

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/3087>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

**Female to Male Transsexuality:
A Study of (Re)embodiment and Identity Transformation**

by

Tracey Lee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in

University of Warwick, Centre for the Study of Women and Gender

September 2001

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements		iii
Abstract		iv
Introduction		1
Chapter One	Locating Transsexuality: Texts and Contexts	
	Introduction	4
	History	4
	Transsexual Identities: Contemporary Critiques and Competing Perspectives	
	Feminist and Sociological Perspectives	9
	Queer Theory and Transsexual Perspectives	22
	The 'Essential Transsexual'	32
	Managing Stigma	36
	Conclusion	43
Chapter Two	Epistemology, Methodology and Method(s)	
	Introduction	45
	Conceptualising the 'Other' In Contemporary Feminist Theory	48
	Representing/Re-presenting the Transsexual 'Other'?	50
	Experience, Power and Voice in the Medical Encounter	55
	Narrative Research and Analysis	67
	Narrative Analysis in Action: Processes and Practices in the Research Context	69
	Interviews	70
	Narratives: Transcriptions, Definitions and Modes of Analysis and Presentation	76
	Analytic Method and Presentation: Chapter Three	81
	Analytic Method and Presentation: Chapter Four	87
Chapter Three	The Struggle for 'Authenticity': Narrative Strategies and Impression Management in Constructing Transsexual Selfhood	
	Introduction	90
	Reading Autobiography	91
	Texts, Talk and the Teller's Problem	96
	The Narratives	
	Eric: 'A compromised life'	102
	Mark: 'I didn't think too much about my childhood'	118
	Ben: 'Having just started out'	136
	Conclusion	165

Chapter Four	Our Bodies, Our Selves?	
	Introduction	172
	Gender Attributions and Bodily Intrusions	174
	Ailing Fictions? (Un)willing Readers and the Female to Male Body	179
	Negotiating Relationships: the Re-embodied Self and the Significant Other	
	Introduction	185
	Families	189
	Parents	191
	Siblings	206
	Partnerships and Families of Procreation	
	Partners	210
	Children	228
	Friends	234
	Colleagues at Work	243
	Conclusion	251
Conclusion		256
Bibliography		261
Appendix A	DSM –IV Diagnostic Criteria for Gender Identity Disorder	269
Appendix B	Transcription Conventions and Glossary of Analytic Terms	271

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank my supervisor Professor Terry Lovell for her unfailing support and encouragement. Her meticulous and critical advice both throughout the research process and during the production of this thesis has been invaluable. My thanks also go to my friends, colleagues and all the staff in the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, University of Warwick, for their intellectual support and personal encouragement. I am also pleased to express my gratitude to the University of Warwick for the allocation of a Warwick Graduate Award which enabled me to begin this project and to the E.S.R.C for the subsequent allocation of a full Research Studentship Award which afforded me the time and space to complete this study. Particular thanks also go to my son, Lee Crane, and my parents, Michael and Cynthia Sunderland, whose encouragement and support has been invaluable both throughout the production of this thesis and during the years of study I have undertaken. I would like to express a special thanks to Jane Abson for the intellectual, practical and emotional support and her generosity of time which has carried me through this project. This thesis could not have been written without her and I should like to take this opportunity to offer her my heartfelt thanks. Finally I want to express my gratitude to both the FTM Network in the UK who, through their newsletter 'Boy's Own', facilitated my access to potential participants for this study, and to all the interviewees who took part and were so generous with their time. Without them this thesis would simply not have been possible and I would like to offer them my sincere thanks.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a qualitative study based in in-depth semi-structured interviews with fourteen female to male transsexuals, concerned with the social and discursive processes through which female to male transsexuals construct their new 'male' gendered social identities and the ways in which their bodies may be seen to impact upon these processes across a variety of personal and social relationships. Chapter One provides an overview and critique of key and competing perspectives concerning the relationships between transsexual subjectivity and embodiment, and the hegemonic discourses/discursive practices of heterosexuality, sex and gender, and medicine. Chapter Two establishes the epistemological and innovative methodological framework of the thesis, moving from the analysis of representations of transsexuality to a sociologically informed analysis. Dealing with issues of experience, voice, power, agency and representation through contemporary work in feminism and the sociology of health and illness, the Chapter adapts the multidisciplinary methodologies and methods of 'narrative analysis' to the study of female to male transsexual identity in social interaction. Chapter Three engages with existing perspectives on written transsexual autobiography within feminist, literary, cultural and transgender theory and, through rigorous and detailed narrative analysis addresses the significance and specificity of 'oral autobiography' where constraints and opportunities for the construction of an 'authentic' transsexual selfhood are produced in a dynamic, interactional context. In Chapter Four personal narratives are examined to extend the issue of transsexual 'authenticity' into the broader area of relationships with parents, siblings, partners, children, friends and work colleagues. It deals with the ways in which past and present knowledge of the interviewees as particularly embodied and gendered individuals by these 'knowing' others impacted upon their recognition and acceptance of them as men. The thesis concludes that taking this analytic approach which moves 'beyond the text' into social and interactional contexts reveals complex negotiations of 'traditional' stories, the significance of others' past knowledge and investments in sexed/gendered embodiment and the interviewees' own active management of their embodied gendered selves which earlier work has overlooked or not fully addressed. Finally it identifies fruitful areas for further research suggested through this study.

Introduction

This thesis is the product of a particular historical moment, where my own personal and academic interests coincided with the proliferation of representations and analyses of transsexuality in the popular media and in academic research. At the time I began to plan the research, British television regularly featured 'talk shows', produced both in the United States and Britain, which took transsexuality as their discussion point. 'The Decision'¹, a 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary, focused upon the decision to transition as made by three female to males, itself generating much discussion in the popular media and in magazines and internet forums organised by transsexuals themselves.

Having an enduring interest in the relationships between personal identity and the society we inhabit, particularly in respect of gender and sexuality, I was drawn, initially by recognition of contiguities between my own 'life story' and those which female to male transsexuals told, to undertake a comparative study of lesbian and female to male transsexual masculinities. This formed the basis of my MA dissertation. In conducting that research and analysis, I became aware that many studies of transsexuality were based in readings and analyses of the 'career' of male to female transsexuals and that the specific experiences, embodiment and 'life stories' of females to males were marginalised or ignored. In addition, those studies which, at that time, *did* address female to male transsexual lives were largely produced within literary and cultural studies and thus within specific academic frameworks. Being a sociologist by training, but

¹ 'The Decision' was transmitted by Channel 4 Television in February 1996.

now based in an Interdisciplinary Centre, I was interested in investigating what a sociological perspective could bring to the debate.

Ultimately drawing from the disciplines of literature, cultural studies, social psychology and sociology, this research takes as its focus the social and discursive processes through which female to male transsexuals construct their new 'male' gendered social identities and the ways in which their bodies may, or may not, be seen to impact upon these processes across a variety of personal and social relationships.² As a qualitative study, the analysis is based upon transcripts of interviews undertaken with fourteen female to males, conducted so as to elicit their stories of transition and the ways in which this, and their (re)embodiment, affected their sense of self and the ways in which others close to them recognised and apprehended that self.

The study begins by briefly tracing the history of transsexuality and goes on to review key texts as they address transsexual identity, moving, at the end of the first chapter, to introduce the sociological perspective with which the study engages. The second chapter deals with issues of epistemology and methodology and takes as its starting point the 'narrative turn' taken in the sociology of health and illness where narrative analysis has been used to 'uncouple' the individual from the medical discourses and practices with which they are implicated at a point of 'disruption' in their biography. The chapter then moves on to engage with narrative analysis as a methodological approach and method in the context

² This study focuses specifically on female to male transsexuality rather than 'transgender', an umbrella term which covers all forms of 'sex/gender crossing' and which may not involve the desire for medical intervention nor an 'opposite' sex identification .

of this research.

In Chapter Three, the study moves on to critically address the issue of transsexual autobiography and the ways in which academics have adduced their conclusions regarding both the content of transsexual autobiography and its function in enabling other transsexuals to construct their identities as they transition and beyond. The chapter juxtaposes a close narrative analysis of the 'coming out' stories of three interviewees, dealing with both the form and the content of their talk and paying close attention to the ways in which their personal accounts work to convey their 'authenticity' as transsexuals in their interaction with me in the context of the interview.

Beginning by developing a critical analysis of academic perspectives on the relationship between the sexed body and the social attribution of gender in the context of transsexuality, Chapter Four focuses on the interviewees' accounts of the ways in which their decisions to transition had been received by known others. Through this focus, the analysis draws out the ways in which the interviewees' material 'sexed' bodies were implicated in the responses they received from particular others, that is, their parents, siblings, spouses, partners, friends and work colleagues.

The thesis concludes by drawing the themes of the analysis together in relation to the methodology and methods adopted and identifies areas for further research suggested by the study.

Chapter One

Locating Transsexuality: Texts and Contexts

Introduction

This chapter initially provides a brief outline of the emergence of transsexuality as a medical 'condition', outlining the basis upon which scholars have later theorised the relationships between normative heterosexuality, medical power, medical technologies as they transform embodiment, and the construction of transsexual subjectivities and identities. Placing analytic focus on the elements of arguments which directly address these issues and interpret their interrelationships, the subsequent discussion is ordered so as to enable a critical review of competing perspectives, moving from sociological and feminist analyses through queer and transsexual perspectives to Jay Prosser's (1998) view of the 'essential transsexual'. Ultimately the chapter addresses the work of Erving Goffman (1963) on social 'stigma' and its management, moving to introduce the complicating, and illuminating, interactional constructions of identity which the study goes on to address in relation to female to male transsexuals.

History

The first reported operation which could be classed as constituting 'sex-reassignment' occurred for a male to female in 1931 (Billings & Urban, 1996; King, 1996) with the first for a female to male following some thirteen years

later (Prosser, 1998; Whittle, 2000). Prior to the 1950s, however, although some physicians were conducting such operations, the term 'transsexual' and the idea of 'sex-reassignment' as they are understood today did not exist (King, 1981, 1996; Hausman, 1995; Devor, 1997).¹ The history of the apprehension of transsexuality as a medically established phenomenon meriting surgical intervention has been traced to have begun in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the work of early sexology as it began to classify deviant behaviours, and thus persons, into types. Ideas of 'cross-sexed identity' and notions of particular persons having been 'born into the wrong body', which are now popularly associated with transsexuality, were initially seen by early sexologists, such as Richard Von Kraft-Ebbing (writing in 1870) as characteristics associated with 'congenital homosexuality'.² With a concern to further refine and define the categories of deviant behaviours, the later sexologist Magnus Hirschfield, in 1910, differentiated what he termed 'transvestism' from 'homosexual' behaviour. Founded upon his observation that in some of his 'cases' it was 'not simply a matter of cross-dressing, but rather more of a sexual drive to change' (Hirschfield, cited in Prosser, 1998:121), he provided a basis upon which a further category of 'transsexualism' would eventually be defined.

The term 'transsexual' as it is now understood was initially coined by David

¹ As Dave King (1996) points out, whilst such operations were being carried out by physicians prior to the later established medical definition and understanding of 'transsexuality', in the available literature of the time '... it is not always clear what the surgeons and endocrinologists thought they were doing when they changed a person's sex', as surgical intervention had been justified on the bases of both 'rectifying a an intersexual anomaly' and aiding 'psychic equilibrium' (p.85).

² As Michel Foucault (1980) writes in the *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*: 'Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of *interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul*' (p. 43, my emphasis).

Cauldwell in 1949, although it was the US endocrinologist Harry Benjamin (1953, 1954, 1966) who popularised the term within the medical literature (King, 1987). Building on Cauldwell's work, Benjamin argued that transsexuality was distinct from homosexuality and transvestism and that it most probably had a biological rather than a psychological cause. For Benjamin and his supporters, this explained why psychotherapy, which up to that point had been considered to be the most appropriate treatment to 'cure' such a condition, had not been successful (King, 1996). Benjamin's work concerning the causes, treatment and diagnosis of transsexuality, together with the fact that sex-reassignment operations were already being conducted in some cases was not, however, well received by psychoanalysts who objected to the surgical removal of 'healthy organs' at the request of 'emotionally disturbed patients' on the grounds that this was ethically unacceptable (Billings & Urban, 1996:100).

As medical research on transsexuality increased throughout the 1960s such an opinion became marginalised within the medical profession as the relationship between bodily sex and gender identity was reconceptualised. The new paradigm was based on two premises: firstly, that bodily sex and gender identity are independent of one another and, secondly, that gender identity is immutable (see, for example, Stoller, 1968).³ Within these new terms, hormonal treatments and surgeries to enable an individual to change bodily sex in cases of 'transsexuality' were legitimised as constituting the most appropriate form of

³ Indeed, in an analysis of the historical developments of endocrinology and plastic surgery, Bernice Hausman (1995) argues that it was through these medical technologies, developed in relation to intersexuality, that the term 'gender' was produced.

medical treatment (King, 1996; Hausman, 1995): it was concluded, in other words, that if 'one cannot adjust the mind to the body, it becomes perfectly reasonable to adjust the body to the mind' (Raymond, 1994:68).

2

This history of categorisation, medical intervention, the idea of the immutability of gender identity and its independence from bodily sex, together with the ongoing development of surgical techniques for sex-reassignment, were pivotal in the development of the phenomenon of transsexuality and for the possibility for 'trans-sexed' bodies and 'transsexual' subjectivities to become discursive and social realities (King, 1987, 1996; Hausman, 1995; Raymond, 1994; Billings & Urban, 1996; Devor 1997).⁴ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s medical research and literature on transsexuality increased, particularly in the United States, and 'transsexualism' was officially listed as a medical 'condition' in 1980 in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). By the fourth edition of the manual (1994)⁵ however, the categoric term 'transsexualism' was abandoned and the diagnostic criteria reviewed, with 'gender dysphoria', one manifestation of which was 'Gender Identity Disorder', becoming the terms through which the 'condition' of transsexuality was described.⁶ Significantly, although the new prescribed 'treatment' for gender dysphoria modified the body

⁴ For detailed discussions of the history see King (1981, 1996); Billings & Urban (1996); Hausman (1995).

⁵ For the diagnostic criteria applied in DSM IV see Appendix A.

⁶ 'Gender Dysphoria' was initially introduced by Norman Fisk in 1973 which he conceptualised as the more generalised 'disease' which underpins conditions of cross-sexed identifications such as those of transsexuality (Billings & Urban, 1996; King, 1996). Whilst many transsexuals refer to themselves as having experienced 'gender dysphoria' prior to sex-reassignment the notion of this as a 'mental illness' is increasingly being challenged. See, for example, Nelson (1998).

rather than the mind, the psychiatric professions nonetheless retained diagnostic authority.

Underpinning this shift in terminology was an increasing dissemination of medical literature concerning transsexuality, such that many of the clinicians throughout the 1960s and 1970s became aware that most individuals presenting for sex-reassignment were becoming as knowledgeable of the diagnostic criteria and medical procedures as they were. As the psychoanalyst Robert Stoller wrote in 1973: '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' (cited in Billings & Urban, 1996:108). Fearful of deception and the growing awareness of there being 'a whole gamut of individuals who, at one time or another, experience sufficient discomfort with their biological sex to form a wish for sex reassignment' (Steiner, Blanchard & Zucker, cited in Hausman, 1995:130), the aim in changing the terminology was to free 'diagnosis from a specific form of intervention – sex reassignment surgery' and enable clinicians to consider surgical intervention 'as a possible treatment for "gender dysphoria" instead of the inevitable outcome of a transsexual career' (King, 1996:96). Thus, whilst prior to this change in terminology the request for sex-reassignment was considered by many clinicians to be the primary 'symptom' in the diagnosis of transsexualism, the introduction of the concept of 'gender dysphoria' refigured the diagnostic relationship. As Dave King (1996) has pointed out, whereas previously 'transvestism' and 'transsexuality' constituted:

... states of being, [which] also lend themselves to self definition. By contrast, “gender dysphoria” names a “disease” and therefore presumably is the property of the medical profession. ... gender dysphoria turns the focus away from the actor and on to the condition and at the same time represents a reaffirmation of professional authority. (p.96)

It is this ‘professional authority’ with which transsexuals, *in order to be transsexuals*, must necessarily engage. It is not sufficient to request sex-reassignment: in order to *become* ‘transsexual’ an individual must be clinically *authorised* to be transsexual. Those who present themselves for sex-reassignment must first be evaluated by a clinician, who will only prescribe hormone treatment and approve surgery upon being satisfied that answers to their questions are truthful and that the diagnostic criteria for the ‘condition’ are being met (Hausman, 1995; Prosser, 1998). For non-medical scholars, it has been this dependent positioning of transsexual individuals vis-à-vis clinicians and the medical discourses and practices within which transsexual discourses are situated, and with which they interact in the diagnostic process, that constitute central and problematic issues to deal with in the understanding, explanation and theorisation of transsexual identity.

Transsexual Identities: Contemporary Critiques and Competing Perspectives

Feminist and Sociological Perspectives

Whilst the history of the emergence of transsexuality through medical scientific discourses has resulted in a dominant ‘essentialist’ conception of transsexuality, ‘as a basically timeless and culture-independent condition or disorder which medical science, courageously applied, has discovered and begun to understand’

(King, 1987:353), this has tended to be rejected by many non-medical scholars who have researched and written in the field. Although varying in the perspectives adopted and developed, such scholars have applied 'constructionist' approaches to transsexuality, theorising both the phenomenon and the identities which have arisen through it as socially and discursively *produced*. Such approaches, as they were employed by some sociologists and feminists throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, underpin what Dave King (1987) has termed the 'invention story' of transsexuality, where medical discourses and practices are seen not as having 'discovered' transsexuality but rather as creating a 'knowledge' which fundamentally misrepresents what transsexuality *really* comprises. The most well known accounts which offer an 'invention' perspective are those put forward by the radical feminist Janice Raymond (1994) and the sociologists Dwight Billings and Thomas Urban (1996).⁷

In *The Transsexual Empire*, Raymond (1994) argues that whilst some individuals may indeed experience themselves to really be of the 'opposite sex' to that which they had been designated at birth, this is not a pathological 'disease' but rather a problem socially created through the rigidity of gender roles within a patriarchal society. The 'phenomenon' of transsexuality, she asserts, has been:

... accomplished by the inherent power of a classification system that has been given medical and psychological credibility. Once sex-role oppression is given the name of transsexualism, and institutionalized in the gender identity clinics, and realized by hormone and surgical treatment, the "condition" of transsexualism itself explains *why* one would

⁷ Janice Raymond's book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* was first published in 1979. Billings & Urban's essay 'The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An interpretation and critique' was first published in 1982 in *Social Problems*.

have the wrong mind in the wrong body. Why? Because one *is* a transsexual. (p.13, emphases in original)

Whilst critical of the medical designation of transsexualism as a pathological 'condition', Raymond contends that foundational to medical knowledges of transsexuality and the development of surgical techniques for sex-reassignment are the dominant socio-sexual interests of men, particularly normatively gendered, heterosexual men. She asserts that through the practice of sex-reassignment – in which individuals 'substitut[e] one sex role stereotype for the other' (p.xvii) - transsexuality serves to reinforce and perpetuate normative understandings and social expectations of sex and gender, and in so doing it comprises a "*sociopolitical program*" that undermines the feminist project '*to eradicate sex-role stereotyping and oppression*' (p.5, emphases in original). Significantly, Raymond maintains that transsexuality is largely a male phenomenon where the techniques for sex-reassignment have been created by men and for men. Female to male transsexuals, she avers, merely function as 'tokens' to create the illusion that transsexuality is a "human" problem' and to hide the patriarchal basis of the transsexual 'empire' (p.27).

