables schools to understand the limits of an environment where the safety of the trans* pupil often has to be prioritised if they are to participate, learn, move freely and be fully part of the multicultural school.

In section 2, I orient the reader to some of the more prevalent cultural understandings around transgender in the period 2001-2003, touch briefly on the research process and introduce Carol and Nathan, the two pupils who are the focus of this paper. This leads into section 3 which discusses trans* theory and gender theory in relation to schooling. Section 4 then explores the ways in which school space was constructed and constrained. I argue that a threefold process of internment was implemented: officially by the school, in pupil cultures and self-imposed. Internment was regulated such that trans* differences and challenges to the 'normal' could disappear. By limiting their space and interaction, Carol and Nathan were limited in self-actualisation and self-empowerment. In section 5, I interrogate how, for these pupils, school was not about processes of gendered learning but privileged rather the learning of gender and assess the consequences of this on their academic

achievements. I argue that as Carol and Nathan had no choice but to prioritise learning gender before becoming academic learners, this took time and had academic costs. In section 6, I comment on the tendency for school staff to see both pupils as either abused or abusive, reducing their gendered identity to damage. Finally, the paper explores the implications for trans* pupils in schools and how the insights of this research might be used to support all school pupils in the dilemmas of gendered learning/learning gender.

2. Researching Transgender Experiences at School: 2001-2003

Between 2001-2003 understanding of trans* identities in UK schools was generally poor — not surprising given the broader context. The Equality Act became law in 2010 (Crown Copyright 2010). Before that, there was no requirement for schools to protect pupils who were undergoing gender reassignment or who identified as trans* from transphobic discrimination, bullying or harassment. Section 28[i] of the UK Local Government Act (HMSO 1988) was still in place and was not repealed in Scotland until 2000 and in England and Wales until the end of 2003. This had contradictory effects in the wider culture (see Stacey 1991), but in schools it 'inhibited a liberal approach to sex education' (Thorogood 2000: 427) and more generally made teachers very cautious in their approach to any discussions about sexuality or gender outside of the 'normal'.

As noted above, the project from which this paper comes was an ethnographic one. I was deeply embedded in the school, where I also worked as the teacher in charge of the key stage 4 (aged 14-16) behaviour and learning support unit at the school where I collected the data (2009). Weiner (1989) identifies a mainstream teacher researcher movement

concerned with professional development and improving pedagogic or classroom practice, in opposition to another type of teacher researcher who undertakes research with a focus on achieving social justice. This second type of teacher researcher, seeking social justice, was where I located my teacher research. The ethnography took place over two years and primarily took the form of 'intensive participant observation' (Skeggs 1997: 21) including interviews, field notes of observations in lessons, during informal school times, and of meetings, notes of informal chats with staff and pupils, the reading of school files and other school policies and minutes of meetings. As an ethnographic project, in which I was an insider-researcher (2009), my field notes and my analysis of the various documents available to me form at least as important a part of my data as do the interviews I conducted with some, but not all, of the pupils involved in the study. In relation to the exclusion and inclusion (where it happened) of my two focus pupils, Carol and Nathan, I draw on all these sources of data.

Having the position of an insider researcher, teaching in the school where I was also researching was a complex position for many reasons. Mac an Ghaill (2002) explores this in some detail, observing how his closeness to his black research participants better enabled him to understand their position in school. This allowed him to generate theory about how racism was operationalised in schools but also to better support his participants as their teacher. My identity as a lesbian created an 'outsider' identification with Carol and helped us get on. I was able to better support her because of the kind of teacher I was. She agreed readily to support me with my research. Her role as a research participant further supported my understanding of her as trans* and of how trans* identities are discriminated against in schools. Mac an Ghaill (2002) alludes to the time and energy of the work involved in this

type of ethnography, as both researcher and teacher identities run alongside each other, intertwine and then make difficult demands on us. For example, with my wider group of research participants, child protection issues were occasionally disclosed during research interviews. These had to be reported and investigated in ways that meant those participants were paused as research participants and, instead, worked with me as their teacher, or with other professionals within a specific child protection protocol, so that investigations were not jeopardised. As an insider researcher my location in the institution in terms of my power also proved important. I was a well-established middle leader with the ear of the leadership. This allowed the research to have some operational impact as it progressed. If a young person told me about a problem with their timetable, subject, or member of staff, I was sometimes in a position to support a change and did so.

Most of the 40 students in the wider research project knew of trans* identities as a cultural spectacle, through figures such as Dana International (http://www.dana-international.net/), who had won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1998 and through late night television shows, particularly Channel 4's *Ladyboys in Thailand*. More mundanely, Hayley Cropper, a fictional character who first appeared in the long running British soap opera *Coronation Street* in 1998 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hayley_Cropper), identified as male-to-female transgendered. However, whilst pupils spoke about Ladyboys and Dana International, Hayley Cropper was of no interest to them, perhaps because she was transitioning to female, rather than to male, but more probably because *Coronation Street* was seen as a TV show for an older generation, though importantly staff did use it as a reference point. More recent research suggests that young people are still equally under- (and mis-) informed, and information about transgender comes largely through media images (Mitchell 2014: chapter

4). One pupil, but not Carol or Nathan, mentioned the academic and trans* activist Stephen Whittle and had seen him give an interview about his own FTM transitioning (Channel 4 2002). More commonly, I heard trans* individuals referred to as 'he-shes', as per the opening quotation[ii]. I see this as an attempt by this pupil to get the terms correct. She was inquisitive, struggling to understand how best to address her trans* identified peer (Carol), as he or she or he-she or gay and how it might feel to interact with her – 'obviously I wouldn't hate her'. She seemed cautious about actually speaking to Carol to ask her directly any of these questions.