For Raymond, whilst both male to female and female to male transsexuals are 'victims' of the 'sex role conformity' within a patriarchal society that has created their gender 'problems', through sex-reassignment their radical potential to be 'outsider[s] to the conventional roles of masculinity and femininity is short-circuited' (p.124). From her perspective, where 'gender' is culturally constructed but 'sex' is biologically given, she argues that transsexuals can never fully become the 'men' or 'women' that they consider themselves to be and asserts that the

domestication of their 'revolutionary potential' through the medical construction of transsexuality and the male medical 'empire', places them, moreover, as collaborators with patriarchy and thus 'restrict[s] her or his potential as a social critic in the sexist society that caused the problem to begin with' (p.172).

Holding a similar view to Raymond, Billings and Urban (1996), in their essay 'The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism', extend their critique to include a view of transsexuality and the practices of sex-reassignment as both a reflection and extension of 'late-capitalist logics of reification and commodification' (p.114). They assert that the development and acceptability of sex-reassignment surgeries provided opportunities for professional advancement and the accrual of prestige and 'status in the emerging specialisms of plastic surgery and psychiatry and psychotherapy which, together with the high costs of such treatments, produced transsexuality as a lucrative and desirable market for those physicians and practitioners involved (p.115, note 6). The medical construction of transsexuality, they argue, 'legitimised by the terminology of disease, pushes patients towards an alluring world of artificial vaginas and penises rather than towards self-understanding and sexual politics. Sexual fulfilment and gender-role comfort are portrayed as commodities, available through medicine' (p.112).

For Billings and Urban, the 'reality' of transsexuality as a medical 'condition' is spurious. Based in Thomas Urban's experiences as an observer in a North American sex-reassignment clinic, they contend that diagnostic procedures involve 'a subtle negotiation process between patients and physicians whereby

both the patients' 'proof' of their eligibility for sex-reassignment and the evaluations by physicians are merely 'grounded in common-sense knowledge of how gender is ordinarily communicated in everyday life' (p.111). The interviewing and patient screening procedures of the clinics therefore function, in their view, 'as patient socialisation': individuals presenting themselves for sex-reassignment learn that in order to gain access to the treatment and surgery they seek they are required to present themselves as candidates who, in their new sex roles, will fulfil the normative expectations of gender. Of particular importance for Billings and Urban is the increasing trend towards public acceptance of sex-reassignment as a legitimate option for 'sexual deviants and victims of severe gender role distress' (p.100). This they argue, 'attests both to the domination of daily life and consciousness by professional authority as well as the extent to which many forms of deviance are increasingly labelled "illness"' (p.99). Echoing Raymond (1994), they maintain that in the case of transsexuality, where through its medical construction and medical practices conventional and normative gender roles are reaffirmed, 'the medical profession has indirectly tamed and transformed a potential wildcat strike at the gender factory' (1996:115).

In the accounts of Billings and Urban and Janice Raymond, transsexuality is thus accorded the status of an ideology: individuals who potentially constitute *real* 'outsiders' to normative gender roles are contained through medicine and the patriarchal and capitalist interests which sex-reassignment both reflects and serves are hidden from view (King, 1987). Offering critical perspectives on the social structures which inhere in the production of 'transsexuality', Billings and

Urban and Raymond oppose the view that transsexuality is a *real* 'illness' which some people suffer from and draw attention to how understandings of 'illnesses' cannot be conceptualised as independent from social and cultural relations and discourses.⁸ However, their approaches render problematic the issues of transsexual subjects' agency and also overlook the potential for there to be transgressive and/or subversive effects of *bodily* transformation upon transsexual subjectivity in these processes. In their approaches, a 'top-down' model of social relations of power is assumed which, as it accords power and control to the medical profession, places transsexual individuals as either 'dupes' of medicine who suffer from 'false consciousness', or 'duplicitous' individuals who, anxious to get what they want from the medical profession and to achieve the recognition by others that they *are* in fact the 'sex' they feel themselves to be, will adhere to the dominant accounts of transsexuality which medicine, through the structures of patriarchy and capitalism, have produced (Nakamura, 1997; Prosser, 1998). As Dave King (1987) points out, in such a model:

... the transsexual patient is like a faulty measuring instrument whose readings can only be seen as a measure of the source of the fault, not whatever it is supposed to measure. The transsexual, being thus 'wired' to capitalism, patriarchy or whatever via the medical profession only registers the interests of these structures. His or her identity is a reflection of those structures and his or her recounted experiences and interpretations of these are to be read in the same way. (p.370)

⁸ As Dave King (1987) notes, however, Billings and Urban take the social processes involved in the medicalisation of transsexuality to point 'to something peculiar and disreputable about the phenomenon' and do not acknowledge the way in which the processes they identify 'have long been recognised as pertaining to medicine in general' (p.361). For a recent overview of the developments of 'social constructionism' in the context of the sociology of health and illness see Simon Williams, 'Sociological imperialism and the profession of medicine revisited: where are we now?' in *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 23, No. 2, 2001: pp.135-158.

Whilst it is entirely possible to argue that this model of power does not necessarily deny agency to the individual in their ongoing construction of subjectivity and the management of structural constraints, it is the case that the power of medical discourses and practices structured through patriarchy and/or capitalist commodification are suggested by these scholars to locate transsexuals as the constructed products of these structures and practices in their bodies *and* their subjectivities.

Since the mid 1980s, however, constructionist approaches such as Raymond's (1994) and Billings and Urban's (1996) which employ a coercive concept of power have largely been rejected by most scholars who, engaging with the work of Michel Foucault (1980), argue that power cannot simply be conceptualised as being the property of a few individuals exercised over others, nor solely as a repressive force. Foucault argues that although the construction of particular types of persons through sexological categorisation provided the means for social control, it also provided possibilities for the production of new subject positions and thus the means for collective and individual resistance. As individuals identified themselves and could be identified by others within the constructed categories, they, in effect, gained a place from which to speak. For Foucault, the constructed identities initially created by sexologists carry the inherent possibility for a 'reverse discourse' – where individuals can claim the identity label for themselves and then use it to obtain acceptance, civil rights and ultimately to resist social control.

Following Foucault and utilising his genealogical approach to history⁹ Bernice Hausman (1995), in *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender*, traces the emergence of transsexuality through the historical development of endocrinology and plastic surgery. Hausman argues that it was these developments, together with the way in which the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' was initially explicated in the context of the medical management of intersexuality with immutability being accorded to 'gender' rather than 'sex', that provided the discursive conditions for the demand for sex-reassignment and the constitution of 'transsexual' subjectivity. Critical of how Raymond (1994) and other feminist authors¹⁰ have approached transsexuality through an exclusive focus upon its placement and development within and through 'gender ideologies', thus overlooking how these were produced *within and alongside* technologies for 'sex-change' rather than overdetermining their construction, Hausman takes up Foucault's argument of the *productive* aspects of power and argues that medical technologies should properly be 'understood to produce things, as opposed to powers that have only negating oppressiveness attributed to them, that only repress' (p.15). She asserts that:

To argue that technology does not influence ideological constructions of the body because the influence is always the other way around represents antitechnological thinking at its most reductive. Rather, developments in technology make new discursive situations possible, open up new subject positions. We need to take account of the significance of the body as a semiotic economy constrained by the ideology of gender, but we also need to recognize the body as a system that asserts a

⁹ Foucault's genealogical approach to history investigates the discourses and practices of the particular institutions under study rather than adopting a teleological approach .

¹⁰ Following Raymond (1994), other feminist authors such as Sheila Jeffreys (1994); Judith Shapiro (1991) and Marjorie Garber (1992) similarly approach transsexuality from the point of view that it has arisen through and reflects ideological constructions of gender. Whilst, apart from Jeffreys, these authors do not write from a radical feminist perspective as Raymond does, they nonetheless concur with her argument that the development of sex-reassignment and transsexual individuals maintain rather than challenge normative gender codes.

certain resistance to (or constraint upon) the ideological system regulating it. Medical technologies directly address this resistance of the body and, by changing the body's capacity to signify sex, affect the potential relation of the body to what are known as gender ideologies. (p.14)

2

For Hausman the medical technologies which have been pivotal to the production of transsexuality must therefore be understood to have some 'relative autonomy' from 'gender ideologies', signalling the possibility for a 'subversive retelling of the *official medical accounts* concerning the emergence of transsexuality and the idea of gender [and] the *official story* put forth by transsexual autobiographers' (p.141, my emphasis). However, Hausman's 'subversive retelling' in *Changing Sex* is limited by its focus on technological change and transsexuals' reliance on medicine in this process. Whilst she grants agency to transsexuals in the historical process of their production, conceptualising the relationship between transsexuals and physicians as 'dialectical', she argues that:

By demanding technological intervention to "change sex," transsexuals demonstrate that their relationship to technology is a dependent one. ... Demanding sex change is therefore part of what constructs the subject as a transsexual: it is the mechanism through which transsexuals come to identify themselves under the sign of transsexualism and construct themselves as its subjects. Because of this, we can trace transsexuals' agency through their doctors' discourses, as the demand for sex change was instantiated as the primary symptom (and sign) of the transsexual. (p.110)

For Hausman, whilst the technologies for 'sex-change' are relatively autonomous from gender ideologies, she refuses the possibility of there being a similar 'relative autonomy' of transsexual *subjectivity* in relation to medical discourses, technologies and 'the idea of gender', leading her to conclude, in

conjunction with her reading of transsexual autobiographies, that a transsexual is in effect an 'engineered subject' (p.147). Although Hausman's project is to centre the technological material construction of the trans-sexed body and refuse to approach transsexuality as a product of unidirectional 'gender ideologies' she ultimately, like Raymond (1994) and other feminist authors before her, accords 'the idea of gender' prime significance: 'once we turn away from "gender" as the causal mechanism of transsexualism, we can recognize it as an authorizing narrative that works to ward off the disruptive antihumanism of technological self-construction' (p.174). For Hausman, any possibility for the production of relatively autonomous or potentially transgressive and/or subversive or resistant 'transsexual' subjectivities has been foreclosed as transsexuals are recuperated into normative gender by the medical profession and the idea of the immutability of gender.

Having reconceptualised 'gender' as having been produced as a new master narrative through a complex reflexive relationship between medical technologies and bodies, Hausman surprisingly fails to take into account how male to female and female to male transsexuals are differently placed both within narratives of gender *and* in their relationships to medical technologies and their capabilities in producing trans-sexed bodies (Garber, 1992; Halberstam, 1998a, 1998b).¹¹ As is

¹¹ As Marjorie Garber (1992) citing Leslie Martin Lothstein - the Co-Director of a North American gender identity clinic - points out, transsexuality has traditionally been seen as a largely male phenomenon: Gender Identity clinics were initially set up for male to female clients and so attracted mainly male to females; most medical and non-medical researchers have been male and so 'may have exhibited a bias towards male patients, together with a "homocentric" or "patricentric" discouragement of women who inquire about clinical treatment'; and women are 'often not considered psychotic enough or distressed enough for treatment, since wishing to be or act like a man is considered "normal" or "natural" in this culture'; and whilst 'men have been allowed to have sex lives and to place importance upon sexual performance and response' until recently women have 'been acculturated to deny, repress, or veil sexual feeling'. For Garber, 'each of these "reasons" for the clinical neglect of female-to-male transsexuals, then, is based at least in part on the dissymmetry between the cultural status of males and females'. (p.101)

well documented, whilst surgical techniques to construct vaginas and clitorises for male to females are relatively unproblematic and successful which, post sex-reassignment, leaves male to female transsexuals with anatomical bodies which satisfy normative conceptions of embodied femaleness, the techniques to construct sexually functional penises (phalloplasty) have not yet been perfected (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Garber, 1992; Nataf, 1996; Devor, 1997; Halberstam, 1994, 1998a; Cromwell, 1999). Due to the high cost but generally unsatisfactory results of surgically constructed penises and the bodily scarring that such surgery involves, relatively few female to male transsexuals undergo such operations (Nataf, 1996; Devor, 1997), suggesting that the medical construction of female to male trans-sexed bodies falls somewhat short of the 'normatively' gendered bodily configurations which authors such as Raymond (1994) see the medical profession as producing.

In Hausman's (1995) analysis, whilst the materiality of the body has been implicated in the historical production of 'the idea of gender', the body once changed is assumed, as for Raymond (1994), to have no further potential for disruptive influence and discursive effect: from that point gender becomes unidirectional. However, can it be possible that the material body once changed has no disruptive effects or influences on transsexual subjectivity and gender identity or in the personal relations and social contexts in which transsexuals interact? Can gender as an 'authorising narrative' fully contain the female to male trans-sexed body which, as an imperfect replication of anatomical 'maleness', suggests that in their case sex-reassignment is perhaps never fully

complete?¹² Is it the case that transsexuals are constrained to represent themselves *as* transsexual subjects only through the symptomatic story learned through medical discourses and the experience of sex-reassignment processes and practices?

In relation to the significance of the physical body, in *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* Kessler and McKenna (1978) argue, based in their social research on how gender is constructed in everyday life, that:

Gender attribution is essentially genital attribution. If you “know” the genital then you know the gender ... The reality of gender is “proved” by the genital which is attributed, and, at the same time, the attributed genital only has meaning through the socially shared construction of the gender attribution process. (pp.145 & 155)

Mirroring Raymond (1994) and Hausman’s (1995) privileging of gender as the prime ‘authorising narrative’ Kessler and McKenna (1978), drawing upon the work of Garfinkel (1967), locate the ‘shared construction of the gender attribution process’ as arising in Western society through what they term the ‘natural attitude of gender’ founded upon the assumption of eight ‘real, objective facts’¹³:

1. There are two, and only two, genders (female and male).
2. One’s gender is invariant (If you are female/male, you always were female/male and you always will be female/male).

¹² It can, of course, be argued that the trans-sexed bodies of many male to female transsexuals are also imperfect replications of ‘femaleness’. For many who transition later in life, for example, it is often not easy to fully conceal the effects of the earlier masculinisation of their bodies. As well as genital surgery, male to females also often undergo cosmetic surgeries such as the reduction of the Adam’s apple and undertake lengthy treatments of electrolysis and attend speech therapy classes in order for their sex-reassignment to be complete.

¹³ Kessler and McKenna provide a discussion of cross-cultural perspectives on gender in their book and thus highlight these ‘facts’ to be constructions of Western societies.

3. Genitals are the essential sign of gender (a female is a person with a vagina; a male is a person with a penis.)
4. Any exceptions to two genders are not to be taken seriously. (They must be jokes, pathology etc.)
5. There are no transfers from gender to another except ceremonial ones (masquerades).
6. Everyone must be classified as a member of one gender or another. (There are no cases where gender is not attributed)
7. The male/female dichotomy is a “natural” one. (Males and females exist independently of scientists’ (or anyone else’s) criteria for being male or female.
8. Membership in one gender or another is “natural.” (being female or male is not dependent on anyone’s deciding what you are.)

Kessler & McKenna (1978:113-4)

For Kessler and McKenna, although genitals are the prime signifier of gender, through the ‘natural attitude of gender’ whether one has a penis or a vagina is transformed from a ‘biological event’ to a ‘cultural event’ (p.153-4). Genitals, as they are attributed to persons by all members of Western societies should therefore properly be understood as ‘cultural genitals’: ‘the one which is assumed to exist and which, it is believed, should be there’ (p.154). Throughout their chapter on transsexuality, which examines how transsexuals ‘pass’ in their new roles in everyday social interaction with unknown others, they argue that transsexuals accomplish and construct gender in much the same way as non-transsexuals do. For Kessler and McKenna, through the ‘natural attitude of gender’ the trans-sexed body, like other sexed bodies, is spoken for, is discursively produced and always recuperated into the gender binary. The material body, always interpreted through cultural norms, is accorded no significance, although, as I shall argue in Chapter Four, this *assertion* of its immateriality is not supported through the construction of their analysis.

Raymond (1994), Billings and Urban (1996), Hausman (1995) and Kessler and McKenna (1978) generate their analyses of transsexuality through a primary focus upon male to female transsexuals, failing to follow through the implications of any differences which may accrue from the differential outcomes of medical and surgical interventions and the social, cultural and personal positionings which females to males may occupy pre- and post-transition. Also, in viewing transsexuality as produced within, and always ultimately recuperated and contained by, discourses of normative gender they can be seen to be blinkered by their own heterosexist assumptions and beliefs. The notions of 'gender ideologies', 'ideas of gender' and the 'natural attitude of gender', ultimately accorded unidirectional power, conceptually foreclose the recognition of the potential for them being 'open to change', for there being possibilities for the construction of other configurations of gender and sexuality or for the transsexual body itself to produce effects in the social and cultural domains and within personal relationships. Through the discursive limits which 'gender ideologies', 'the idea of gender' and 'the natural attitude of gender' place upon the material body, each perspective, although based in different premises, also ultimately suggests that the only 'transsexual' story to be told, heard and re-told is the 'official' version developed through medical technologies, discourses and practices: a singular, undifferentiated, conformist and traditional 'transsexual' story.

Queer Theory and Transsexual Perspectives

Increasingly, many transsexual and transgendered scholars are arguing that whilst it may indeed be a truism that medical technologies, discourses and practices of

sex-reassignment operate within a framework of naturalising gender norms, this does not necessarily have to lead to the conclusion that transsexuality equals conformity to these norms (Stone, 1991; Stryker, 1994, 1998; Whittle, 1996; Bornstein, 1994; Halberstam, 1994, 1998a, 1998b; Hale, 1998). Drawing upon queer theory which emphasises transgression, disruption and subversion of normative assumptions of sex, gender and sexuality, they endeavour to establish the grounds through which alternative 'subversive' accounts of transsexuality are possible, countering the views outlined above which locate transsexuals, post transition, as wholly recuperated into dominant, normative heterosexuality.

Although there is no singular queer 'theory' as such, there are nonetheless some basic theoretical premises that underpin queer perspectives. These were largely outlined by Judith Butler (1990, 1991, 1993), one of the leading authors in queer theory's initial development. Employing the constructionist and deconstructionist approaches of poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives, Butler argues that heterosexuality and the norms of 'heterogender' achieve their naturalistic effects through the 'imitative strategies' of enactments of gender which, in imitating 'a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity' produce the very sense of this ideal's naturalness (1991:21). Butler¹⁴ asserts that, through this 'grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized' (1990:151, note 6) - what she terms the 'heterosexual matrix' - there can be 'no

¹⁴ Whilst Butler's perspective to a certain extent mirrors Kessler and McKenna's (1978) argument that the material body (especially genitals) are cultural rather than biological (see p.21 above), Butler differs in so far as she does not consider the material body to be 'outside' of cultural and social discourses, but constituted through them. Although on this basis she refuses to make a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', seeing the former as constituted through the discourses of the latter, through her argument of there being the possibility for 'all sorts of resignifying and parodic repetitions' of gender and sexuality (1991: 23) she nonetheless does rely on a metaphorical (if not literal) distinction between them. Andermahr et al (1997) similarly make this point in their *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* (pp. 84-5).

recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition will be shown to have been gender all along' (p.8). For Butler, gender should therefore be conceptualised in two ways. Firstly as 'performative' in a structuring, regulatory and constraining sense: there is no pre-discursive/social subject who can choose gender, as via birth into the heterosexual matrix individuals are compelled to *be* gendered in order to come into being as viable, culturally intelligible subjects. And secondly, as a 'performance' which, whilst involving the enactment of the social meanings and discursive practices of the 'heterosexual matrix', is nonetheless a site in which 'all sorts of resignifying and parodic repetitions become possible' (1991:23). For Butler and other queer theorists there are no causal connections between sex, gender and sexuality, but rather, cutting across, moving within and through the construction of a homosexual/heterosexual binary divide, there is an 'open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' (Sedgwick, 1994:8). Gender, homosexuality and heterosexuality, are thus not fixed or stable categories or 'identities' and possibilities for change and for their resignification are continually present.

Through the lenses of queer theory, many transsexual and transgendered scholars thus oppose charges of the necessary conformity of transsexuals, and consider transsexual subjects, in their unique location in relation to the constructedness of sex and gender, to constitute *specific* and *privileged* 'queer' sites for the transgression, disruption and subversion of normative understandings of sex, gender and sexuality (Stone, 1991; Stryker, 1994; Whittle, 1996; Bornstein, 1994).

Others, extending this perspective, argue for the recognition of the potential queerness in *all* constructed sexed and gendered performances and in their project to deconstruct the binaries of sex, gender and sexuality, refuse to accord any ontological specificity to a 'transsexual' subject (Halberstam, 1994, 1998a, 1998b; Hale, 1998).

From the latter approach, Judith Halberstam (1994) in her essay *F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity*, places an exclusive focus upon female to males and deconstructs the seam between the categories of 'lesbian' and 'transsexual' by taking the female to male transsexual body - which she identifies as being an imperfect replication of the normative 'male' body both with and without a penis - and aligning it with what she terms the 'postmodern lesbian body', a body which, through an increasing proliferation of diverse lesbian sexual and gendered practices, she argues has ceased to confine itself within the traditional, defining terms of 'lesbian', 'gay' or 'straight'. Postmodern lesbian forms of masculinity, enacted through the configuration of genders such as 'butches' and 'drag-kings'¹⁵ and sexualities, where for example the use of sex-toys such as dildos have gained popularity, are seen by Halberstam to be little different from female to male transsexual forms of masculinities and sexualities, leading her to argue that 'the specificity of the transsexual disappears' (p.212). She asserts:

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 but where are we crossing from and to what? There is no "other" side, no "opposite" sex, no natural divide to be spanned by surgery, by disguise, by passing. We all pass or we

¹⁵ The term 'butch' is used within lesbian discourses and cultures to refer to lesbians who 'are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than with feminine ones' (Rubin, 1992: 467). The term 'drag-king' refers to a woman 'who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume' (Halberstam, 1998b: 232).

don't, we all wear our drag, and we all derive a different degree of pleasure - sexually or otherwise - from our costumes. 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. (p.212)

Thus, Halberstam accords disruptive potential to the trans-sexed body in relation to the homo/heterosexual binary, but this is not differentiated from the disruption which is caused through changing or challenging normative codes of dress. The body, as is clothing, is significant *only* insofar as its representations provide a site for interpretations. Indeed, moving from a singular focus on the transsexual individual which other analyses adopt, Halberstam argues that 'readers of gender' 'as much as bodies, create sexuality and gender and their transivities' (p.220). On this basis, gender is considered to be a 'fiction' which, in being *created between people* has the potential for always remaking the gendered body, pointing Halberstam toward a conceptualisation of gender which pushes beyond the 'reiterative' or conditioned 'resignifying' performances that Butler (1990, 1991, 1993) outlines. For Halberstam (1994) gender is 'defined by its transitivity' (p.226) and it is the 'readers of gender' as much as, or perhaps more than, the performers of gender who ultimately enable the 'fictions' of gender to come into being and be realised. She argues therefore, that:

Creating gender as fiction demands that we learn how to read it. In order to find our way into a posttranssexual¹⁶ era, we must educate ourselves as readers of gender fiction, we must learn how to take pleasure in gender and how to become an audience for the multiple performances of gender we witness everyday. (p.226)

¹⁶ The term 'posttranssexual' was coined by Sandy Stone (1991) who will be discussed below (p.29).

Although Halberstam was one of the first scholars to specifically address the subversive potential of female to male transsexual bodies,¹⁷ the representational approach she adopts – abstracted from a consideration of broader social relations and practices in which the body both in its physical and representational sense will nonetheless reflexively interact – places limits upon the scope of her argument. As Susan Bordo (1993) argues, ‘[n]o matter how exciting the destabilizing potential of texts, bodily or otherwise, whether those texts are subversive or recuperative or both or neither cannot be determined in abstraction from actual social practice’ (p.294). However, Halberstam’s concern with the importance of ‘readers of gender’ does nonetheless open up the question of the significance of the material body in relation to audience which I explore further in Chapter Four, broadening this to include issues which arise through social practice in particular social contexts *and* personal relationships.

Whilst in Halberstam’s view the idea of gendered performances or ‘fictions’ render the physicality of bodies to be metaphorically as well as literally ‘immaterial’ as long as they are correctly ‘read’, Sandy Stone (1991) and Susan Stryker (1994; 1998) each consider the trans-sexed body itself - as a material, physical body - to be significant in the social and discursive processes of transgression, disruption and subversion. Susan Stryker (1994), in her essay ‘My Words To Victor Frankenstein Above The Village Of Chamounix - Performing Transgender Rage’, argues that

¹⁷ Following Halberstam, Stephen Whittle (1996) in ‘Gender Fucking or Fucking Gender?: Current Contributions to Theories of Gender Blending’ provides an analysis of the photographic representation of the naked physical body of the female to male transsexual photographer Loren Cameron. Photographic representational work on female to males includes for example, Loren Cameron (1996) ‘Body Alchemy’ Cleis Press, and Halberstam & Lagrace Volcano (1999) ‘The Drag King Book’ Serpent’s Tail.

although the medical construction of transsexuality and the medical discourses and practices of sex-reassignment operate to 'stabilize gendered identity in the service of a naturalized heterosexual order', this does not preclude:

... medically constructed transsexual bodies from being viable sites of subjectivity. Nor does it guarantee the compliance of subjects thus embodied with the agenda that resulted in a transsexual means of embodiment. As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intended 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. (p.242)

Following Hausman (1995), Stryker thus emphasizes the productive power of medical technologies in their ability to produce new subject positions. However, whereas Hausman sees the inherent potential subversion of such medical technologies as recuperated by the 'idea of gender', Stryker locates the performance of undergoing sex-reassignment - the very engagement with medical technologies - as ultimately foreclosing the possibility for full recuperation to take place. For Stryker, in undergoing such a process it is difficult to maintain a belief in normative understandings of sex, gender and sexuality and, in transforming one's body into a trans-sexed body, it is difficult to hold and maintain an understanding of one's self as unproblematically and essentially 'normative'. Drawing a comparison between Frankenstein's monster and the transsexual body, Stryker counters the view that the subjectivities of transsexuals are necessarily mere reflections of the medical discourses and practices that underpin the creation of that subject position and argues that 'the consciousness shaped by the transsexual body is no more the creation of the science that refigures its flesh than the monster's

mind is the creation of Frankenstein' (p.242). For Stryker, the transsexual body is therefore inherently subversive and disruptive but for this to be discursively and socially realised transsexuals, who 'often successfully cite the culture's visual norms of gendered embodiment', need to declare their status as transsexuals and thus expose the constructedness of the gendered subject positions they nonetheless occupy' (p.241).

Sandy Stone (1991), in her essay 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', also argues alongside Stryker, that whilst medical discourses and practices work to contain transsexual identity and subjectivity within a normative heterosexual order, the disruptive potential of the trans-sexed body has nonetheless always existed. For Stone, this potential has not been realised as, through the medical protocols of sex-reassignment, transsexuals have effectively been hidden from history - caught between medical and conventional gender discourses where being compelled to 'pass' has silenced the telling of their 'authentic' experiences:

... it is difficult to generate a counterdiscourse if one is programmed to disappear. The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself, to fade into the "normal" population as soon as possible. Part of this process is known as *constructing a plausible history* – learning to lie effectively about one's past. What is gained is acceptability in society. What is lost is the ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience ... Instead, authentic experience is replaced by a particular kind of story, one that supports the old constructed positions. (p.295, emphasis in original)

In order for transsexuals to form their own counter discourse to these 'old constructed positions' of naturalising, normative heterosexuality and heterogender, and create the discursive conditions through which the subversive potential of transsexual bodies can be realised, Stone asserts, akin to Stryker, that transsexuals

should refuse to pass, refuse to be silent about their gender histories in order to make these cohere with the gendered subject position they currently occupy, and come out *as* transsexuals. In the refusal to be verbally silent and thus invisible *as* transsexuals, she argues that transsexuals will then begin to write themselves into the discourses by which they were initially written, and in so doing will become 'posttranssexual' – putting into effect their disruptive potential by 'reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body' which, in the 'new and unpredictable dissonances' between sex, sexuality and gendered performance it can generate, will 'fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries' (pp.298-9 & 296).

However, does making a verbal declaration of one's transsexuality always add up to subversive resistance – that is, will it necessarily lead others to question and challenge the beliefs and institutions of normative sex, gender and sexuality, to recognise it as subversion and not as a joke or as symptom of pathology (see the 'natural attitude of gender' pp.20-21 above)? In view of Halberstam's (1994) and Bordo's (1993) arguments which lead to a consideration of the significance of social contexts and social practices in which performances of gender and sexuality and the readings of these performances take place, then Stone's and Stryker's reliance upon the power of written and spoken language to produce recognition of subversive transsexual subjectivity appears either optimistic or misplaced.

Despite their differences in focus, Halberstam, Stryker and Stone each place emphasis on what Judith Butler (1990, 1991, 1993) outlines as the resignifying potential of gendered 'performances' and what Kessler and McKenna (1978) refer

to as 'the doing of gender' thus overlooking the 'performative' aspect of gender - the discursive conditions of the regulatory 'heterosexual matrix' which render some gendered subjects intelligible but not others (Butler, 1993). As Butler outlines, gender performances:

... cannot be theorized apart from the forcible and reiterative practices of regulatory sexual regimes ... the account of agency conditioned by those very regimes of discourse/power cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism ... and in no way presupposes a choosing subject. (p.15)

In theorising against the feminist and sociological perspectives which, as shown above, overwhelmingly deny transsexual subjects any claim to a relatively *autonomous agency and subjectivity from medical discourses and practices*, Halberstam, Stryker and Stone have, I suggest, overplayed the possibilities for the autonomy of persons (transsexual, transgendered or otherwise) and have underplayed the constraints which necessarily inhere in the reflexive production and construction of our individual experiences and selves. Thus, we may well be performers of 'fictitious' gender but we nonetheless live out our gendered *identifications within and through a range of discourses, discursive practices and social contexts where, although gender and its meanings are negotiated with others*, this is always through discursive and social conditions which are not entirely of our own making. These place limitations upon the freedom of our agency and subjectivities and indicate that equally there are then limitations to the realisation of transsexuality's transgression and its disruptive and subversive potential. By taking into account the significance of competing discourses, discursive practices and social contexts, 'queer' notions of transgression, disruption and subversion are thus effectively uncoupled and point to how transgression may not always lead to

disruption or subversion, or that sometimes it may be disruptive but not be subversive and indeed that disruption in itself may not always hold the guarantee of transgressiveness. Moreover, none of these will necessarily lead to a *transformation* of institutionalised heterosexuality and the structure of domination of the sex-gender system, such that transsexuality could be socially and culturally accepted as simply one of an array of possible gendered positions.

The 'Essential Transsexual'

The positioning of transsexuality as either exclusively recuperative or subversive suggests a certain *theoretical* impasse. With both 'sides' operating as a critical response to what the other does not reveal, how might discussions on transsexuality proceed? Jay Prosser (1998) in his book *Second Skins: the body narratives of transsexuality*, argues that transsexual narratives, or what he terms the 'body narratives' of transsexuals, have largely been erased within the discussions that have so far taken place – both through the emphases on 'authorising gender narratives' and on 'performance' – and that in order to enable the materiality of the transsexual body and transsexual subjectivity to be fully and properly read, it is on the body narratives of transsexuality that we should now place our focus. In a critique of Hausman's (1995) project, Prosser argues that 'the body and narrative work together in the production of transsexual subjectivity' (p.105) and that, contrary to Hausman's identification of the simultaneous production of transsexual subjectivity with the development of medical technologies, the 'naming of transsexuality was rather a response to preexistent transsexual identity patterns and indeed embodiments' (pp.9-10). Critical of constructionist perspectives, which he

sees as problematically lending support to 'mainstream' stereotypes of transsexuals in which they are conceived as 'literally' 'unnatural' constructed objects, invalidating their 'claims to speak from legitimate feelings of gendered difference' (p.8), Prosser argues for the need to read 'the transsexual as authorial subject' (p.9).

For Prosser such a reading however is not without risk in that:

To the extent that transsexual narratives cannot be read without our accounting for the subjective experience of being transgendered,¹⁸ reading them necessitates our taking at every step ... a phrase that's been much circulated recently – "the risk of essentialism" (pp.16-17)

Identifying the 'authorial subject' with essentialism, for Prosser personal identity exists before or beyond social and cultural contexts and discourses. He appeals to a 'real' transsexual who is not a creation of medical technologies: his transsexual subject is therefore not a discursive or technological production, but an individual who realises her/himself *through* technologies, having created the circumstances in which s/he can fully come into being. Taking transsexual autobiography as the focus of his analysis of transsexual 'body narratives', Prosser is critical of those theorists who only find within it the symptomatic story of the medical discourses and practices which they have assumed *a priori* to produce transsexuality itself, suggesting alternatively that: 'if autobiography is transsexuality's proffered symptom, the transsexual necessarily authors his or her own plot *before* s/he has access to technologies.' (p.133).

Although Prosser here hints at the potential for a variety of 'transsexual plots' to be

¹⁸ Prosser distinguishes between transsexual and transgender identities although often, as in this instance, he uses the terms interchangeably.

revealed through close analytic attention to personal narratives, such a possibility is foreclosed by his insistence that the narrative of 'being born in the wrong body' is ultimately the singular and *true* expression of authentic transsexual experience (p.69) and also through his insistence that, in changing their bodies, transsexuals are drawn more fully, and properly, into heterogender (p.6). On this basis, Prosser argues against queer theory's utilization of the transsexual figure as *the* privileged site of its subversive project and insists upon the specificity of the 'transsexual' against the 'transgendered' figure which he argues queer theory both constructs and relies upon.

The irony of Prosser's position is that he ultimately replicates the conclusions of those authors, such as Hausman and Raymond, whom he consistently criticises for not taking into account the specificity of transsexual experience. Thus, as for Hausman and Raymond, for Prosser there exists only one possible 'transsexual' story to be told, heard and re-told. This fundamental flaw in Prosser's analysis arises, I suggest, through his realist approach to how 'the body and narrative work together in the production of transsexual subjectivity' (p.105). Nonetheless, Prosser's method which focuses upon transsexual narratives suggests the potential for an alternative, *constructivist*, narrative approach which could engage with the complex construction of individual narratives, the stories which are told of experience and the relationship(s) between the material body and transsexual subjectivities.

This critical review has clearly illuminated the significance of medical discourses and practices to the academic debates concerning the production of

transsexual subjects: non-transsexual scholars have been shown to focus upon the limitations which they place upon the realisation of transsexual subjectivities and transsexual scholars shown to propose means through which these limitations can be exceeded or, in the case of Prosser, theoretically dispensed with through a recourse to a 'reality' of transsexual experience which lies outside of the ways in which it has been spoken.

However, concentration upon medical discourses and practices, seen to constrain individuals to gender conformity and the telling of a pre-written story of self-hood; to produce the potential for resistance to and/or disruption of the structure of the sex/gender system and heterosexuality; or to enable the transsexual to embody their 'real' gender, can be seen to place stringent limits upon the scope of the debate.

Whether scholars approach their studies through literary or social perspectives, medicine, heterosexuality and the sex/gender binary are ultimately the central discourses and practices which the subjects of their studies are investigated through and against. In none of these analyses are these discourses and practices and the specificity of transsexual embodiment and subjectivity directly engaged with in light of the complexity of the broad range of social contexts and personal/social relationships within which transsexuals (as all individuals) must interact.

Holly Devor (1997)¹⁹, who conducted social research through interviews with female to males in the U.S.A., suggests the significance of this complex positioning in relation to the female to male trans-sexed body, although her analysis does not theoretically engage with its implications. She writes:

¹⁹ Devor's study is critically engaged with in Chapter 4: Our Bodies Ourselves?