My focus here is, as noted above, on 'Carol' and to a lesser extent on 'Nathan', and names are clearly significant. Nathan did not choose his pseudonym for this research. He was Asian, British and Muslim. The name on the school register was an Asian girl's name. The name he chose to go by in school was a white British male name. I have chosen an alternative in keeping with this. His transitioning in respect of gender symbolically through choice of name was also raced. Carol was a white working class British pupil and drew on class and whiteness in the construction of her masculinity. Carol chose her mother's name for the research project. Interestingly, her given name, shortened, was gender ambiguous. This is significant, since most pupils in school called her by this shortened version, which could easily be read as a boy's name. When she chose her mother's name as a pseudonym, she was not particularly conscious of the implications for my research project – only that she was missing her mother, who lived about 100km away in Southampton, a lot. However, given that Carol chose a girl's name, I have used female pronouns throughout when discussing 'her' though I am not entirely convinced this reflects Carol's reality, given much of her lived existence in school. I have used male pronouns when discussing Nathan.

I spent at least one hour each day working, talking with or observing Carol, both in and out of lessons and she was happy to be interviewed. She was a 'target' year 11 pupil in the learning and behaviour support unit. Since she had only arrived at the school at the start of year 11, and had been out of school for more than six months previously, there was an urgent need to support her to achieve some examination success and, more importantly, secure an onward path in education or employment. My data about Nathan consists of observations both in and out of lessons and comments made by other students and staff. He consented to be part of the research but I did not interview him. He always greeted me in the corridor and there was a tacit recognition of my lesbianism as some sort of 'othered' connection between us. I also worked very closely with his best friend, Ayani, and he would sometimes speak to me through her or be present when I was conversing with her. Nathan was permanently excluded at the end of the spring term in his final year of school but allowed to attend to take examinations, which made interviewing him tricky. I have thought a great deal about whether to include Nathan in this study, but given my observations of the discrimination he endured and the fact that I am able to offer this from the perspective of an ethnographer in the school, I think it is useful. It was my first year working in the school so I was not able to change much for him positively at the time but I can at least put on record an explanatory account of the exclusionary processes that made it impossible for him to remain in the school.

3.Trans* theory

Trans* theory was less academically developed in 2003 than today. The *Transgender Studies Reader* (Stryker and Whittle 2006), published three years after this data collection, brought

together and presented key debates in trans* theory across different disciplines. This volume, and volume two (Stryker and Aizura 2013), presented key theoretical challenges to gender studies and feminist theory. New explanatory terminology, describing the specificity of the discrimination to which trans* individuals are subjected, was brought more widely into circulation. The term 'trans*' is used in this paper as an inclusive term of all identities within the diversity of the gender identity spectrum, excluding those whose gender identities conform to those assigned to them at birth – often now known as 'cisgendered' identities. 'Cisgenderist discrimination' is used to explain discrimination against those whose sex and gender do not cohere, against trans* individuals. For example, having separate male and female toilets can be viewed as cisgenderist practice, since it takes for granted that only two genders are possible and these are generally socially decided by signifiers such as dress, body hair and body shape. Cisgenderism is a useful term in capturing some specific discrimination such as this, not identified by sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, or homophobia. It is not without critics. Enke's (2013) important critique of cisgenderism is similar to that made by Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), in relation to the 'majoritising' or 'minoritising' view of homosexuality. Enke suggests that cisgender is in a dualistic asymmetric relationship with transgender and that it allows those claiming a cisgender identity to maintain a distance both psychologically and in terms of the power this identity gives them, whilst often at the same time advocating respect and rights for trans* individuals (Enke 2013).

Taking a majoritising view would suggest that all of us have a stake in gender/s and, perhaps more widely, that we are all caught in matrices of gender-power-identity-desire and these

are further caught in other intersections of class, race and disability. Enke suggests that an adverse impact of the term cisgender is that it forces the then minoritised other, transgender, to 'come out' through 'an ever narrower set of narrative and visual signifiers (Enke 2013: 243).