It seems to me that the transsexual role never gets entirely exited ... Female-to-male sex reassignment surgery has not yet reached sufficient sophistication that female-to-male transsexuals have the option of even attempting to put their transsexualism entirely behind them. Female-to-male transsexuals and their intimates are continually confronted with visages of their less than perfectly male bodies. However, for all transsexual persons, their transsexualism always remains a piece of potentially stigmatizing information which needs to be managed indefinitely. (p.48)

Lending support to the positions adopted by Stryker and Stone (above) in respect of the specificity of transsexual experience and the impossibility of straightforward recuperation into heterogender, Devor's remarks additionally suggest the need for the ways in which this may be managed in daily life to be more fully explored, implying, moreover, the necessity also to take into account the 'readers of gender' (Halberstam, p.26 above) as they are implicated in interactional contexts and personal relationships.

Managing Stigma

As Devor (1997) notes, some scholars concerned with transsexuality and society have 'acknowledged their debt to Erving Goffman's (1963) work on the management of social stigma' (p.43).²⁰ However, whilst recognising the value of Goffman's insights most, including Devor herself, have not systematically applied them in the investigations of transsexual lives. Although Kessler and McKenna (1978) leap from the notion of social stigma to recast its management in terms of the 'doing of gender' and Feinbloom (1976), in her sociological but clinically

²⁰ Whilst Goffman's work on social stigma is pertinent to studies concerning transsexuality, he does not himself draw upon or refer to the lives of transsexuals in his discussion.

informed study of transvestites and transsexuals, considers the issue of stigma 'beyond the data' she collected (p.8), the significance of the concept of social stigma and its effects within the lives and upon the identities of transsexuals has yet to be addressed.

For Goffman, embodied selves and identities are socially and discursively constructed but significantly, throughout a lifetime are always 'accomplished' or contested and recast within *social interaction and interpersonal dynamics*. In their relations with others, individuals are necessarily engaged in an ongoing project in the establishment of their 'selves': 'selves' which in their presentations are continually negotiated and in need of management. Like Halberstam (1994), Goffman acknowledges that it is the observers, or to use Halberstam's term 'readers', as well as the performers or presenters of 'selves' which enable any given accomplishment or contestation and recasting of a 'self' to take place. In contrast to Halberstam's undifferentiated and unaccounted for 'readers', however, through his sociological focus Goffman conceptualises observers (as well as performers) as variously socially positioned and as drawing upon personal stocks of social 'knowledges' concerning categories of persons and social and cultural norms and practices. It is within this sociological framework of the social positioning of persons and the interactional, interpersonal processes through which identities are produced that Goffman deals with the issue of social 'stigma'.

In the context of social 'knowledges' of the norms of sex, gender and sexuality in

Western society, within the broad range of social and personal relationships in which transsexual lives are lived, by virtue of undergoing or having undergone sex-reassignment they are *positioned* in many of these relationships as individuals who deal with 'stigma', which Goffman (1963) describes as the possession of 'an attribute that makes him (sic) different from others in the category of persons available for him to be' and which is seen by others to be 'discrediting' (p.12). For Goffman, the potential for any person to be positioned as 'stigmatised' arises through an exposure of a 'discrepancy' between what he terms a 'virtual' social identity, that is the identity and/or character attributed to a person by others who do the attributing by drawing upon tacit social 'knowledges' of available categories of persons (for example, male and female), and their 'actual' social identity, '[t]he category and attributes he (sic) could in fact be proved to possess' (p.12).²¹

Underpinning Goffman's concept of the 'actual' social identities of all persons are their socially constructed 'personal' identities, where both 'are part, first of all, of other person's concerns and definitions regarding the individual whose identity is in question.' (p.129). At birth, for example, our parents or guardians are legally required to register and obtain a certificate of our arrival into the world whereupon we are legally and officially registered as a person of a particular sex, born on a particular day, in a particular place and with a particular name. The birth certificate, forming the foundation for the subsequent identification of who 'in fact' we are, constitutes a lifetime 'identity peg' to

²¹ Goffman terms an individual's subjective sense of personal identity the 'ego identity', the 'subjective, reflexive matter that necessarily must be felt by the individual whose identity is at issue' (p.129)

which all other official documentation, up to and including our death, refers and thus assumes and works to largely ensure that we will always be seen to *be* a specific person: that we as the person 'who qualified in the past is the self-same person who qualifies in the present and will do so in the future' (p.74).²² In addition to the 'identity document' of the birth certificate, an 'actual' social identity also comprises what Goffman calls the 'positive mark' of personal identity, that is the images and memories of us as particular and 'unique' persons that those who know us have in their minds (p.73).

Goffman identifies two types of 'stigma' which arise through the discrepancies which can occur between the 'virtual' and 'actual' social identities of persons. 'Stigma' may be body-bound, as in the case of a severe disfigurement, for example, or it can be bound to a person's character, such as having a criminal history or through being lesbian or gay. Importantly, as Goffman asserts, a 'stigma', whether bound to the body or character, is not an inherent property of those persons who may be said to deal with it, however, but rather is a social and culturally constructed property of persons where '[a]n attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable or discreditable as a thing in itself' (p.13). Indeed, any person

²² In the UK, whilst individuals may officially change the name given and registered to them at birth through either Deed Poll or Statutory Declaration and for women, through marriage, the birth certificate itself cannot be changed. All official documentation of name change refers to the original name on the birth certificate which is often a necessary document to produce, for example, when applying for a passport. Currently, whilst transsexuals cannot change the sex stated on their birth certificate, with a doctor's letter the stated sex on a passport or driving license can be altered. Thus, whilst a personal identity can be officially changed, the necessary official documentation always retains some links with the original 'identity peg' of the birth certificate. The birth certificate can therefore create significant problems for transsexuals in so far as they legally remain of the sex it states. This denies them the right to marry a partner (of the transsexual's originally ascribed sex) and for female to males, the right to gain legal recognition of their parental status to any children borne to or adopted by their female partners. For a discussion of the law and transsexuals see Whittle (1999).

who does not fit society's 'normative ideal' of a white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, young, law abiding and otherwise conventional male or female may find this lack of fit discrediting in some situations, whilst in others, a reverse discrediting may occur. For example, a heterosexual woman engaging in political work with a group of lesbian women may find that in these circumstances she is discredited and thus 'stigmatised' as a heterosexual woman by the lesbians she is working with. As Goffman observes, a 'stigma', then, must not only be seen as a social and culturally constructed property of any persons who are said to be dealing with it, but must also be recognised as an attribution which will depend on and indeed can shift through certain social contexts and relationships.

Through the social positioning of female to male transsexuals in relation to 'the natural attitude of gender' (Kessler & McKenna, 1978), the potential for discrediting and thus the attribution of 'stigma' can be seen to involve both the 'body-bound' and 'character-bound' types that Goffman discerns. The former can be seen to involve two basic strands. Firstly, insofar as in relation to 'the natural attitude of gender' which holds that '[g]enitals are the essential sign of gender. (A female is a person with a vagina; a male is a person with a penis)' (Kessler & McKenna, 1978:113), with the absence of a penis, the bodies of female to male transsexuals, pre-transition, do not and most will not, post-transition, conform to popular 'normative' expectations of maleness.²³ Secondly, in the sense that the 'natural attitude' holds that '[o]ne's gender is invariant. (If

²³ Arguably, even for those female to males who have undergone phalloplasty (the surgical construction of a penis) its lack of full functionality will mean that they will still not meet the social expectations of normative maleness.

you *are* female/male, you always *were* female/male and you always *will* be female/male)' (p.113, emphases in original), the changed or changing bodies of female to male transsexuals may *not* in the eyes of certain others, serve to qualify them as *really* being the males they claim to be. The latter 'character-bound' type of 'stigma' can similarly be seen to have two basic strands. Firstly, and related to the last 'body-bound' strand, in the 'natural attitude's' assumption that there can be 'no transfers from one gender to another except ceremonial ones (masquerades)' (p.13), female to male transsexuals may find that in their explicated desire for sex-reassignment and/or during and after the having undergone the process, others either do not take them seriously in their identity claims or position them as persons to be ridiculed. Secondly, as medicine under the terms of 'the natural attitude of gender' has designated transsexuality as a psychological 'illness' or 'condition', female to male transsexuals are positioned in such a way that in the eyes of others they may be seen to be 'decidedly barmy' (Whittle, 1996) or as someone who has 'a diseased mind' (Stryker, 1994).

The potential for the possibility of discrediting and thus 'stigmatising' characteristics to be attributed to female to male transsexuals by others depends upon the contexts and relationships that female to males will occupy and engage in and will further depend, as Goffman (1963) notes, on whether the discrediting attribute(s) (in this case their transsexuality) is known or not known by others. In relationships and in contexts where their transsexuality is known by others, they are placed in situations where they occupy what Goffman terms a 'discredited' position, that is, the ways in which they depart from normative conceptions of maleness will be known about by others and for the female to male 'the sense of not knowing what the others present are "really" thinking about him' will arise (p.25).

In contexts and in relationships where their transsexuality is not known by others, they then occupy what Goffman terms as a 'discreditable' position, where there is always the potential for the 'secret differentness' (p.102) (their transsexuality) to be revealed either by themselves through slips in conversation or through the physical exposure of their genitals. Should this occur, of course, then their 'virtual' social identity of normative maleness may then be discredited at which point their positioning in that particular context or relationship would undergo a shift from that of 'discreditable' to 'discredited'. However, as Goffman argues, in daily living it is more usually the case that persons dealing with 'stigma' will experience the occupation of both positionings, either singularly or in combination, such as when in 'mixed contacts' with some people who know about the 'stigmatising' attributes and others who do not. For example, in going out from a home environment shared by family members, close friends or loved ones to go into the town centre to pay a bill, a variety of social contacts and verbal and non-verbal forms of interaction will have taken place, within which a person's positioning as either 'discredited' or 'discreditable' will be subject to a number of shifts and potential combinations.

Thus, as Goffman (1963) writes:

Instead, then, of thinking of a continuum of relationships, with categoric and concealing treatment at one end and particularistic, open treatment at the other, it might be better to think of various structures in which contact occurs and is stabilized – public streets and their strangers, perfunctory service relations, the workplace, the neighbourhood, the domestic scene – and to see that in each case characteristic discrepancies are likely to occur between virtual and actual social identity, and characteristic efforts are made to manage the situation. (pp.72-3)

As he observes, the stocks of social 'knowledges' concerning social and cultural norms, practices and categories of persons which individuals positioned as

dealing with stigma will necessarily be aware of and perhaps also hold, 'equip him (sic) to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be' (pp.17-18). With these social 'knowledges' shared between the individual and others, 'discreditable' positionings thus involve the need for the management of 'information' on the part of the person who occupies that position, for whom the primary concern will be the question of whether '[t]o display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where' (p.57). 'Discredited' positionings, on the other hand, necessitate the negotiation of these shared social 'knowledges' with others known to them and thus largely invoke the need for the management of 'tension' with these others.

Conclusion

To discuss transsexuals in the context of 'stigma' is not, then, to 'fix' individuals as inherently or essentially generative of its attribution, nor as definable under its sign, but to identify them as individuals actively engaged in the management of interaction. The particular context of the interaction, the person(s) involved, their relationship to the individual and the 'knowledges' which each possess will inflect that interaction. Locating female to male transsexuals within this common set of social interactional dynamics offers, therefore, an alternative framework through which to interrogate the construction and maintenance of their identities as they 'come out' and transition to embody their masculinities.

Whilst this framework *informs* the analysis of the research interviews which follow in Chapters Three and Four, it does not provide a *sufficient* basis for it. As a theory of social interaction, the framework does not speak to the significance of medical discourses in the construction of transsexual identities which have been seen to be foregrounded in the work of the scholars discussed in this chapter, nor does it directly address the epistemological and methodological questions which the study presented in its design and conduct.

In the following chapter, drawing particularly upon the work of Arthur Frank (1995) on 'illness' narratives, together with feminist work on epistemology and methodology and the multidisciplinary methodologies and methods of narrative analysis, the epistemological and methodological framework for this study will be developed, through addressing key issues of experience, voice, power, agency and representation.

Chapter Two

Epistemology, Methodology and Method(s)

The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. (Stone, 1991:294)

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'Other' ... It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak ... Often this speech about the 'Other' annihilates, erases: 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.'

(bell hooks, cited in Kitzinger & Wilkinson (eds.),1996:11)

Introduction

As Judith Halberstam (1998a) has observed, '[w]e are at present in the midst of a Foucauldian "reverse discourse" on transsexuality and transgenderism' (p.301). Many transsexual and transgendered activists and academics, angered by the ways in which they have been represented by the medical establishment and non-transsexual academicians (most notably some feminists)¹, have begun, to use the words of Sandy Stone (1991), to 'strike back' and write '[themselves] into the discourses by which

¹ The main feminist writers who have been subject to criticism by transsexual and transgendered activists and academics are Janice Raymond (1996), Bernice Hausman (1995) and Germaine Greer. Greer has mainly been criticised in relation to the ways she has promulgated her views on transsexuality through the media, full details of which can be found on the Press For Change website: <http://www.pfc.org.uk>

[they have] been written' (p.299). Through this marked shift from research 'objects' to that of 'subjects' engaged in 'speaking back' - establishing the field of what is coming to be known as 'transgender studies'- issues of epistemology and methodology are increasingly being brought to the fore (Namaste, 1996; Rubin, 1998). In the context of this research concerning female to male transsexual identity, these issues are therefore perhaps most particularly in need of articulation and discussion. As a non-transsexual female embodied, lesbian researcher I could be seen to be an 'outsider', an 'other' in relation to the subjects of my study where, in having both developed and produced this thesis under the auspices of a Centre for the Study of Women and Gender in a British university, this 'otherness' can be seen to extend beyond that of sex/gender location into a relational positioning which is fraught with the very issues of power that the 'reverse discourse' is working against.² As was evident in the sociological and feminist perspectives discussed in Chapter One and as Pat Califia (1997) writes, '[m]ost of the literature about transsexuals has been written by self proclaimed experts, from a position that claims to be academic or scientific ... it is the medical doctor, therapist, academic, and feminist theoretician who interpret "them" for the rest of "us," and thus claim to be the voice of reality' (pp.1-2).

Following Califia, I too 'am not comfortable allying myself with supposedly

² The relations of 'otherness' in which myself and the subjects of this research are implicated in relation to one another also extends to include those of class, 'race', ethnicity, age, and (dis)ability. In the context of the epistemological issues which are taking place through the 'reverse discourse' and within 'transgender studies', however, it is my positionings as a 'non-transsexual female', as a 'lesbian', as researcher within the academy and in 'women and gender studies' which emerge as particularly significant.

objective experts' (p.2) and wish to place substantial distance between myself and the kinds of theorising which until recently have served to silence and discredit the academic (and otherwise) voices of transsexuals (Whittle, 1996). However, in recognising that through my positioning this is nonetheless potentially the way I may be perceived to consider myself and present this research, it is clear that a mere rejection of such a potentiality will not do and that more than a passing expression of my discomfort and desired distance from such approaches is required. My goal, through my particular positionings, to establish the means through which female to male transsexual voices can be heard and not discredited needs to be explicated – what are the epistemological underpinnings of this goal? In an informally published set of 'suggested rules for non-transsexuals writing about transsexuals' (Hale, 1997) researchers such as myself are warned 'you are not the experts about transsexuals, transsexuality, transsexualism or trans____. Transsexuals are'.³ In view of my particular social and discursive positioning as a non-transsexual researcher (an 'outsider'), what then, or who, and how can *I* claim to 'know'? And what status can be accorded to the 'knowledge' that through this thesis *I* aim to produce?

To address these questions, in this chapter I will first briefly discuss what is meant by the concept of the 'other' and, drawing upon the understandings and issues the concept has raised within the context of contemporary feminist theory, provide the epistemological basis for the primary research upon which this thesis is founded.

³ These 'suggested rules' are published on the World Wide Web. They can be found at: <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~sandy/hale.rules.html>

Beginning by outlining the 'demands' transsexuals have made upon 'outsider' approaches to research on transsexuals, and suggesting their implicit recognition of its possibility, the discussion then moves to discuss the nature of the relationship between transsexuals and medical discourses and practices. Drawing upon the work of Arthur Frank (1995), an analogy is made between transsexuals and those who live in the wake of medical intervention in their lives, outlining recent developments in the sociology of health and illness which foreground the agency of individuals and the new subjectivities which their experiences produce. Having established the theoretical basis upon which transsexuals' experience and voice can be centralised, the chapter then addresses the methodological foundation of the study through a discussion of narrative research and analysis and, ultimately, the research process undertaken in the production of this thesis.

Conceptualising the 'Other' in Contemporary Feminist Theory

The concept of the 'other' was initially introduced into feminist theory through the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) who, in her theorising of the relations between men and women, argued that man has been constructed as the 'subject' of humanity and woman has been constructed as the 'other' in relation to him: 'the negative of men, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself' (Butler, 1990:9-10). Building on this insight, early second wave feminists sought to challenge the 'malestream' knowledge which pervaded social scientific research, where women, where they were discussed at all, were continually constructed as inferior and/or as

abnormal 'others' (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996). Assuming an essential difference between the 'sexes' they called for the recognition of epistemological 'standpoints', which, whilst urging male researchers to recognise the partiality of their research 'findings', also entailed the forging of a distinctly 'feminist' project - firstly to put women into the picture of otherwise 'malestream' social reality, and secondly to oppose the traditional social scientific emphasis on researcher 'objectivity' and establish a higher level of truth and knowledge by approaching their research from the perspective of women's lives (Rose, 1983; Smith, 1987; Hartsock, 1987; Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Drawing upon Marxist epistemology, specifically the Marxism of George Lukács (1971), feminist standpoint theorists posited the possibility of a more accurate truth and knowledge directly attainable through the experiences of women as products of their subordinate position in the sexual division of labour. Through occupying this subordinate position women were seen as the privileged 'knowers', able to offer insights and knowledge of the social world that men, as they occupied positions of power which they had vested interests in maintaining, would or could not be aware of (Tanesini, 1999).