As a researcher and a teacher, and because of my theoretical understanding of gender as fluid (though I hope not in the fetishist way that Enke also cites as problematic for transgendered people), using cisgender is problematic, because it tends to separate or other transgendered individuals from the rest of 'us' 'normal' folk whilst also tending to homogenise all non-trans* people of a particular gender regardless of other intersectional differences such as sexuality, race and class and, as Sedgwick (op cit.) pointed out, there are similar dangers in all minoritising practices). For example, I identified as an out lesbian and my gender presentation at that time was fairly masculine, yet I did not (and do not) identify as trans*. I never asked Carol whether she identified as 'transgendered', because that would have felt like othering her in a minoritising way. However, writing about her as transgendered in spite of this becomes problematic because it relies on perceptions of how her gender was read by others, including myself, as transgendered, through the sorts of things she said and did and the ways in which she presented herself. She referred to herself as a boy. Certainly the discrimination she experienced as a result was both transphobic and cisgenderist. Kennedy's use of 'cisgenderism' (2012) in schools identifies specific instances of it in discriminatory practices such as refusing to let trans-identified pupils use the male/female toilet of their choice (often insisting they use the disabled toilet) or refusing to call the pupil by anything other than their given birth name, notwithstanding legislative

protection in the UK (Crown Copyright 2010). Both Carol and Nathan experienced many of these specific discriminatory practices.

Francis (2010) suggests that whilst the understanding of gender is binary within the regime of the school, different versions of masculinity and femininity are variously adopted by most pupils at different times, to different degrees and in different contexts. She proposes the term 'gender heteroglossia' to capture the gender performance of the 'numerous examples of gender ambiguity, complexity and transgression' in schools (2010: 485). Francis observes that the same pupil might perform gender differently dependent on situation, circumstance and motivation. Some pupils performed gender heteroglossic performances in their patterns of achievement, for example being an academically achieving 'boffin' boy whilst performing also gender monoglossia by being good at sport to compensate for this. However, where heteroglossia represents a consistent failure to do gender correctly, it is less acceptable. I found the consistently transgendered performances of Carol and Nathan were not generally well tolerated.

In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam (1998) outlines an understanding of masculinity as practiced by those who at one time identified as female, who still partially do so, or who are in transition, offering a range of different cultural representations of female masculinity. Halberstam's term, 'transgender butch' (1998: chapter 5) is particularly appropriate for both Carol and Nathan; though neither of them owned this term, they applied the words man/boy to themselves, regularly passing as male. Both pupils were not only in transition in relation to gender and sex, but also transitioning from child to adult. Their immanent

identities drew on cultural representations of female masculinity as resources which provided precedents for their existence, at least in cultural spaces. These female masculinity types were aspirational markers of possible realness in the world. Carol drew on male figures of men in uniform. She was herself an air cadet. Nathan wore black jeans, bomber jacket, shirt and baseball cap, passing as a young man.

Paechter (2006) has critiqued 'female masculinity', arguing particularly that it makes little sense as a theoretical construct, compared to the more obvious construction of masculine woman. She also suggests that Halberstam focuses on cultural studies for her 'truth' and fails to even acknowledge the work on gender identity completed in social science. Female masculinity is more theoretically convincing when taken as a study of a cultural type. It describes a set of female masculine iconic cultural referents. This is the difference between a 'masculine woman' and a woman practicing one of the iconic types of 'female-masculinity' that Halberstam outlines. Halberstam (1998) is writing the cultural history of a type. For example, I was a masculine woman at the time that I worked at this school, but I was not practicing 'female-masculinity' in the way that either Carol or Nathan did or through any of the types that Halberstam describes. Their performances of masculinity were much more challenging than mine. They were more consistent, more overt, and as their final year progressed both of them became more consciously stylized. Finding a way of recognising Carol and Nathan's cultural choices of masculinities in the data meant acknowledging this.

Butler (1990) has argued that the biologically, dichotomously sexed body as given at birth — with its male or female gender—is essentialist. This binary is strengthened through everyday discursive practices that make doing boy/man or girl/woman appear natural

when, in fact, they are practices that both constrain and permit choice. Butler argues that our relationship to the 'quite feminine' or 'quite masculine' (Butler 2004: 42) is necessary for us to be understood as intelligible subjects. This means those pupils with unintelligible gender, that which does not ever conform to established gender regimes, may have difficulty in being recognised in school. For Butler, being 'oppressed' is a mark of progress beyond the 'unrealness' of being unintelligible, which is not even considered worthy of oppression as human (2004: 218). Despite experiencing the discrimination identified by Kennedy as cisgenderist (2012), for these two pupils, Butler's sense of 'unrealness' was often much closer to their general experience than cisgenderism or transphobia and was additionally nuanced by their class and ethnicities. They were 'othered' in ways that suggested a certain lack of confidence about how to manage those who were so different. One of my purposes here is to make real the oppression suffered by Carol and Nathan as 'oppression', rather than as an 'unrealness' (2004: 218)— which in Carol's case at least, led to her being labelled as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) and her transgendered identity mislabelled or absorbed as a deficit in relationship to learning.

Youdell (2006) builds on Butler's notion of the unintelligible subject to explore the idea of 'impossible bodies' and 'impossible learners' in the school. She elaborates this theory to investigate identity categories that are less compatible with notions of the ideal learner and suggests that there might be identities which are completely incompatible with learning as constructed in school contexts. I show here how the identities of these two transgendered pupils at this time, in this school, were incompatible with learning. By this, I do not mean that they were not capable of learning but that the school constructed learning as, or confused it with, conformity to its own everyday practices. Learning becomes impossible if

one becomes excluded from (or within) classes. Impossible learners are those who, for whatever reason, do not get to go to classes, who do not participate in the curriculum of the school. Learning becomes impossible in this sense, and there is a loss of the opportunity to learn with one's peers. Within the context of a girls' school, Nathan and Carol made 'sex-gender trouble' (Youdell 2006: 161) and they made trouble as learners. Both had previously been excluded from schools. Nathan had several fixed-term exclusions before being permanently excluded. Carol had had fixed-term exclusions from schools in Southampton before moving to London. Both were young women growing up uncomfortable with the female sex assigned to them at birth and more comfortable as male. Both Carol and Nathan had in-school exclusions as well, commonly referred to as 'seclusion', where they would be separated and isolated from other pupils and would complete set work alone away from peers. An impossible learner is not a pupil therefore, who finds it impossible to learn, but rather one who seems at odds with the way in which learning is configured in the school though, as Youdell suggests, part of a learner's subjectivity could be recognised and understood while other parts were not (Youdell 2006: chapter 12) .

More recently, there has been more work to support transgendered youth and their parents. Most of this work revolves around meeting young people's needs to transition (for example, the work of de Vries and Cohen-Kettenis in the Netherlands (2012), of Norman Spack in the USA (Edwards-Leeper and Spack 2012) , support for parents in the form of self-help books based on the work of Spack (Brill and Pepper 2008) and wider professional literature for those working in the field (Mallon 2009). Generally, however, most work is clinical or medical in its focus, often assuming a gender binary and looking at transition in terms of clinical or medical processes to achieve resolution. More sociological research

based around school experiences of trans* teens tends to reconstruct these through memory work, so we have a retrospective adult gloss on what have clearly often been quite traumatising adolescent educational experiences (Johnson, Singh, and Gonzalez 2014).

Finally time is central to this paper; as Plummer suggests, 'Stories can be told when they can be heard' (Plummer 1995: 120). Telling the stories of Carol and Nathan, as I did in 2003 and now, in 2015, are two different tasks. I tell it now because seemingly not much has changed for trans* pupils in schools in the interim, and, as noted above, Mitchell (2014) highlights the alarming lack of engagement with trans* issues in schools. These pupils seem to be as isolated, as in need of support, as much in danger of transphobic bullying as Carol and Nathan and schools seem as unlikely to be undertaking any work to tackle this as they were in 2003. Without telling a minoritising story of transgendered strangeness in school, I explore here the processes which conspire to make it very difficult for those pupils who consistently perform a trans* identity to succeed in schools academically. Whittle et al (2007) show that transgendered people are over-represented amongst those who leave school with very few qualifications and yet also in the numbers who complete both further and higher education. This suggests that compulsory schooling makes particular demands of sex/gender in learning and the recognition of success. It may be that as pupils move more consciously and confidently into their chosen gender, the 'unrealness' of gender becomes less salient and they are more easily accepted for their choices.

4. Trans-existence school space

This section explores some of the strategies used to exclude or marginalise Carol and Nathan's existence in school space. Whilst some were overtly discriminatory others were

more covert, ostensibly intended to function as supportive but in reality minimising the impact of gender trouble in school.

4i.Refusal of admission

Carol and Nathan had embattled existences facing quotidian challenges to their trans* identities, most significantly their right to be at Manor High at all. Girls' schools are self-evidently for girls and being a recognisable pupil-subject meant constituting one's gender as female. Thus Carol's right to be at this girls' school was contested immediately by both pupils and staff. This often turned her into a spectacle:

> I got the comment, 'Is that a boy or a girl?' Students seem to feel that they can speak about her, to me, in front of her – (Fieldnotes)

Nathan was in the year group above Carol and left before she arrived. However his trans* practice was still very much in people's minds and Carol's arrival reignited discussion about him. Pupils concerned about Carol's presence in school used the example of Nathan to discuss their anxieties, mounting a constitutive challenge to Carol's right to be there. Some said they felt uncomfortable being around her; one refused to be in a room alone with her.

Masculinity simultaneously troubles femininity in girls' schools as its other, as a 'lack', and yet doesn't trouble it at all because it is supposedly absent. Carol and Nathan presented particular problems for girls at Manor High because of the masculine gender 'choice' they made. Carol and Nathan thus destabilised the apparent stability of the category 'girl', causing considerable anxiety and making apparent the extent to which gender could be performed. This denaturalised other girls' performances of femininity, which they found

threatening. Whilst it has been suggested that girls' schools extend the repertoire of ways of being and doing girl (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001), there are clearly constitutive limits to this and the performance of trans female to male identity was, for some, an extension too far.

Some pupils felt it appropriate to contest the right of Carol and Nathan to be in school and did not recognise their own behaviour as oppressive. Knowledge that other pupils and I were lesbian did not create the same unease; whilst anti-lesbian sentiments were expressed, we were well defined as female desiring females. The lack of a vocabulary through which to organise oppressive discourse around Carol posed a problem for pupils and, from Carol's first day, our work to interpellate her in the school began from the sense that she was, in Butler's (2004 :218) terms 'unreal' – 'is that a boy or a girl?' (Fieldnotes)

Staff tended not to ask questions about Carol's and Nathan's rights to be in a girls' school, deploying instead a discourse of adolescence as a time of emotional, hormonal and physical torment to explain them (Epstein and Johnson 1998). Generally, they were seen as girls suffering confusion that would ultimately be resolved. More radical staff suggested this might be through operative sex change. They never considered that these pupils might want to remain 'in transition': gender or sex as unstable and constructed identity categories were not contemplated.