Feminist standpoint was soon challenged, however, by black, non-Western, lesbian, working class and (dis)abled feminists for whom the singular oppositional relation of woman/man underpinning the concept of women as 'other' represented a failure to take into account differences *between* women. The standpoint was seen by these feminists to represent not *all* women but *particular* women, notably those white, middle class women who had access to privileged social positions which facilitated

their writing and speaking. The privileged 'knowers' as represented through feminist theory were thus revealed to be white, western, middle class, heterosexual, non-disabled women, creating those outside of this group as other 'others' 'for whom they themselves constitute a new hegemony, and in relation to whom they stand in positions of power and domination' (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996:7). Through the long and often heated discussions of 'women and difference' which have taken place within contemporary feminisms, conceptualising 'otherness' and the relations and processes through which 'othering' occurs have since been re-framed to acknowledge their production through the diverse relational positionings of women as well as through women's relations to the diverse positionings of men. Arising through these discussions pivotal questions have come to the fore: how can feminists avoid participating in processes of 'othering'? Is it possible and/or desirable to either represent (as in speak for) or re-present (as in speak about) groups of which one is not a member (Spivak, 1986)? Should 'we' whoever 'we' may be, only speak for ourselves?

Representing/Re-presenting the Transsexual 'Other'?

The existence as mentioned previously, of an informally published set of 'suggested rules for non-transsexuals writing about transsexuals' (Hale, 1997), indicates that some direct engagement with this issue is also taking place within transsexual 'communities'. Apart from the assertion that, contrary to the ways in which transsexuals have traditionally been represented and re-presented, it is transsexuals

and not non-transsexual researchers who are the 'experts' in the field, researchers such as myself are directed thus: to 'interrogate your own subject position'; to be wary of potential exoticism; to 'not erase our voices by ignoring what we say or write, through gross misrepresentation'; to 'be aware that our words are very often part of conversations we're having in our communities, and that we may be participating in overlapping conversations within multiple communities'; to not 'represent us or our discourses as monolithic or univocal'; to not 'uncritically quote non-transsexual "experts"'; to recognise that "Transsexual lives are lived, hence liveable"; to 'make explicit' if 'talking about male-to-female transsexual discourses' or 'female-to-male transsexual discourses'; to be aware 'that if you judge us with reference to your political agenda (or agendas)' that it is equally legitimate 'for us to use our political agenda(s) as measures by which to judge yours'; to focus on 'what does looking at transsexuals ... tell you about yourself, not what does it tell you about trans'; to 'ask yourself if you can travel in our trans worlds'; to not 'imagine that you can write about the trope of transsexuality ...without writing about transsexual subjectivities, lives, experiences, embodiments'; and finally, to not 'imagine that there is only one ... figure of "the" transsexual'. Throughout these 'suggested rules' non-transsexual researchers are provided guidance to see transsexual difference not only in relation to themselves, in terms of the relational positions of 'transsexual' and 'non-transsexual' individuals, but also in the relations *between* transsexuals. Through this guidance the suggestion is to affirm difference but avoid participating in the particular processes through which transsexuals, as a collective and as individuals, have been pathologised, silenced,

delegitimised and denied 'expert' status in relation to their own lives - 'othered' – by non-transsexual people who have written and spoken about them.

Implicit in these 'suggested rules', in that they have been written for non-transsexual researchers, is therefore the view that it *is* possible (if perhaps not particularly desirable) for transsexuals to be spoken for and/or spoken about by individuals from other groups. An argument that members of particular groups 'can and should only speak for themselves' is thus not advocated, but what *is* suggested is that this should be conditional upon researchers working towards 'representational realism': to consider themselves in relation to their research subjects as primarily the 'conduits' through which transsexuals, in their 'expert' status, can be heard (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996).⁴ Echoing the perspective characteristic of much feminist research throughout the 1970s and 1980s, these particular 'suggested rules' appear to inform non-transsexual researchers to present transsexuals, both as a collective and individually, 'in their own voices' expressing their experiences 'as they really are'⁵. The problem with this approach, however, as Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1996) point out, is that:

... the stories told to us by Others are not transparent accounts of the world ... However we interpret the task of "representing Others", we have to recognize the complexity of the stories that "they" as well as "we" tell, and not imagine that simply "enabling

⁴ As an 'informal' list of suggestions there is not an explicitly discussed argument for this approach within the document. The approach is rather inferred.

⁵ For feminist research that has adopted this approach see, for example, Ann Oakley (1981) *From Here to Maternity* and Sheila Kitzinger (1987) *Giving Birth: How it Really Feels*. For a critique of the approach in relation to each of these texts, see Cosslett (1991).

them to be heard” will unproblematically translate into revolutionary and political change.’ (p.23)

To this I would also add that people are not *necessarily* always aware of and able to articulate their own social and discursive positioning. For example, people can often say ‘more than they know’ and as Lukács (1971) observes in relation to dominant classes, all people to varying degrees can be seen to have a stake in *not* fully recognising and/or understanding themselves and what they communicate in interaction with others. Epistemological questions of what, or who, and how I can claim to ‘know’ in the production of this thesis thus also involve issues of what, who, and how the *subjects* of the research can claim to ‘know’. What is the status of the ‘expert’ transsexual experiences and ‘knowledges’ which can be spoken to me, and which I intend to speak about?

As has been recognised both within contemporary academic feminism and in other (overlapping) fields such as post-colonial studies and queer studies, there can be no such thing as raw, unmediated ‘experience’, as ‘what one experiences will depend on the concepts available to that person’ (Tanesini, 1999:149). Whilst this has not been deemed to constitute grounds for it to necessarily be dispensed with altogether, to consider experience as *foundational* to the production of ‘knowledge’ concerning transsexuals, as implied in the ‘suggested rules’, is problematic epistemologically, for as Joan Scott (1992) argues in the context of historical research on difference:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the

historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history are left aside. (p.25)

Scott's argument has particular resonance in the context of this thesis since, as discussed in Chapter One, a central issue confronting scholars concerning transsexual experience and voice is the positioning of transsexuals in relation to medical discourses and practices. Through the *official* medical recognition of transsexuality as a 'condition', characterised as a 'Gender Identity Disorder' produced through extreme 'Gender Dysphoria' (DSM IV), transsexuals are constructed by and positioned through medicine to be individuals who, in their 'cross-sex' identifications, suffer from a psychologically derived 'illness' (Nelson, 1998). This designation together with the processes of clinical evaluation and diagnosis, which individuals who seek sex-reassignment are required to engage with in order gain access to hormone treatment and surgeries, places transsexuals in a 'colonial' position vis-à-vis the medical profession (Stone, 1991). Thus, in order to *become* 'transsexual' an individual must be clinically *authorised to be* transsexual, which necessitates their telling a 'correct' symptomatic story of the self (Prosser, 1998).⁶ As most scholars in the field have pointed out, this positioning creates difficulties for the telling, to which I would add the *hearing*, of 'authentic' accounts

⁶ The relationship of transsexuals to medical discourses and practices is ongoing for transsexual individuals. Whilst clinical evaluation and diagnosis may be relatively short processes, surgeries can take many years to complete and hormone treatments and health checks are required throughout a lifetime (Devor, 1997). Transsexual stories of the self are thus continually negotiated through this context as well as in others.

of transsexual experience, as through the medical construction of transsexuality as a 'condition' and individuals' investments in gaining access to treatment, what can be told is already determined by what clinicians expect to hear (Shapiro, 1991; Hausman, 1995; Billings & Urban, 1996; Raymond, 1994; Stone, 1991).⁷ On what basis, then, *can* centrality be afforded to the experiences and voices of transsexuals?

Given that my goal in this study was to foreground the voices of female to male transsexuals, but avoid recourse to essentialist views of transsexuality existing behind the discourses through which they have already been written (Prosser, 1998) or overplay the agential and transgressive power of speech (Stone, 1991; Stryker, 1994), this question constituted my central methodological problem. The search for an appropriate way through this dilemma was, surprisingly, resolved through research on the literature produced within the sociology of health and illness. Whilst not wanting to support the view that transsexuality is an 'illness', it is nonetheless the case that transsexuals, in their diagnosis, 'treatment' and on-going health monitoring throughout a lifetime (Devor, 1997) are located in specific relationships to medical practices. It seemed appropriate therefore to review the ways in which the voices and experiences of others similarly located were dealt with by scholars.

Experience, Power and Voice in the Medical Encounter

Although it is not within the scope of this study to enter into an extended discussion

⁷ As discussed in Chapter One, this issue has also been recognised by clinicians to be a 'problem' in attaining accurate 'diagnosis'.

of the sociological debates which centre upon lay and professional understandings of 'illness' and those concerning the relative statuses of, and relationships between, 'expert' and lay perspectives in the diagnosis, treatment and/or management of given 'conditions', in light of the understanding of the significance attributed to medical experts in the context of transsexuality by the scholars discussed in Chapter One they must, nonetheless, be addressed.

The attribution of overwhelming power and authority to clinicians, whether they deal with physical or psychiatric 'illness', to determine the self-understanding, self-presentation and self-conduct of individuals in the context of particular clinical constructions of their 'illness' is highly contended. This contention, moreover, is not confined to the academic domain, with the power and status of the 'experts' and their knowledges being challenged more and more readily through, for example, the legal system and within the media (see Williams and Calnan, 1996). In the contemporary world, as was highlighted in the Introduction and in Chapter One in relation to sources of information which emergent transsexuals may draw upon, actual and potential 'patients' have a wide variety of sources of information (rationed by wealth, language and educational opportunities) which they can draw upon as they individually seek to understand and negotiate their 'condition' (see Bury, 2001). In the context of the diagnosis of transsexuality, it is this lay knowledge which, *in itself*, has been seen to constitute a problem for diagnosing clinicians and which, *of itself*, suggests that individuals seeking diagnosis may not be wholly subject to clinical authority.

What, then, have scholars suggested to be the relationships between medical knowledge and authority and the individual 'patient'? Lupton (1994) offers an overview of competing perspectives on this issue, identifying functionalism, political economy, social constructionism and feminism as broadly representing the divergent emphases. Functionalists, she suggests, view medicine 'as a means of alleviating deviance' (p.130) and as working towards the restoration of individuals from sickness to health, in the context of a normative social order which requires their conformity. It is this view of medicine, where power and authority are held by experts and individuals are recuperated, through their intervention, into normativity which, I would suggest, characterises Hausman's (1995) understanding of the social role of medicine and its capacity to both construct and contain transsexuality. Political economists, working through a model of medicine as constructed through and serving the interests of capital, characterise the doctor-patient relationship, particularly where class locations diverge, as being one of struggle, with the 'patient' being subject to the oppressive power of the clinician. This can be seen to be reflected in the view of Billings and Urban (1996) where transsexuality is seen as being constructed through commodification and the accrual of medical prestige and status.

Early post-structuralist perspectives, which can be seen to some extent to mirror functionalism (Lupton, 1994), building upon the work of Michel Foucault, emphasised the doctor and patient as being mutually implicated, through their co-terminous socially constructed expectations of what the medical encounter *should*

comprise, in the co-production of 'docile bodies' and thus social conformity through the internalisation of surveillance and medical discourses on behalf of the patient. Medical power here does not coerce the individual into conformity, nor act as an oppressive force, but rather is involved in the active production of a conforming subjectivity. Through such a perspective, transsexual 'patients', as they engage in the medical encounter would be both willing participants to that encounter and would necessarily reproduce the medical account of their condition, as it is this encounter which, in fact, would be seen to be bringing it into being (a view again expressed by Hausman).

Feminism presents divergent perspectives on medical power and authority, with the radical feminist view identifying medicine as being produced through the social relations of patriarchy, constructing women as pathological deviants from normative masculinity in the construction of specific 'mental illnesses' (for example, hysteria) and also through the 'medicalisation' of women's bodies. From such a perspective, a dominant medical concern is the construction and maintenance of normative heterosexuality and male social power and authority. It is this view of medicine which underpins Raymond's (1994) perspective on the construction of the transsexual subject. Alternative feminist views have presented a strong critique of such a perspective on the basis that the emphasis on (male) medical dominance suggested that 'women's 'authentic' understandings of their bodies [were] 'tainted' by medical discourses' (Lupton, 1994:131) and thus women voices were effectively silenced as they were not attributed a position to speak from. More contemporary

feminist views have foregrounded both the positive outcomes of medical knowledges and interventions for women (notably the control of fertility) and also the agency which women exercise in their use of and engagement with medical 'authority'. In such views, women's active engagement with medicine and its technologies cannot be 'simply be explained away as 'false consciousness'' (Williams, 2001:142).

Discussing recent developments in medical sociological views of the relationship between the doctor and the patient, Williams (2001) suggests that, in contemporary society, it has become 'increasingly built around a *reflexively organised dialectic of active trust and radical doubt*: one, which as the former term implies, has to be continually 'won' in the face of the latter' (p.145, emphasis in original). 'Patients' as construed here cannot be viewed as passive products of medical practices, but as individuals, armed with their own knowledges and (more or less) cognisant of medical protocols and discourses, who must *rely* upon ('trust') medical expertise, but, are, at the same time, sceptical of the exercise of medical power and cannot thus be seen to be confined to the understandings of clinicians in the construction of their 'story of self'.

Thus, in studies which take this latter perspective, the experiences and voices of patients are not marginalised or deemed insignificant in relation to the medical discourses and practices which define their illness. Indeed, in such studies, these voices and experiences are foregrounded as 'patients' are seen to 'speak back', both

from their positions as 'knowers' of their own 'illness' and as individuals who bring their broader knowledges into medical encounters and practices.

In *The Wounded Storyteller* Arthur Frank (1995) moves from a focus on specific voices, experiences and knowledges in the context of specific illnesses, to a focus upon changes in the ways people have experienced 'illness' over time. He traces these experiences as shifting through the overlapping stages of premodern, modern and postmodern experience.⁸ For Frank, the shift from premodern to modern experiences is usefully exemplified through Bourdieu's (1977) quotation of an elderly North American woman: 'In the old days ... folk didn't know what illness was. They went to bed and they died. It's only nowadays that we've learned words like liver, lung, stomach, and I don't know what!' (1995:5). The learning of such terms for parts of the body signified the shift of experiences of illness into the modern period where prior, popular 'knowledges' and experiences of illness together with community based forms of treatment were replaced by medical 'knowledges' and expertise, and professionally organised regimes of treatment. Frank argues that within this period:

The story of illness that trumps all others ... is the medical narrative. The story told by the physician becomes the one against which others are ultimately judged true or false, useful or not. ... [and where] a core social expectation of being sick is surrendering oneself to the care of a physician. I understand this obligation of seeking medical care as a *narrative surrender* and mark it as the

⁸ Frank utilises the terms premodern, modern and postmodern with respect to the 'thick descriptions' and 'the feel of the differences' of experiences of illness across time but without any 'strict' reference to their periodisation (p.4).

central moment in modernist illness experience. The ill person not only agrees to follow physical regimens that are prescribed; she [or he] also agrees, tacitly but with no less implication, to tell her [or his] story in medical terms. ... The physician becomes the spokesperson for the disease, and the ill person's stories come to depend heavily on repetition of what the physician has said. (pp.5-6, emphasis in original)

Whilst the basis for the scepticism of many scholars toward transsexual experience and voice mirrors that which Frank describes as the 'narrative surrender' produced and achieved through the development of modern medicine, the shift in experiences of illness he identifies as having occurred from modernist to postmodern times suggests that such scepticism on these grounds is no longer tenable or useful. Frank argues that modern medicine set in place the possibilities for new postmodern experiences and stories of illness as patients and those close to them, gaining familiarity with medical terms and techniques and affected by the life changes which illness can often bring, increasingly came to 'recognize that more is involved in their experiences than the medical story can tell' (p.6). Whilst the woman quoted by Bourdieu (1997) (above) indicated that modern medicine had superseded her earlier experiences and had initially taken her voice away by replacing it with a language she did not understand, Frank (1995) describes postmodern experiences of illness which, increasingly involving the negotiation of 'post-illness worlds' *move beyond* medical 'symptoms' and 'knowledges', as characterised by 'people feeling a need for a voice they can recognize as their own' (p.7). However, in such an experience, he suggests '[m]odernist medicine hardly goes away: the postmodern

claim to one's own voice is halting, self doubting, and often inarticulate, but such claims have enough currency for illness to take on a different feel' (p.7).

Postmodern experiences of illness which take on 'a different feel' to the story of the illness told by medicine particularly arise for those individuals who constitute what Frank terms 'the remission society':

Members of the remission society include those who had almost any cancer, those living in cardiac recovery programs, diabetics, those whose allergies and environmental sensitivities require dietary and other self monitoring, those with prostheses and mechanical body regulators, the chronically ill, the disabled, those "recovering" from abuses and addictions, and for all these people, the families that share the worries and daily triumph of staying well. (p.8)

This society, emerging through the achievements in modern medicine, comprises individuals who 'live in the wake of illness'. Rather than being either well *or* sick, '[i]n the remission society the foreground and background of sickness and health constantly shade into each other' (p.9) For Frank, an inherent problem of the remission society is that 'modernist medicine lacked a story appropriate to the experience it was setting in place' (pp.9-10), thus, being neither well nor ill has generated a new position to speak from. In respect of transsexual individuals who are located within a position of dependence upon psychiatry for diagnosis and the prescription of hormones throughout a lifetime, upon surgeons for operations which may take years to complete (dependent upon the financial resources of the individual) and upon other clinicians for ongoing medical checks (for example, for

liver function tests), their position can be seen as analogous to those who live in the 'remission society'. Thus modern medicine enables their (re)embodiment, but on this model can be seen to produce 'an experience' which the 'medical story' cannot wholly contain.

Extending the concept of the new positions produced through 'membership' of the 'remission society' Frank suggests that such individuals can be characterised as being 'more specifically, *postcolonial* in their construction of self':

Just as political and economic colonialism took over the geographic areas, modernist medicine claimed the body of its patient as its territory, at least for the duration of the treatment. ... For those whose diseases are cured, more or less quickly and permanently, medical colonization is a temporary indignity. This colonization becomes an issue in the remission society when some level of treatment extends over the rest of a person's life, whether as periodic check-ups or as memories. The least form of treatment, periodic check-ups, are not "just" monitoring. ... For the person being checked, these check-ups represent the background of illness shading back into the foreground. Even for those whose visa is stamped expeditiously, the reality of lacking permanent citizenship is reaffirmed. (p.10)

For Frank, those who become familiar with medical terms and techniques, 'question their place in medical narratives' (p.11). It is in this questioning that he suggests an analogy to people who have been politically colonized can be drawn, where the *processes* of the emergence of the postcolonial subject of this context can be utilised to map out the relationships of 'patients' to medicine. Following Gayatri Spivak (1990) 'who speaks of colonized people's efforts "to see how the master texts need

us in [their] construction ... without acknowledging that need” (cited in Frank, 1995:11), Frank suggests that the ‘post-colonial members of the remission society’ are similarly demanding ‘that medicine recognize its need for them’ (p.12). In this demand, such members are claiming their own voices as they refuse to be ‘reduced to “clinical material” in the construction of the medical text’ (p.12) For Frank:

Post-colonialism in its most generalized form is the demand to speak rather than being spoken for and to represent oneself rather than being represented or, in the worst cases, rather than being effaced entirely. But in Postmodern times pressures on clinical practice, including the cost of physicians’ time and even greater use of technologies, mean less time for patients to speak. People then speak elsewhere. The post-colonial impulse is acted out less in the clinic than in the stories that members of the remission society tell each other about their illnesses. (p.13)

Thus, in the broader context of changing experiences of illness, Frank marks out the role of medicine in producing new subject positions, individual agency, active engagement with medicine and, therefore, the relative autonomy of the experiences and voices of persons with illness from medical discourses and practices. In the light of his work, it is evident, therefore, not only that this ‘relative autonomy’ and ‘postcolonial subjectivity’ *can* be seen as applicable to the positioning of transsexuals in relation to medical discourses and practices, but that it necessarily *must* be. Indeed, it is surprising that the view of transsexuals as merely being the ‘engineered subjects’, ‘dupes’ of medicine or ‘duplicitous’ individuals (Hausman, 1995; Raymond, 1994; Billings and Urban, 1996, above) continues to persist.