On the front of Carol's records from her previous school, deliberately placed under the clear plastic cover, was an unsigned post-it note. It read, 'Until recently, impossible to tell if Carol was a girl or a boy' (Fieldnotes). This implied that Carol's gender identity might be in

transition and that she might have to be supported against transphobic bullying. The post-it note simultaneously positioned her as Other.

Carol's place at the school was also contested on educational grounds even before she arrived, because of her previous record. She had attended four different primary schools; had frequent absences from her previous secondary school; had often been in trouble and been placed on a reduced timetable[iii] aged 14. She had also been in trouble with the police. Carol had been moved from living with her mother to her father because of domestic violence. Between April and October of the year she was 14, no school in the local authority in London to which she moved would offer her a place. Finally, the Director of Education of the local authority instructed Manor High to enrol her[iv]. Because of her history of 'disruption' and period of missed schooling, the principal decided not to allow her to attend any lessons; he did not want Carol to experience any more failure and I was instructed to set up a timetable that would allow her to succeed. This meant that Carol would not be taught in any mainstream class.

4ii. Invisibility through Benevolent Internment

Carol was from the outset defined as precariously *interpellate-able*. She spent two days a week in a commercial garage on an extended work placement and the rest of the time in the behaviour support centre. These strategies minimised her interactions with staff and students. Foucault identifies internment as a key strategy of the Classical Age, to keep the sexual ethics of the bourgeois family safe from the threat of 'unreason', by removing those considered mad or sexually immoral (Gutting 2005). Carol was dealt with through benevolent internment or internal exclusion within her placement. In my role as teacher

rather than researcher, I argued against this because it was so harsh and also because I was in charge of teaching a pupil who was interned in two classrooms all day for three days per week, with minimal opportunity for interaction. The school population did not have to interpellate her, to *real-ise* her existence. Later in the year she did attend some lessons after careful negotiation and a great deal of support. At the micro-level, however, the same processes continued as Carol was kept away from the 'normal girls' in class.

4iii. Invisibility by refusal of recognition

A more active refusal by staff to recognise him, by literally refusing to see him, led to Nathan's invisibility.

> In a lesson, taught by a generally effective teacher, Nathan suddenly got up and walked out... Earlier, he had had his hand up to answer questions but had not been selected. When Nathan walked out, the teacher made no comment. About fifteen minutes later, Nathan walked back in and sat down, only to walk out again after about five minutes and not return. The teacher made no comment, either to Nathan or the class, about such behaviour and the whole group ignored it. Neither did she report the incident. (Fieldnotes)

No other pupil was able to come and go from the classroom: 'bad' pupils were constantly challenged for breaking rules. Although this gave Nathan a certain power, it also meant he did not learn anything – he was invisible, not recognised. It appeared that the teacher did not want to call him 'Nathan'. She had already used his given birth name when calling the

register and other pupils had answered on Nathan's behalf. His friend, Ayani, told me later that Nathan did what he liked in lessons. Butler argues that:

> [If] the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that "undo" the person by conferring recognition or "undo" the person by withholding recognition , then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced (2004: 2).

Nathan was undone because recognition of his gender was withheld. His failure to incorporate gender norms so as to make him fully recognisable made his life much harder to live. The refusal of many staff and pupils to interact with Nathan meant that his power to self-actualise, even to constitute himself in relation to making meaning through learning, became very difficult. In spite of his slightness of build, staff were clearly quite scared by him, by his otherness, and would not challenge him. He often truanted from lessons and, in year 11 (aged 15-16), started to deal drugs in the toilets—a space of pupil power. Although this clearly gave him some power and status amongst pupils and scared some staff, it made it virtually impossible for him to succeed in school. Eventually he was excluded and allowed into school to only take his leaving examinations. After this, the police were contacted and an injunction taken out preventing him from coming within 50 metres of the school gates. As Butler has suggested, if one's options are 'loathsome' (2004: 2) it may be better to remain at a distance from social norms which are impossible to fulfil, even if this leads to 'estrangement' and an 'impaired sense of social belonging'. Nathan's estrangement was perhaps, a consequence of his lack of intelligibility within the school. Kennedy (2012) gives the specific example of refusal to use a trans-identified pupil's name as cisgenderism in

practice, but does not allow for the devastating consequences this may have on the impossibility of being recognised as a learner.