Frank's description of 'postmodern' experiences of illness and the metaphor of the postcolonial positioning of members of the 'remission society' can be seen to lend support to the arguments of Stryker (1994) and Stone (1991) discussed in Chapter One who, pointing up the 'complexities and ambiguities of lived experience' (Stone, 1991:295) similarly evoke a postcolonial stance with regard to the positioning of transsexuals in relation to medical discourses and practices as they call for transsexuals to '*write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written' (p.299) by refusing to pass and rather, tell the stories of their experiences which the medical, official story of transsexuality obscures. Stone and Stryker each suggest akin to Frank that 'modernist medicine lacked a story appropriate to the experience it was setting in place' (Frank, 1995:9-10), pointing to the need for scholars dealing with transsexual identity to therefore now shift their focus – to move beyond locating transsexuals firmly within the *medical* master narrative of transsexuality, and to rather consider the ways in which this master narrative and the discourses of sex, gender and sexuality which underpin and inform it are negotiated by transsexuals as they seek to live out their identities in the broader contexts of their relationships and everyday lives.

Establishing the grounds upon which, in view of the positioning of transsexuals in relation to medical discourses and practices, the issues of transsexual experience and voice can be accorded centrality does not, however, wholly overcome epistemological problems of experience and voice which, as discussed earlier, cannot be understood as foundational to the production of knowledge and so

approached and dealt with in the context of interview based qualitative research as transparent representations. That experience is always mediated and produced through social and cultural discourses and discursive practices necessarily must be taken into account and, moreover, must also be considered in relation to how interview material might be analysed and presented.

Again, it was through work in the sociology of health and illness that I was drawn to a methodology which would be appropriate to this task. Dealing with individuals who experience a 'biographical disruption' (Bury, 1982) in their lives (an 'illness'), where 'the relations between body, mind and everyday life are threatened' (Bury, 2001:264), lead many scholars to focus on autobiographical accounts and oral narratives of illness. As Bury (2001) recently asserts:

The study of illness narratives constitutes a dual process in examining these dynamics. On the one hand the exploration of chronic illness narratives may throw light on the nature of disrupted experience, its meanings and actions taken to deal with it. On the other hand, the study of such narratives has the potential to reveal a wider set of important issues to do with the links between identity, experience and 'late-modern' cultures. ... [and] connections between personal and bio-medical narratives of chronic illness... (p.264-265)

Whilst again, I do not wish to construe transsexuality as an illness, parallels can be drawn between the biographical disruption produced through the experience of chronic illness and that produced through sex-reassignment. Even where individuals may assert the continuity of their gender throughout their lifetime (for, example, for

female to males, 'I have always been a man'), nonetheless the re-assignment process refigures the body and whilst they themselves may feel continuity of their gender identity, they are likely to be 'seen' by known others to have brought about a 'disruption' in their biographies. Moreover, in the light of the current literature concerning transsexuality, the exploration of illness narratives to examine the connections between 'personal and bio-medical narratives' appeared to provide an innovative and useful means through which to avoid the theoretical impasse within this field as discussed in Chapter One and to undertake the shift in focus indicated as necessary through Frank's (1995) work. Following these scholars, in the development of this thesis I therefore adopted a narrative research approach drawing specifically on the methodologies and methods of narrative analysis.

Narrative Research and Analysis

Utilised within a number of disciplines, notably literature, anthropology, sociology, including the sociology of medicine, education, and psychology, narrative research is interdisciplinary in character, and, within the social sciences, extends what has been termed the 'interpretive turn' (Denzin, 1989; Plummer, 1983) where, as Plummer (1995) notes:

The ceaseless nature of story telling in all its forms in all societies has come to be increasingly recognised. We are, it seems, *homo narrans*: humankind the narrators and story tellers. ... It has become recognised as one of the central roots we have into the continuing quest for understanding human meaning. Indeed, culture itself has been defined as 'an ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves'. (p.5, emphasis in original)

Narrative research and analysis is thus concerned with the first-person accounts and stories people tell about their lives, and can be applied to ‘a wide spectrum of narratives, from literary works, to diaries and written autobiographies, conversations or oral life stories obtained in interviews’ (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998:3). Taking personal narratives as the object of its analysis, it focuses upon human agency, subjectivity and identity and ‘how protagonists interpret things’ (Riessman, 1993:51). Based in the premise outlined above regarding the status of ‘experience’, as a methodological approach narrative analysis enables us to examine how ‘individuals construct past events and actions ... to claim identities and construct lives’ (Riessman, 1993:2). Whereas the first-person accounts drawn upon in traditional qualitative social research assume the talk of informants to be transparent – that is, as reflective of the ‘reality’ of their particular life-world - within narrative analytical approaches, as Riessman (1993) observes, ‘language is understood as deeply *constitutive* of reality, not simply a technical device for establishing meaning. Informants’ stories do not mirror a world “out there”. They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions and interpretive’ (Riessman, 1993:4-5, my emphasis).

Whilst it is possible to deal with identity through narrative from a realist perspective, ‘as a (better or worse) representation of internal and external reality’ (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998:8), which Prosser (1998) does on the basis that constructionist approaches ‘desubjectiviz[e] the subject’ (p.8), most scholars concerned with identity and working within a narrative analytical approach largely

adhere to perspectives of social and cultural construction but importantly, acknowledge the subject as one who *also* constructs. Rather than being a means through which an essential subjectivity can be *realised* (Prosser, 1998), narratives are viewed as *constitutive* of that subjectivity and thus as sites of human agency, where, as Rosenwald and Ochsberg (1992) write:

How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned. (p.1)

Within this process, however, individuals are not *wholly* free to construct her/his 'self' but rather, as embodied and socially located, construct 'their identities and self-narratives from building blocks available in their common culture, above and beyond their individual experience ... [and] within an interaction, according to a specific interpersonal context' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998:8-9).

Narrative Analysis in Action: Processes and Practices in the Research Context

Applying a narrative approach in the context of qualitative interview based social research thus necessitates that particular methodological consideration is given to how the interviews will be structured and conducted, how the interview material generated will be transcribed, analysed and presented and also significantly, the role of the interviewer/researcher throughout these processes (Mishler, 1986). Although

these concerns indeed apply to qualitative and ethnographic social research in general, as Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) point out, in such projects it is usual for 'the production of the personal account [to be] regarded as unproblematic in itself and as allowing us a more or less unobstructed view of the subject's life.' (p.4), where 'it is the events, not the stories informants create about them, that are intended to command our attention' (p.2). A narrative analytical approach, in contrast, is concerned precisely with *how* personal accounts are produced and focuses upon the 'how' as well as the 'what' of what is told, how an account is worked up between the interviewee and the interviewer, and how researchers can interpret the interviewees' interpretations and re-present these interpretations (Riessman, 1990, 1993; Atkinson & Coffey, 1996). In the remaining part of this chapter these issues will be addressed and discussed in light of the primary research conducted for this thesis, whereafter I will then move on to provide the reader with an outline of the analytical tools that are employed in relation to the interview material located in Chapters Three and Four.

Interviews

The primary research conducted for this thesis comprised in-depth face-to-face interviews with fourteen female to male transsexuals who, responding to an advertisement requesting research participants which I placed in a magazine

produced by and for female to males⁹, contacted me by telephone or email and after a brief discussion of the project volunteered themselves for interview. During this initial discussion, I advised the prospective participants of the nature and purpose of the research, answered any questions which they had and assured them that anonymity would be preserved throughout the research process, with all names being changed in the printed document. All of those who contacted me agreed to interview, and indeed, appeared keen to share their stories. As stated in the Introduction, the period in which the research was undertaken was an historical moment of proliferation of representations of transsexual 'lives', particularly female to males, which up until this point had been largely invisible. This could be argued to be bound up in the cultural shift towards the public telling of 'private' stories, particularly through television 'talk shows'.¹⁰ As Plummer (1995) suggests: 'the mass media has become a key story teller of our personal ... lives in ways that even thirty years ago would have been inconceivable' (p.9), providing potentials for a range of audience responses, from outrage to indifference, from guidance to 'a source where a person can literally find themselves in the text' (p.21). A key 'text', which itself generated both 'popular' and 'serious' television discussions, was 'The Decision', which provided a unique referent for female to males: the first 'serious' documentary style television production offering a sympathetic, rather than titillating or scandalous, representation of female to male transsexual lives. In this context, the

⁹ The advertisement was placed in 'Boy's Own', a magazine distributed to members of the FTM Network, UK.

¹⁰ We can list, for example, 'Kilroy', 'Central Weekend Live', 'Trisha', 'Jerry Springer', 'Oprah', 'Esther', 'Maury Povich'.

eagerness of those who contacted me as potential participants can be understood.

The interviewees ranged in age from twenty one to fifty two years and were variously positioned across the stages of sex-reassignment (pre, present and post transition) and across locations of social class. Of the interviewees, thirteen were white and born and raised in the UK and one was Asian, born and raised in Pakistan though now living in the UK. At the time of conducting the interviews all were living in various locations in England. Two interviews took place in my own home, eleven were conducted in the homes of the interviewees and one took place in a quiet area of a public park. In each case the interview took approximately two hours to complete and all were tape recorded and later fully transcribed.

In the light of my research focus upon the social and discursive processes through which female to male transsexuals construct their new identities and the ways in which their bodies interact with these processes within their social and personal relationships, together with the narrative methodology I adopted, the interviews were both designed and conducted to elicit personal narratives from the interviewees. This involved planning, prior to conducting the interviews, the form that the interviews would take and the style and techniques of interviewing that I would employ.

Within the social sciences research interviewing takes many forms, broadly conceptualised as 'structured', 'semi-structured' or 'unstructured' (Burgess, 1982; Mishler, 1986; Collins, 1998). Structured interviews can be characterised as

comprising a schedule of questions determined prior to the interview which are asked in both a fixed order and form across the range of interviews conducted; semi-structured interviews as more reflexive, where predetermined questions or defined topics can be discussed in any order and form and where the interviewer, responsive to the interviewee, may also extend these into other areas deemed significant to the research; and the unstructured interview as 'flexible but ... also controlled' (Burgess, 1982:107), where rather than being based upon predetermined questions the interviewer and interviewee engage in 'conversation' through which the interviewer guides the interviewee into relevant talk concerning the research question(s).

Although, as has been noted, even in the most highly structured interviews interviewees will often offer narratives of their experiences (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988), in order to gain rich and detailed personal narratives from the interviewees the interviews were designed and conducted in an unstructured form but based in and directed through two central questions: a) how the interviewees came to recognise themselves as being transsexual and b) how their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment had affected both themselves and their relationships with others in their lives particularly, if appropriate to their circumstances, their families, partners, children, friends and work colleagues. These two open-ended questions were posed to each interviewee, the first of which was organised to comprise the initial focus within the interviews with the intent of generating personal 'coming out' stories such as those characteristic of popular

transsexual autobiography, and the second as the focus for the latter half of the interviews, with the intention of drawing out narratives of their experiences and interpretations of how others known to them have apprehended and related to them since deciding to undergo sex-reassignment and/or having gone through their transitions.¹¹

Whilst through these questions the interviewees were centred in the interview and positioned to take the lead in the telling of their stories, they did so in relation to myself as the interviewer. In the interview context I took up the position of an active listener where, through my enquiries, calls for clarification and indeed reactions to their stories, my role was not one of detachment but empathetic engagement. Although in largely mirroring the interactional dynamics of ordinary conversation, this ‘conversational technique’ was relatively easy to utilise, it was, however, consciously and deliberately employed. As Collins (1998)¹² argues, the advantages of such practice is twofold: it facilitates the production of narratives and significantly, also counteracts the power imbalance between the interviewer and interviewee:

Engagement implies a willingness on the part of the interviewer to understand the interviewees response to a question or prompt in the wider context of the interview(s) as a whole. The interviewee might develop a narrative thread almost regardless of the disparate questions put to them. Such ‘meta-narratives’ may or may not

¹¹ The material generated through the interviewees responses to these two questions is located respectively in Chapters Three and Four.

¹² Peter Collins (1998) ‘Negotiating Selves: Reflections on ‘Unstructured’ Interviewing’ in *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 3, no. 3, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/3/2.html>

relate to the explicit subject under review and provides the interviewee with a ready means of countering and undermining the unequal relations of power which are said to typify all interviews. (para:1.6)

To this, a third advantage can be added. Through my active engagement during the interviews the meaning of talk was *explicitly* negotiated and temporarily established between myself and the interviewees. Although this process is indeed a generic feature of all interviews, sometimes seen as an obstacle to ‘objectivity’ and as a technical ‘problem’ which interviewers can seek to overcome through techniques of detachment, in the context of narrative research it constitutes one of the foci for analysis. As Mishler (1986) argues, narratives produced within interviews are always *jointly constructed* between the interviewee and the interviewer, where: ‘the interviewer’s presence and form of involvement – how she or he listens, attends, encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates topics, and terminates responses – is integral to a respondent’s account’ (p.82).

Through the practice of my active engagement with the interviewees throughout the interviews, the joint construction of the narratives produced through the dynamic interaction which took place could thus be more explicitly identified at the level of transcription and analysis, creating the potential for the interviewees’ social, interactive processes of identity construction as it occurred in the interview context to be revealed.

Narrative: Transcriptions, Definitions and Modes of Analysis and Presentation

After conducting the interviews I transcribed all of the recordings verbatim. As Lapadat (2000) notes, such a practice is not, however, a simple and straightforward neutral process: '[t]he researcher makes transcription decisions depending on purpose, theoretical stance, and analytic intent. In turn, these transcription decisions influence the analysis, interpretations, and implications for theory and practice' (p.206). Recently, the recognition of the differences between oral and written styles of speech where, against the latter, oral styles can appear incoherent and perhaps confused and 'messy' when transcribed, has led some qualitative researchers to 'tidy up' the recorded oral speech during the transcription process (see, for example, Standing, 1998). This practice has been advocated on two grounds: that the juxtaposition of the 'messy' speech of the interviewees against the considered, 'non-messy' academically written text can reinforce an unequal power relation between the researcher and the interviewee (Standing, 1998); and that the textual production of orally derived 'messy' speech can 'involve an unethical stigmatization of specific persons or groups of people' (Kvale, 1996:173).

Although these arguments are laudable and indeed valid, it is nonetheless the case that such a practice may not be suitable for all social research. As Lapadat (2000) argues: '[r]esearchers' transcription systems need to reflect their data and their purposes' (p.205). In view of the narrative methodological framework I adopted, which attends to the 'how' as well as the 'what' of talk, and in order to maximise the

potential to reveal the interactive processes which were at work during the interviews, I therefore chose not to 'tidy up' the 'messiness' of the speech but rather include in the transcription all the forms this can take. Thus the 'hmm's, erm's, err's, yeah's, you know's and 'huhh's' (sighs)', all of which permeate general conversational style talk were transcribed in preparation for the movement into the stage of focused close analysis.

Organising and preparing for the analysis of the interviews and the way in which the analysis of the personal narratives would be presented in the thesis constituted the most challenging aspect of this research project. This was due to three overlapping factors. Firstly, within narrative analytic approaches there is no agreed upon definition of what constitutes a 'narrative' (Riessman, 1993). Secondly, as an interdisciplinary methodology there is no singular method of narrative analysis that can simply be 'applied' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998) and thirdly, narrative analytic approaches employed within interview based social research have characteristically focused upon and presented for readers the referential and representational functions of narrative where little attention has been paid to its performative and interactional functions (Wortham, 2001; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). This third factor posed particular problems with respect to one of the issues I wanted to address in the research, namely, the social and discursive processes through which the interviewees constructed their identities where, in view of the literature (discussed in Chapter One), my goal was to move beyond textual, visual and cultural representation and (re)introduce a sociological perspective to the

present discussions of transsexuality. My negotiation of the competing definitions of 'narrative' together with the method(s) of narrative analysis I chose to adopt in this thesis, discussed below, were profoundly influenced by this goal.

Polkinghorne (1988) draws attention to the contended nature of the term 'narrative', which he suggests can be used to designate a variety of forms: writing in essay form (as in a written report); writing in complete sentences (as a request for a narrative response to a questionnaire) and a written or told 'story', either as a work of fiction or as in telling the story of an occurrence in one's life, or the story of one's life (pp.13-14). In relation to the personal narratives I gained from the interviewees, I have chosen to use the term 'narrative' in a generalist sense to refer to 'first person accounts of experience' (Riessman, 1993:17) and following Coffey and Atkinson (1996) 'restrict the [technical] use of "story" to those genres that recount protagonists, events, complications and consequences' (p.54). This definition of 'story' (not differentiated from 'narrative' by many narrative analysts) has certain resonances with the traditional narrative model developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) who understand narratives as sequentially ordered recountings of events from time past, where the teller produces a chronologically faithful account which has a beginning, a middle and an end and where the narrative is always structured in relation to the question 'and then what happened'. Applying methods of linguistic analysis, Labov and Waletzky break a story into the following six elements or sequences, each of which has a specific function:

an abstract: the summary of the substance of the narrative
orientation: time, place, situation, participants
complicating action: the sequence of events
evaluation: significance and meaning of the action and attitude of the narrator
resolution: what finally happened
coda: where the narrator returns the perspective to the present

A typical short (and fictitious) example of how this model appears when applied is thus:

Abstract

01 taking my driving test was a very scary experience

Orientation

02 I arrived at the Test Centre and met the examiner

Complicating Action

03 and he ushered me into the car without saying a word...

04 so I just did as he asked

05 and I was driving around and then just out of the blue I hit a lampost!

Evaluation

06 at the time I was so upset

07 but actually it was the examiner's fault

08 in being so silent he had made me nervous and lose my confidence...

Resolution

09 anyway, he silently drove us back to the Test Centre and I didn't pass my test

Coda

10 so now I'm worried about going through with another test in case it happens
again

For Labov and Waletzky, whilst this model provides a technical form in which to locate and present the progressive elements of a story, of particular significance to analysis is the evaluation sequence as this enables the listener/analyst to identify the point being made through the story. In the above fictional story, for example, the evaluation sequence shows how the teller guided the listener to interpret the incident of the car accident: that whilst she was driving it was in fact the examiner who was to blame and that she should be absolved from responsibility for the accident.

Other scholars, however, have suggested that all narratives do not necessarily follow this structure. Some have argued that they can be ordered through 'consequential sequencing' where one event may cause another but may not link together chronologically (Young, 1987), or that narratives may be ordered by theme and thus 'episodic' in sequence (Riessman, 1993). In addition to these alternative sequencing processes, Riessman (1990, 1993) suggests that narratives gained through interviews are not always organised through these traditional linguistic forms but often constructed through genres which, through familiarity with the conventions of kinds of 'stories', will engender particular expectations and responses in the listener. Examples of such genres are 'habitual narratives' which depict the general routine of events over time rather than a specific past time event and where there is no peak in the action being conveyed, 'hypothetical narratives' which describe events that did not actually happen, and 'topic centred narratives' which consist of 'snapshots of past events which are linked thematically' (1993:18). As different genres have different effects on the listener, the choice of genre (the structure of the narrative as

well as what is told) is, she suggests, critical to the teller's engagement of the listener and their response. It is through the structure that we are drawn into the perspective of the narrator (Riessman, 1990: 78).

As Riessman suggests, the analysis of narrative thus necessitates that attention is paid to both the *form* as well as the *content* (the referent) of the narratives produced as it is through the form that tellers engage with what she terms 'the teller's problem': how to convince a listener who was not there to witness the events being recounted that what happened did indeed occur in the way being described, and to 'convince the listener of the justification for the teller's perspective and actions' (1990:230). However, as is shown in the above, the form which is primarily taken into account by narrative analysts is restricted to the way in which the talk of the teller draws upon and is located within narrative structure, sequencing and genre, all of which, as I noted earlier, directs analytical focus upon the representational functions of narrative. Whilst Riessman (1990) states the necessity of '[g]oing beyond a formalist analysis of the text [and that] a narrative cannot be fully interpreted without investigating the condition in society of the person who produces the text'¹³ (p.94), the issue of *how* to systematically 'go beyond' is neither adequately examined or incorporated into narrative analytic method. The issue, as it were, is deemed to be dealt with by narrative analysts, outside of the methodological text.

¹³ Whilst here Riessman (1990) appears to suggest that narratives are solely produced by the teller, elsewhere in her work she explicitly refers to narratives as joint constructions. See, for example, pages 117-8 and Riessman (1993).

As stated earlier, this posed significant problems for one aspect of this research in terms of my goal to develop a sociologically informed analysis of how the interviewees socially and discursively constructed their identities: narrative analysis enabled my focus upon the content and narrative form of their talk but did not have the analytical methodological tools to enable me to adequately deal with the social interaction within the interviews *and* the social positioning ‘in society of the person who produces the text’. This problem has only most recently begun to emerge within the discussions between narrative analysts. In the latest edition of *Narrative Inquiry*, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) address the issue of the joint production of narratives within interview contexts precisely with this problem in mind:

... experientially based “lived stories” – are always directed towards an audience, whose role, needs, and moral stance must be observed in the transformation process into speech. This makes the person to whom the story is told a co-author of the narrative product, whether she may actively intervene or not. The listener introduces and incorporates the social aspect of personal identity construction, as its validity for the individual is not independent of its social acceptability and ratification. Observing the interactive negotiation of the story’s meaning and social purpose in the act of narrating offers another perspective on the understanding of “doing identity”. (p.202)

Analytical Method and Presentation: Chapter Three

Interestingly, overcoming the dilemma of analytical ‘method’ in relation to the analysis of the interviewees’ identity construction mirrored the process of my proposed redress concerning the existing literature on transsexuality (see Chapters One and Four): I returned to Goffman (1959, 1974, 1981). Alongside his work on

Stigma (1963) upon which I was able to draw in order to take into account the social positioning between myself and the interviewees in relation to their specific interaction with me in the interviews,¹⁴ his earlier work in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and later Conversational Analytic work in *Frame Analysis* (1974) and *Forms of Talk* (1981) provided the conceptual tools from which I developed the method for the analysis of the personal 'coming out' narratives.

Following Riessman's (1990, 1993) 'narrative genres', in Chapter Three I utilise the analytical tools derived from Goffman's work as 'interactional genres', which enabling the identification of how an interviewee's particular 'self' or combination of 'selves' is worked up and constructed through the narrative being told can illuminate the interactional as well as narrative process of what we might call 'identity work'. These include 'impression management', where largely through talk individuals project impressions of themselves to others, usually favourable ones, in which they guide the listener to apprehend them as a particular kind of 'self' or combination of 'selves' throughout the narrative content and the type of narrative forms employed; and 'footing' moves, where during interaction individuals continually shift speaking positions within their talk. 'Footing' moves, as defined by Goffman, take many (and multi-layered) forms. For example, individuals can present themselves as currently being responsible for their words, statements and

¹⁴ Goffman's work on *Stigma*, discussed in Chapter One, is also utilised in relation to the content of the interviewees' personal narratives with regard to the second research focus: the ways in which the interviewees' identities were received within their social and personal relationships with others and the effects of their bodies upon others' perceptions of them (located in Chapter Four). The method of analysis employed in respect of this focus is discussed below.

interpretations or they may present these as being based in the experience and/or point view of others or themselves as they once were in the past – thus distancing themselves from them. First level speaking positions which can be occupied by speakers are:

The *Animator*: the person who is currently animating the production of the words being spoken (this may not be the actual ‘self’ of the individual, for example, she or he might be repeating other words such as a passage from a novel).

The *Author*: the ‘I’ in the here and now, the individual who has selected the words being spoken and who is the creator of the speaking position being occupied.

These speaking positions can also be taken up by speakers on a secondary level, that is, ‘embedded’ in talk which moves across different levels of past time. Goffman illustrates this through the following:

To the best of my recollection,

1. I think that
2. I said
3. I once lived that sort of life

Goffman (1981:149)

In this example, (1) is a speaking position of current 'author' (as above), (2) is an embedded 'animator', 'an earlier incarnation of the present speaker', and (3) is a 'doubly embedded figure', namely, a still earlier incarnation of the one in (2) (p.150). All the speaking positions outlined may be taken up singularly or sometimes together and comprise what Goffman terms the 'production format' of talk. This interactional genre of 'footing' enables an analytical complication of the notion of speaker in ways that are particularly useful in applying a narrative analytic approach. Thus, through this genre it is inadequate to employ the notion of speaker in singular terms, as evident through the multiple speaking positions that can be occupied 'it is not true to say that we always speak our own words and ourselves take the position to which these words attest' (Goffman, 1981:146).

Once gaining these analytical tools, the process of analysis necessitated that the initial transcriptions be reordered both to facilitate the analysis itself and importantly, to make the analytic process transparent through the presentation of the interview material in the thesis. This involved separating out the personal 'coming out' narratives from the other material to be used in Chapter Four (which was made easier due to the structure of the interviews in which this was the first focus of 'conversation') and, as do some narrative analysts, break down the flow of the transcribed talk into numbered clauses and, where 'stories' were identified, organise them within the form outlined by Labov and Waletzky (see above). Whilst this analytical and presentational style is not uniformly adopted within studies dealing with narrative (see, for example, Ginsberg, 1989), I made the decision to do so on

two bases: firstly, because in so doing the interactional and narrative strategies together with the meaning generated throughout the talk becomes more apparent for analysis, and secondly, the interpretations I ascribe to the talk can become more visible and thus open to potential contestation by the reader. This I considered to be particularly important as it has the advantage of countering the interviewer/interviewee imbalance of power, enabling the (multiple) voices of each of the interviewees to be heard and also facilitates the production of potential 'multiple readings' of the narratives. As Mishler (1992) points out: '[e]ach life is more than one story, and each story has many versions. No particular "telling" can be captured fully in any single analysis, however detailed and complex' (p.34).

Most narrative analysts note that narrative analysis is a painstaking and lengthy process although most do not discuss the limitations upon dealing with narrative in terms of space. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) state:

In spite of the fact that most narrative studies are conducted with smaller groups of individuals than the sample size employed in traditional research, the quantity of data gathered in life stories is large. ... There are often hundreds of pages of exact transcription of an interview. Even when researchers limit the breadth of their questions, or the time of the interviews, or use written narratives, the quantity of material in such studies is always surprising. Moreover, no two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of narratives is manifested in extremely rich data. (p.9)

In beginning the analysis of the transcripts, it soon became apparent that it would not be possible to present a narrative analysis of all the interviewees' personal 'coming

out' stories. As a result three narratives have been chosen for inclusion in the chapter, the choice of which was done on the basis of being able to present diversity of age, personal circumstances, stage of transition, and ethnicity. To facilitate both the reading of the narratives and their analysis the relevant narrative and interactional genres together with the transcription conventions I have adopted are listed in a separate glossary (see Appendix B).

Analytical Method and Presentation: Chapter Four

Whilst the analysis for Chapter Three required a complex method of analysis for both the content and form of the narratives and interactional talk, for the analysis in Chapter Four the requirements of method were somewhat different. In the interviewees' narratives concerning their relationships with known others in their lives, my primary interest was to investigate, through their accounts, the ways in which their bodies (once female, now in or post-transition) had impacted upon their negotiations of identity in these contexts. For this purpose I have applied concepts drawn from Goffman's (1963) work on social 'stigma' (discussed in Chapter One). Goffman developed this work through observational methods, although I have applied his notions of social positioning to my analysis of the interviewees' narratives. This focus thus necessitated paying particular attention to the content of the interviewees' talk within their narratives rather than the strategies of interaction, although this can not simply be separated (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998).

As stated above, conducting narrative research leads to vast amounts of transcribed material for analysis. With the aim of utilising the accounts of all the interviewees for this part of the study, this presented a significant problem both for analysis and particularly for its presentation in the thesis. To undertake the close analysis adopted in Chapter Three quite simply would have been impossible. An alternative 'thematic' ordering of the interview data as each interviewee spoke of particular relationships was thus undertaken. Within this thematic ordering, however, the segments of talk selected for analysis were considered in relation to the interviewees' narratives as a whole where, in keeping with the analytic method adopted for Chapter Three, the segments of talk were not subject to analysis in abstraction from their context. That is, earlier or later talk by the interviewees concerning the same person or relationship was incorporated into the analysis. Thus the mode of narrative analysis has been systematically tailored to be appropriate to its purpose but without sacrificing a detailed and rigorous approach to the material.

In light of the above, the mode of presentation of the segments of talk was also modified. In order to more clearly juxtapose the interviewees' voices and to focus attention upon content rather than form, I have chosen to present the talk in the style of quoted excerpts, where in so doing, the space for the individuality of the interviewees has been maintained but without fracturing the focus of the chapter into discreet interviewee-based elements which would have detracted from the wholeness of the particular discussion I have undertaken in this Chapter.

The following chapter begins with a critical discussion of scholars' work on the written autobiographies of transsexuals in order to further contextualise the analysis which follows. Briefly, such autobiographies have been seen to mirror medical discourses and have been suggested to regulate the self-representation and subjectivities of transsexuals. Following this discussion, the narrative analysis method as discussed above is applied to the 'coming out' stories of Eric, Mark and Ben, where their negotiations of medical discourses and practices and transsexual autobiographies are addressed in relation to the ways in which they sought to construct their identities and establish their 'authenticity' in the interview context.

Chapter Three

The Struggle for 'Authenticity': Narrative Strategies and Impression Management in Constructing Transsexual Selfhood

Introduction

The struggle for 'authenticity' in the presentation of personal identity can be variously interpreted contingent upon one's view of identity's 'source'. If one posits a personal identity which is the product of 'inward generation', then authenticity will be produced through faithfully representing that inner selfhood to others (expressing the 'real you'). If, rather, personal identity is viewed as 'dialogic', that is, produced in specific contexts in relation to specific others, then 'authenticity' is a temporary establishment of an agreement of that identity which can be recognised and 'honoured' at that time (Goffman, 1959; Taylor, 1991). In the discussion of transsexual autobiography which follows, each of the authors considered can be seen to adopt a particular perspective on 'authenticity', both in relation to personal identity and personal experience. Whilst this is not interrogated in each case, their perspectives in relation to 'authenticity' are clearly visible through the stance they take in relation to transsexual autobiographical accounts. From my own perspective, following Taylor (1991) and Goffman (1959, 1963), I understand 'authenticity' to be a dialogic production and it is this understanding which I take forward into the narrative analysis later in this chapter.

Reading Autobiography

Chapters One and Two have suggested that, due to the positioning of transsexuals vis-à-vis the medical profession, scholars have been centrally concerned with the (im)possibility of the telling and hearing of 'authentic' transsexual accounts. In the recognition that transsexuals are often well versed in the medical literature/criteria on transsexualism, traditionally most scholars have tended to distrust and dismiss transsexuals' accounts on the grounds that in their investments in gaining what they want from medical professionals they simply reproduce the 'symptomatic' stories of the self that clinicians expect to hear (Shapiro, 1991)¹. Recently, however, with an increasing proliferation of non-medical literature about and media representations of transsexuality, extending the collection by transsexuals of what Sandy Stone (1991) terms the 'Obligatory Transsexual File'², many transsexual and non-transsexual scholars have begun to focus their attention upon representations of transsexuals and, in particular, their self-representations within autobiography (Stone, 1991; Hausman, 1995; Prosser, 1998).

Sandy Stone (1991), in her discussion of male to female transsexual autobiography, argues that the authors tend to produce accounts that are complicit with normative discourses of binary and oppositional gender and that,

¹ As outlined in Chapter 1 a distrust of transsexual accounts on these grounds has also been voiced by clinicians of transsexualism, see, for example, Tully, 1992.

² Sandy Stone (1991) writes that the 'Obligatory Transsexual File' 'usually contains newspaper articles and bits of forbidden diary entries about "inappropriate" gender behaviour. Transsexuals also collect autobiographical literature.' (p.285). With the increasing proliferation of information about and representations of transsexuality, it can, of course, now be extended to include magazine and journal articles, books (fiction and scholarly as well as autobiographical), photographs, videos, and last but by no means least, Internet resources.

by presenting themselves as having moved 'from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women' where '[t]here is no territory in between' (p.286), they both deny and fail to reveal the 'mixture' (p.287) of gender which cross-sexed identification and sex-reassignment necessarily bestow on the subjectivities and bodies of transsexuals. For Stone, transsexual autobiography thus largely represses and misrepresents 'authentic' transsexual subjectivity, which she claims will only be gained once transsexuals refuse to pass and begin 'to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible' (p.295).

Bernice Hausman (1995), taking issue with Stone's (1991) designation of transsexual autobiography as 'part of the repressive structure of "official" transsexual experience' (1995:146), asserts that as transsexual autobiographies serve to enable many individuals to identify themselves as transsexual and thus 'actively construct themselves as transsexuals' (p.146), they do not constitute a repression of 'authentic' or 'true' transsexual subjectivity but rather, together with medical discourses, constitute the very means through which the possibility for transsexual subjectivity is itself produced. Hausman's idea of the possibility for transsexual subjectivity that she sees the autobiographies as facilitating is, however, based in an imitative model of reproduction. She argues, extending the common critique of transsexual accounts, that:

...while transsexual autobiographies may not be representative of the experiences of many (or even most) transsexual subjects, they are indicative of the establishment of an official discourse (or set of discourses) regulating transsexual self-representation and therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity. The

autobiographical texts help institute a certain discursive hegemony within a community whose members have a substantial investment in mimicking the enunciative modality of those who have been successful in achieving sex-transformation. (Hausman, 1995:142-3)

Ostensibly against Stone's argument that there are more 'authentic' and 'true' transsexual experiences to be revealed by transsexuals, Hausman, critical of the way in which the authors invariably present themselves as having always known themselves to really be the other sex (and thus transsexual) all along, concludes that she finds neither 'the possibility of an "authentic" account of the transsexual, nor a particularly subversive story about sexuality' in the autobiographical narratives (p.147). But these conclusions to her analysis in fact concur with Stone's, who proposes that transsexual autobiographical accounts deny and do not reveal 'authentic' transsexual experience, calling not for a rereading of existing autobiographical texts, but for a *re-writing* of such texts through the disclosure by all transsexuals of their more 'authentic' experiences *as transsexuals*.