4iv. Policing the boundaries of transgendered school space - bullying

Anxieties felt by other students around Carol's place in a girls' school were expressed through incidents that objectified her, making her a spectacle or mocking her in ways that were both homophobic and transphobic and thus policing the school space as being for those who could 'do girl' acceptably. Twice a group of older girls set up others – a younger naïve girl and one identified as having SEN – to ask Carol out, having persuaded them that Carol was a boy. The older girls would then taunt each of these girls, saying that she must be a lesbian. Carol hated it. It made her interactions in informal pupil cultures very difficult. She survived by building a shield of friendly students around her to mediate her interactions with pupils she did not know or who only knew her by reputation. Carol thus took to spending most of her informal school time in the behaviour support centre unless accompanied by her younger sister or, later on, by final year pupils also supported in the centre. They became her protectors and mediated her interactions with others. Interestingly, these final year pupils were highly effective in challenging transphobia against Carol. Wernick et al (2014) suggest that peer intervention can be more effective than teacher intervention in transphobic bullying but clearly this requires the creation of a supportive culture where all are valued and where those peers themselves feel invested in non-exclusionary practices.

Until Carol had an established peer group, she could not simply walk down the school corridor like other pupils. She chose her times carefully, or had protection in the face of the gendered space policed against trans* pupils. Since corridors, classrooms, playgrounds and lunch halls could be unsafe, Carol needed chaperoning by 'real' girls or authority figures whom she knew to be on her side. Survival required ingenuity and planning—for example, we had to set time aside at the start of each day to work out her safe passage through the building over that day's time and space.

In the end, Nathan tended not to go to lessons preferring to learn in the less formal spaces outside classrooms. He would often stay behind after school in the library to study, having spent relatively little of the day actually in class. I would go to observe a lesson and he would not be there – in part, at least, a response to the refusal to use his name.

For both students the challenge to their right to be in the school made it difficult for them to participate. Not simply marginalised, they were the antithesis of what was to be included in the school. This made negotiation of their interactions with others complicated; space was contested and their right to be in it not a given. They could be denied space or chased from it through the refusal of recognition or an inquisitorial focus on the impossible configuration of their sex, gender and sexuality. Eventually they were both ceded very little bits of physical space from which they negotiated or fought for more. While space in schools is widely contested, with rules about where and when pupils can and cannot go, the space available to Carol and Nathan was much more harshly restricted by cisgenderist practices.

5. Cis/Gendered Learning and Learning Transgender

The Cartesian mind/body split endemic and expected in formal education creates problems for pupils who, like all of us, must carry their minds in their bodies (O'Flynn and Epstein, 2005). Schools seldom recognise explicitly the complexity of embodying successful learner identities without compromising other aspects of identity. Many schools seek to ensure that pupils wear the right school uniform, for example, assuming that this will support academic success: pupils are supposed to regulate their bodies in order to disappear metaphorically into the school body, allowing their focus to be on the mind. But pupils' bodies often signify sexuality or gender through uniform (Epstein and Johnson 1998), as was the case for Carol and Nathan. Both Carol and Nathan wore perfect school uniform, using it to enhance their appearance as boys, always wearing trousers and ties – the more perfect their uniform, the more masculine and 'different' they managed to look. Indeed, staff nearly escorted Carol (in uniform) off site recognising her as a boy (which of course she was) on at least three occasions; one teacher confessing to me that he had assumed her to be a male intruder, but paused when he saw her school jumper.

Heather Mendick suggests that academic disciplines, as they are constructed, have gendered 'personalities' (2006). In particular, she describes doing maths while being female, as 'gender transgression', arguing that for girls to do well in maths they have to 'do masculinity' in some way (2006: 140). Carol presented stereotypical masculine subject preferences. She liked maths and would happily attend maths lessons, generally only missing them when she wanted specific support from me. Her favourite subject was PE. She often attended not only her own PE lessons but also PE clubs and helped out in the lessons or clubs of younger pupils. She had played football at a league level for a local team before

moving and was eager to join another. She did not enjoy English literature, especially poetry:

> Carol did some … work on a poem by Carol Ann Duffy … called "*Valentine"*. I asked her what she thought it would be about. She did little quote marks with her hands in the air and said in a mock sexy voice—but disparagingly—'love'. (Fieldnotes)

She would never attend English lessons and if I ever made her do so, she disrupted them and was sent out.

Carol enjoyed and experienced most success in subjects where she could perform her masculinity with the greatest ease. These were often those that did not require her to engage with feelings. In this respect, she embodied the emergent figure of the 'stone' butch of Halberstam's repertoire of female masculinities, one that is not open to emotional vulnerability (1998: 118 - 120).

Carol's perception that school curriculum subjects had a role in affirming or threatening her masculinity suggests they can be perceived in ways that are cisgendered, rather than just gendered. This would mean the gendered identity of a subject is inscribed on the learner's body, through movement, gesture, activity or even through its lack. Eventually, through this inscription the body becomes subjectified and gendered as a mathematician, or poet, or scientist, or linguist. Historically, school curriculum subjects have been separated for boys or girls. Physical Education often continues to be so. Clearly transgendered pupils need to be particularly alert to historic cisgenderist curriculum and subject construction and pedagogies, still embedded in practice (Sykes 2010). At the same time, it is difficult to know whether a loosening of gender ties with specific subjects, supports learning or makes it

more difficult for transgendered students as well as for those of the 'wrong' gender for the subject. A loosening of the gendered and therefore cisgendered ties with specific subjects has implications for all genders and indeed for those subjects where it is loosened. Such a process might support non-binary trans* identities because it would allow for a more dynamic interaction with learning and identity making. For Carol, whose transgendered identity was more binary FTM, the discourse of maths and PE as masculinising was important.

For Carol and Nathan, doing masculinity well was part of how they did learning. Although a detailed examination of Carol and Nathan's identities is beyond the remit of this paper, it is important to note that their sexed/gendered selves were core and often privileged over their academic selves. It seemed that Nathan would have liked a chance to do learner as well as masculinity, but being *Nathan* was more important. Carol was more connected to vocational learning and concerned to further her ambition to become a garage mechanic, a pursuit that provided opportunities for working on her masculinity. Her work placement in a garage two days per week was hugely important to her. Occasional paid work at a fairground also provided Carol with further opportunities to develop her masculinity and she enjoyed the power that passing as male brought:

> I look like a boy cos … you work on a fair, you work on a basketball, you look like a girl they think, 'oh that girl's easy to push over, this, that and the other'. They think – this bloke trying to play with the basketball but cos they don't know, cos they think I'm a boy, I say, 'Oy leave it alone!' and they say, 'Yeah all right mate – safe' and then they walk away … (interview Carol)

Her success at doing masculinity grew throughout her final year in school. Opportunities to experience masculinity out of school were clearly very important, given the restricted opportunities within school and she felt empowered by a sense of the physical threat embodied in that masculinity, contrasting this with the supposed vulnerability of female workers . It appears from this, as well, that she was developing a more traditional working class masculinity. It is difficult however, to write this without finding oneself expressing crude stereotypes of masculinity – a problem noted by both Francis (2010) and Paechter (2006) . Carol was not a crude stereotype. She drew on iconic and available masculinities as resources however, using them to support the development of her own identity.

6. Constructions of Transgender as abused or abusing

Carol struggled against others' astonishment at her masculine appearance. In desperation, she said to me that she couldn't be 'a woman' even if she had wanted to: 'look Sarah - I've always been like this. Look I've got a man's shirt on, man's trousers, man's shoes. It's just what I like to wear' (Fieldnotes). Carol used her appearance to self-actualise as male and was more able to pass as male than female. Outside school, she worked on dilemmas about the kind of masculinity she wanted to be recognised as performing in interactions with other working class males. Her father sometimes accepted her masculinity, but this was not secure and on occasions he could also be abusive and even violent to her because of it.

Fashioning a particular masculine appearance occupied both Carol and Nathan in their final years at school. Carol struggled with the staff's interpretation of her performances of

masculinity. This crystallised when she had her head shaved in the spring of her final year to consolidate her masculinity. She started talking to me about the possibility of the haircut intensively about three weeks before it actually happened. Finally she arrived one day with her head shaved, wearing school uniform.

> Carol has shaved all her hair off - a number one all over, I'd say. Teachers and non-teaching staff - except The Deputy I have to say - think it's a symptom of abuse - characterising it as self-harm. However, Carol has always wanted this since I've known her. (Fieldnotes)

The youth worker who had been supervising Carol's work placement wanted to refer this as a child protection issue, arguing that it was self-harm and a result of her father's violence towards her. Violence and gender identification were related for Carol and her masculinity was partly produced out of the violence in which her life was led. However, it was the physical violence she experienced which was the child-protection issue. This was an example of a member of staff insisting that a gender norm be enforced and pathologising Carol's masculinity. If Carol had been biologically male, the haircut would not have been a big issue. Carol never regretted her shaved head, experiencing it as delightful and empowering, redoing it regularly. She deliberately set out to look like Sigourney Weaver in *Alien 3* (Fincher 1992). She achieved this, especially in her PE kit of vest top and tracksuit bottoms. For Carol, the *Aliens* film series signified a conscious intertextual stylisation, her first foray into the fashions of female masculinity (Halberstam 1998). It was a successful

experience of learning gender. It needed constant defending however, as a legitimate practice.

The shaved head also caused shock for one of the more senior butch lesbian teachers:

> What's happened to Carol? What's she done? She's really gone overboard. I thought we had a boy on the premises - I really did. I thought 'oh well here we go' and I was going to you know, get him off site and then I realised it was her. If ever there was a case for a sex change it's her. (Fieldnotes)

Carol's butching-up of her masculine appearance seemed to be about an increasing confidence that she would be accepted but staff interpreted a gender incongruent performance through a discourse of self-harm or medicalised gender dysphoria. It seemed intolerable to have someone who was performing masculinity in a female body—this was seen as requiring intervention – 'a sex-change'. Carol clearly saw herself as empowered and looking good.

Nathan used the appearance that came with dealing drugs to develop his masculinity. He wore a baseball cap pulled down over his face, a bomber jacket and black Levi's in the penultimate term. The beauty of this was that his self presentation was at once macho and not to be challenged, whilst not requiring great physical displays of power. Nathan was very slight and did not have Carol's muscularity, but students were much more scared of him than they were of her. Nathan's chosen appearance and masculine performance led to him being considered a danger to younger pupils, abusing their naivety. However, Nathan was

also being manipulated by older men outside school to deal substances inside school. In his penultimate year of schooling he had left home and had moved in with his best friend, Ayani. Even though he subsequently went back home, most of the time was still spent at her house. He was under sixteen and vulnerable and far more abused than abusing, often by those who should have been protecting him. Whilst not wishing to be reductive in situating Nathan on the abused side of the abusive/abused dichotomy, Nathan needed material support and trans* friendly adult guidance in order for him to succeed.

7. Conclusion

Carol and Nathan lived in a world shrunken in many ways. Their presence in school was minimised, physically through internment and conceptually through misrecognition or a refusal to recognise. Nathan was effectively rendered invisible. They could not, in any uncomplicated sense, participate in school or lessons as intelligible subjects. Staff and other pupils would first have to recognise them and they would then have had to develop the confidence to articulate that recognition into discourse. There were key individuals or groups of individuals who recognised and affirmed their masculinities but they were often outside school or marginalised in the school themselves.

The cases of Nathan and Carol demonstrate the demands that schooling places on pupils to learn genderedly, and even cisgenderedly, as well as the panic generated when faced with unrecognisable gender. Placing trans* pupils in single-sex schools which are not of their chosen gender is cisgendered practice in itself. Every day is set up as a fight for legitimacy to exist and for recognition. Both Carol and Nathan drew on other roles through which to

mobilise their masculinities: roles that might be more understandable and might offer them status, protection and a means through which others could relate to them.

As Carol's confidence in doing boy and even man grew, she became able to do a particular type of man: strong, looking 'hard' and fit, a mechanic with technical know-how and she became a protector of women. Nevertheless her cultural foray into the world of *Aliens* was misread by staff and quickly pathologised as self-harm. The absence of transgender as a discourse through which the established school pastoral systems could understand her might have led to the undermining of her identity choice.

Nathan's entanglement with drug dealing may have been a poor choice made in conditions not of his own choosing but this was, perhaps, better than some of the choices available, for example suicide. The demand by the school that he learn as a girl was one he could not fulfil. He studied on the edge of the school – after school, or in class, without being able to participate. He established a presence in the borderlands, in the spaces of pupil culture: in toilets and libraries. He took examinations but was not allowed to take part in the preparation, the revision classes or the study sessions.

Carol managed to move into a position where she got what she wanted from education, gaining a Modern Apprenticeship from Kwik-Fit, thus working with education to achieve in ways that allowed her to develop her masculinity and the career she wanted. Nathan chose a bad-boy masculinity that gave him access to status, money, a few admirers and a small group of students who would relate to him. The future looked much more bleak for Nathan in terms of his interactions with the police and possible future prosecutions and addiction.

Nathan found it difficult to get support from either school or home: the discrimination against his trans* identity forcing him into both insecure living arrangements and inappropriate ways of earning money.

Schools very rarely ask questions about gendered learning and when they do ask, it is often to remark on the underperformance of boys within a context where gender is an immutable given (Epstein et al. 1998). Transgender exposes schools to fact that gender is both taught and learned, constituted and constrained by school practices and the individuals caught up in them. Some of those practices are exposed here. These are practices which impact all gender/s but impact transgender disproportionately. They act across three dimensions: a) the un/conditional use of space; b) the dichotomy of learning one's gender through the learning of curriculum subjects and pedagogies that seem to carry gender and c) the building of recognisable masculine or feminine identities through cultural performances and interactions.

Carol and Nathan were going through extraordinary processes of self-examination, reflection and self-recognition: they were very serious learners in this respect. Learning as a transgendered learner brings additional complexities to educational success, in ways that can severely compromise it. Transgendered pupils need staff to support them across each of these three dimensions: space, gendered learning and the cultural and interactive performance of gender. This requires a very high level of adult support. A starting point might be to create a trans* learning profile, capturing these dimensions, providing support for areas of difficulty, utilising areas of strength and auditing and intervening in these three

areas where trans-exclusionary practice seems evident or likely to have most impact in undermining the success of the pupil.

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[i] This had forbidden Local Authorities (a 'Local Authority' is the name given to the governing body of a local area in the UK) and therefore also state run schools under their control, from 'promoting homosexuality' or educational materials that represented same sex relationships as part of 'pretended family relationships' (Gillan 2003: accessed 25 January 2015).

[ii] Indeed one pupil had told another pupil, in discussing my lesbian relationship, that I must be 'the man' in the relationship, asking me to confirm that this was the case. This led to an interesting discussion of sex, gender and sexuality in relationships.

[iii] Schools use 'reduced timetables' as temporary solutions for pupils who are having difficulty managing to remain in school for the whole day and attend every lesson. A pupil will be required to attend a reduced number of lessons.

[iv] Local Authorities are less able to instruct such schools to take pupils today. This is because of the creation of Academy School status. Schools, previously funded through the LA are now increasingly funded directly from the DFE and work with private businesses or charities, which form Academy-chains to provide education. Today, the LA would be more likely to commission private Alternative Education placements for pupils such as Carol. . It is conceivable that a provider could set up today in London at least, to work specifically with trans* pupils, where school is proving not fit for purpose. Very recently, just such an alternative provision has been suggested for lgbt secondary pupils in Manchester (Glendinning 2015, 16 January)