In view of these conclusions, Jay Prosser (1998) argues that both Stone and Hausman have failed to grasp the 'temporal dynamics intrinsic to narrative form' which necessarily override what they both identify as a 'discontinuity "between the story of surgical sex change and the story of already being the other sex" – between becoming and being' (Prosser, 1998:119 & 118). He points out that the presentation of self-continuity in the face of self-discontinuity in the autobiographical narratives is an effect of the authors 'retrospective construction' of the past which, far from being unique to transsexual autobiographers, is a generic feature of *all* autobiography:

... the life in writing is always a retrospective reconstruction. Autobiography returns in order to re-present and in so doing, re-vise (rewrite and see again) the past. The subject's becoming through returning, the life's progression through revision of the past, is autobiography's structural sine qua non. ... Looking back as the conventional autobiographical omniscient narrator of his or her life, as the subject who knows the end of the story, the transsexual writes the life as directed. (p.117)

Opposing Hausman's assertion that the transsexual autobiographies function as texts to be 'mimicked' by their transsexual readers, Prosser argues that they involve a 'dialogue of interpretation' between the authors and readers and that the meanings of transsexual narratives are produced 'in a textual exchange' (p.105).³ For Prosser, transsexual autobiographies are thus products through which the narratives of transsexuality are continuously 'recycled' rather than simply reproduced. Although outlining the reflexivity involved in the production and consumption of transsexual autobiographical narratives Prosser asserts, however, that the traditional trope of having been born with the 'wrong body' is, nonetheless, a fundamentally accurate representation of 'authentic' transsexual experience. In contrast to Stone (1991), who argues that the phrase 'should be examined with deepest suspicion' (p.297), Prosser argues that:

A transsexual leitmotif appearing across transsexual narratives, the proliferation of the wrong body figure is not solely attributable to its discursive power. ... transsexuals continue to deploy the image of wrong embodiment because being trapped in the wrong body is simply what transsexuality feels like. (p. 69)

Hausman (1995), Stone (1991) and Prosser (1998) each suggest that what is of

³ As both Prosser (1998) and Hausman (1995) note, it is common for the authors of transsexual autobiographies to refer to the transsexual autobiographies they themselves have read and also other representations of transsexuals such as newspaper or magazine articles, these, of course constituting a part of what Stone (1991) terms the 'Obligatory Transsexual File'. See footnote 2 above.

significance in relation to transsexual autobiography is therefore not just the texts themselves, but that which lays outside of the texts. For Stone this is the 'authentic' experience of transsexuals which the autobiographies fail to reveal and represent, whereas for Hausman this concerns the transsexual readers of the autobiographies, those whose subjectivities she claims are enabled but regulated by the texts and who are compelled to mimic their discourses in order to gain access to the technologies of sex-reassignment. For Prosser, of particular significance is the relationship between autobiographical authors and their readers, where what occurs through transsexual autobiography is the 'recycling of the transsexual narrative from life to text to life ... both in the autobiographies and in the oral recounting' (p.125). Neither Prosser, Hausman or Stone, however, undertake any empirical enquiry into these areas. Apart from referring to the omission of the male to female transsexual ritual of masturbation immediately prior to genital surgery - 'wringing the turkey's neck' (Stone, 1991:289) - from their autobiographical accounts, Stone does not cite any other instances of more 'authentic', non-represented transsexual experiences. Hausman similarly does not provide any substantive evidence to support her claims of the effects transsexual autobiographies have on the subjectivities of transsexual readers, and Prosser also does not provide evidence that *all* transsexuals feel like they have been 'trapped in the wrong body'.

Through their respective omissions, each highlights the need for a considered enquiry into the following questions: how do transsexuals engage with the kinds of self narratives presented in transsexual autobiography? Do they affirm or resist such representations in their own accounts? And if either or perhaps both

are so, to what extent and in what ways? How *do* transsexual subjects affirm their transsexuality and individual subjectivity in an interactional context: that is, beyond the conditions of written autobiography where what matters is not simply how the self is presented but how it is apprehended and received by others? This chapter takes up these questions, together with those raised earlier in relation to their relationships to medical discourses and practices, firstly through a critique of the function of written and published autobiography in the ongoing construction of 'transsexual' narratives and, secondly, through an analysis of the personal narratives of three interviewees, addressing the ways in which these individuals produced accounts of themselves as 'authentic' transsexuals *and* 'authentic' individuals.

Texts, Talk and the 'Teller's Problem' ⁴

As the pasts recounting is compelled by the knowledge that the future of one's sex is to be determined by what one has to say for one's self, there has probably never been so much at stake in oral autobiography. (Prosser, 1998:108)

As stated in Chapter Two, all the interviews conducted with the interviewees were unstructured in order to facilitate the production of personal narratives and focused upon the questions of how they came to recognise themselves as being transsexual and how their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment had impacted upon both themselves and their relationships with others. Significantly, although all recounted having had a sense of there being a disjuncture between their bodily sex and their sense of a masculine self, none constructed their narrative through the trope of 'being trapped in the wrong body' (Prosser, 1998:69). Rather,

⁴ Riessman, C. K. (1990) *Divorce Talk*

throughout their narratives this was shown to be only one of a multiplicity of stories that can be told which, together with the related and similar concept of the mind being 'right' but the body being 'wrong' (Devor, 1997), was used strategically in specific contexts as a means of conveying a shorthand and popularly recognised explanation of the 'transsexual' self to unknowledgeable others in order to facilitate gaining their acceptance⁵.

All of the interviewees demonstrated throughout the construction of their narratives that they were active rather than passive readers/consumers of transsexual autobiography and other media representations of transsexuals. Matthew, for example, who was waiting to begin sex-reassignment, recounted that whilst reading female to male transsexual autobiographies had enabled him to begin to clarify his transsexualism, he had been both sceptical and critical of the accounts he had read. Referring to the autobiography of Paul Hewitt (1995), he described his 'questioning' reaction:

...things just clicked 'yeah this where I'm coming from' erm but at the same time he kept saying that this and this and this were evidence of the fact he was transsexual and I thought 'hang on there's a lot of masculine women who show exactly the same...erm..' [-] I mean a lot of...he said things like oh 'men like to hold, women like to be held'...that's very heterosexist, stereotypical stuff...I questioned it all the time...

For many of the interviewees, the BBC television documentary 'The Decision', which followed three female to male transsexuals as they engaged with the processes of sex reassignment, had constituted for them a moment of epiphany – the sudden identification and realisation of themselves as being transsexual. However, this was also accompanied, as in incidents with the autobiographical

⁵ This issue is further addressed in Chapter Four: Our Bodies, Ourselves?

accounts, by some critical responses with regard to the way in which transsexuals were presented. James, for example, described his reaction to 'The Decision' as follows:

I saw a programme on the TV, 'The Decision' (T: right) and up to that point I didn't...know really who I was I suppose...when I saw it I just thought...sort of thought, 'right that's where I fit', you know, 'it's...there's no question about it' and err...although at first I didn't actually sympathise with any of the people on the TV (T: didn't you?) I thought they were really self absorbed sort of really strange characters, you know, I thought 'oh I'm glad I'm not like that!' [-] I think it did present the people, the way I viewed it, as 'gosh, you're so sad haven't you got anything else to think about?', you know...and I didn't want to relate to that part of it at all, I rejected that...

All of the interviews illustrated that the representations of transsexual selfhood within autobiography and other media forms were far from being 'mimicked' but rather constituted for them representations from which they wished to maintain some personal distance. Thus, contrary to Hausman's (1995) assumption of the regulatory function of transsexual autobiography upon 'transsexual self-representation and therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity' (pp.142-3), these interviewees demonstrated a critical distancing from the narratives and personalities represented at the same time as experiencing points of recognition between themselves *as* transsexuals and those represented *as* transsexuals. This suggests a significant point of criticism of Hausman's work in that by reading transsexuals only through the master identity of 'transsexual', she fails to take into account the complexity of their individual subjectivity and therefore their

capacity to constitute critical readers.⁶ But why the critical distancing from the narratives? If as Prosser (1998) argues, that if 'one's sex is to be determined by what one has to say for one's self, there has probably never been so much at stake in oral autobiography' (p.108), what then, is at stake for transsexuals in their being 'critical readers'? It is here, I suggest, that the difference between written autobiography and oral autobiography both emerges and becomes crucial.

Whilst Prosser in my view quite rightly points to the 'recycling' processes involved in the (re)production of transsexual narratives, in his proposal of there being only one story to be told - 'being trapped in the wrong body' – he suggests such recycling between autobiography and oral recounting to be confined to the singular individual's engagement with autobiographical texts. This overlooks the multiple social contexts of 'life' wherein transsexual subjects will necessarily have to negotiate, establish and maintain their identities as 'creditable' (Goffman, 1963) and 'authentic' with multiple others. To realise self-identity as 'authentic' is not simply to recognise *oneself* as being so (or having been established once and for all through clinical diagnosis) but requires the *ongoing* recognition by others. As Charles Taylor (1991) notes: 'The thing about inwardly derived, personal, original identity is that it doesn't enjoy this recognition a priori. It has to win it through exchange, and it can fail' (p.48). What is at stake for transsexuals is thus gaining the recognition by others of a self which is beyond a 'mimicry' of popular conceptions of 'authentic' 'transsexuality' and which is

⁶ Indeed, Hausman makes her belief that transsexuals cannot be critical readers explicit as she writes: '... for the reader interested in verifying his or her own gender confusions, these narratives provide ample opportunity for identification and mirroring. For a critical reader, on the other hand, the reading process can be confining, especially as the author makes blanket statements concerning sex, gender, and sexuality.' (p.156). Prosser (1998) similarly criticises Hausman (1995) for this belief.

rather, distinct, unique and therefore *more 'authentic'*. All of this, showing the (re)production of transsexual narratives to have a social and not merely a textual force, suggests as Ken Plummer (1995) succinctly puts it, that '*[i]t is time to go beyond the text.*' (p.19, emphasis in original).

In relation to the interview questions regarding their 'coming out' and the impacts this had on their relationships with known others and in the contexts of the interviews for this research, the interviewees were involved in the process of negotiating and establishing their identities as transsexuals and as individuals with myself as the interviewer. Unlike published autobiographical narratives of transsexual identity, which as a result of the editorial process can be described as 'honed products', the personal narratives generated in the context of the interviews were thus *jointly produced* in a dynamic, interactive social situation between the interviewees and myself. Prosser (1998), asserts that the transsexual 'self' is not performative but is rather realised through narrative, 'essentially' pre-existing the narrative but requiring it for self realisation. However, in the social, interactional context of oral recounting, where speech has a performative function (Wortham, 2001; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000) and which involves a listener as well as a teller, the self is *necessarily* performative because as Goffman (1959), in a manner that anticipates Butler (1990), observes, it is in social contexts and social interaction that:

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not the *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the

characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. (Goffman, 1959:245, emphases in original)

As an imputed 'product', 'authenticity' of selfhood is not therefore simply of one's self but is rather actively produced and accomplished through processes of both self presentation and audience attribution. An 'authentic' self is thus not static or fixed in the sense of fully corresponding to one's inner self and will invariably shift across the variety of contexts and relationships that an individual will move through during a lifetime. This suggests the need to therefore 'bracket' the idea of 'authenticity', to ask not 'in what ways *are* transsexuals more "authentic"?', but 'what are the strategies of talk which produce their "authenticity" as effect?' Within the analysis of the personal narratives produced through the interviews, it is thus necessary to attend to the 'how' as well as the 'what' of the interviewees telling. This extends the paying of attention to what Catherine Kohler Riessman (1990) terms 'the teller's problem': how in constructing their narratives tellers have the problem of convincing the listener who was not there to witness the life, events or scenes being recounted that 'what happened' really did happen; to how through their narratives, the interviewees sought to establish a particular self and gain and maintain the recognition of this self as 'authentic' and 'credible' by myself as the interviewer and other potential readers. As Goffman (1959) observes, in all social situations we continually project, and work to maintain, impressions of ourselves (usually favourable ones), where with others we 'contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured.' (p.21).

Both the selves and the narratives produced through the interviews were thus temporary and constructed not merely in the presence of, but in relation to, myself as the interviewer and other potential future readers. In my own (and other potential readers') knowledge of their transsexual status, the interviewees interacted and conversed with those whom Feinbloom (1976) describes as the 'knowing' audience.⁷ This is significant because as Riessman (1993) asserts, 'a story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener' (p.11).

The Narratives

Eric: 'A Compromised Life'

Eric was fifty two years old and was employed as a secretary in a local university. At the time of the interview he had been receiving hormone treatment for five years and, having had chest surgery four years previously, he considered that the process of his transition was now complete. At the start of the interview I first asked Eric, as I had all the interviewees, how he had come to recognise himself as being transsexual and how his decision to undergo sex-reassignment had come about. In beginning his personal narrative, Eric introduced his account through a preface where he referred to himself as being in a '*minority*' amongst female to male transsexuals and as living '*a compromised life*':

- 01 Okay erm...I'm fifty two
- 02 and I'm a secretary...at the local university...huhh..
- 03 I suppose the thing that makes me...a minority
- 04 even among...females to males
- 05 is that I'm married (...)

⁷ Feinbloom's (1976) outline of the 'knowing' audience is referred to more extensively in Chapter 4.

06 erm I'm still married...we still live together (T: hmm)
 07 (...) I've been having treatment for about five years (...)
 08 I live a sort of...compromised life at the moment..
 09 where...erm as far as I'm concerned I'm male...erm I feel as if I look
 male...
 10 erm but I'm still my husband's wife...
 11 and his friends will always see...me as that
 12 although I...I think that...people that knew you before...always see a
 woman (T: hmm)
 13 erm I was talking to Adrian in [City]
 14 and err he said 'if you had a big black beard, they'd still see a
 woman'...because
 15 *T: it's amazing isn't it*
 16 yeah, it's what they, they just think you're an eccentric woman...(T:
 hmm)
 17 erm but people I meet new...new people, see a man (T: hmm)
 18 and, and it can be quite hard to live like that..
 19 erm...but it was a decision I took to do that
 20 at the moment it's okay (...)
 21 I don't know how long I can do it for (...)

In beginning his personal narrative by informing us that he is '*a minority even among...females to males*' as he is '*married*', Eric directs us to perceive both himself and the account that he is about to tell as unusual and more complex than is generally the case in popular transsexual autobiographical accounts. In these accounts sex-reassignment is held to signify the end of a life of compromise and self-abnegation and constitute the process through which individuals then fully live their lives *as* the sex they consider themselves to be. In contrast, Eric tells us that due to his marital status and thus his conflictual social positioning as both a '*man*' and his '*husband's wife*', he lives a '*compromised life*' post transition, where although as far as he himself is concerned he is '*male*' and '*look[s] male*'⁸, for others who knew/know of him as his '*husband's wife*' he remains a female. Whilst through his preface Eric therefore projects an impression of his difference and distance from other female to males, through lines 12 to 21 we

⁸ Having had five years of hormone treatment and a bilateral mastectomy, Eric was undoubtedly male in his appearance.

are, however, guided away from regarding him as being less of a 'man' and thus 'inauthentic' and discreditable in his transsexuality.

Moving into an evaluative clause in line 12, Eric takes up the authorial speaking position and pulls us into his present point of view. Here, through the conditional 'although' and his use of the general 'you', he presents the issue of continuing to be seen, post transition, as a 'woman' by those who knew him previously, as generalisable to all female to males and so not as particular or as discrediting only to himself ('*although I...I think that...people that knew you before...always see a woman*'). Informing us in line 13 of having discussed the issue with another female to male, Eric then goes on in line 14 to shift his speaking position to that of embedded animator, where, quoting the words of his associate, he guides us to concur with this view. Through these two interactional moves, Eric thus projects an impression of himself as a normative 'transsexual' whose '*compromised life*' and his difference from others, is due to his social and interpersonal positioning rather than 'who' he *really* is. Having established a temporary agreement for his definition of the situation with myself in line 15, Eric goes on in lines 16 and 17 to affirm the agreed upon understanding.

Whilst there is a potential reading here that in being a less straightforward account than most, it could therefore be interpreted as a positively 'queer' story of a life lived in between 'sexes' and 'genders', Eric moves through lines 18 to 21 to foreclose this interpretation. Through the authorial speaking position he pulls us into his point of view where, through a series of clauses punctuated with both short and lengthy pauses, he guides us to apprehend the severity of his situation. Describing it as 'okay' although '*it can be quite hard to live like that*'

and that whilst '*it was a decision [he] took to do that*' he does not '*know how long [he] can do it for*', Eric depicts his circumstances as filled with trauma and pain, thus leading us away from any apprehension of celebration and/or directness characteristic of 'queer' accounts. Through his preface, Eric guides us, rather, to see the transgression and disruption inherent in his social positioning as both a '*man*' and his '*husband's wife*', and indeed therefore also in his status as '*transsexual*', as distressing, unwanted and as distorting who he feels himself to be: '*as far as I'm concerned I'm male*'.

Having directed us at this juncture to understand his '*minority*' status as being circumstantial rather than *of himself*, Eric then continues his personal narrative by moving back to his far past and reflecting on his childhood, which in the following extract he frames through the statement that it '*was not pleasant*':

- 01 E: ...erm (...) my childhood...was not pleasant...
02 and I don't have one good memory of being a child...or a teenager
huhh..(...)
03 and I didn't really escape from it until I moved away and got married (T:
right)
04 erm...I'm never quite sure...
05 I'm not on good terms with my parents...we just about speak...
06 I'm never quite sure whether they...really had a sneaking suspicion of
how I was...
07 err I was deliberately done up with curls and ribbons and frocks (T: hmm)
08 (...) the curls were the worst, the curls and the ribbons (T: hmm)
09 I could cope with the frocks...erm (...)
10 back then when I was small,
11 when I listen to other transsexuals they say...'I knew when I was five' (T:
hmm)...
12 what I knew when I was five...was I wasn't a human being...and...how I
managed...
13 erm my mother was very domineering
14 and she said I was a girl...and there was no getting away from it
15 and I looked at the girls and I knew I wasn't one of those
16 and I looked at the boys and they said...I wasn't one of those either...(T:
right)
17 so...I wasn't human (T: hmm) erm (...)

Through the framework of a childhood that '*was not pleasant*', in lines 02 and 03 of this extract Eric continues in the authorial speaking position where, informing us that he does not '*have one good memory of being a child...or a teenager*' and through the word '*escape*', he indicates having experienced profound unhappiness as a child and during his youth. Guiding us into an understanding of his unhappiness, through lines 04 and 09 he tells us that he now wonders whether perhaps his parents '*really had a sneaking suspicion of how [he] was*' and that to compensate he '*was deliberately done up with curls and ribbons and frocks*'. Here, through the use of the word '*deliberately*' Eric depicts the '*curls and ribbons and frocks*' as having been forced upon him by his parents, thus projecting an impression of his prior self as a child as 'inauthentic' in her overt femininity, guiding us to concur with his speculation that this therefore *was* a '*deliberate*' gesture by his parents to prevent '*how [he] was*' (his 'authentic' 'male' self) from emerging. Whilst having employed at this point the trope of 'having been/known all along' which is characteristic of traditional and popular accounts of transsexuality, Eric then moves through lines 10 to 12 to establish some distance from it.

Here, through the speaking position of animator, Eric contrasts what '*other transsexuals*' say concerning the young age at which they became aware of their cross-sex identification with his own prior knowledge of himself and, in so doing, draws us straight into his view of the distinctiveness of his own personal experience. Through his admission that '*what I knew when I was five...was I wasn't a human being...and...how I managed*', Eric portrays a childhood of

continuously coping with repression. In the juxtaposition of his own unawareness with the awareness signified through the trope of 'having known all along', Eric thus attributes to it a luxury of opportunity for self knowledge which had been denied to him and, through this portrayal, defends both his past and present 'authenticity' as a transsexual. Framing his explanation of how as a child he had begun to consider himself as not '*a human being*' with the statement (in line 13) that his '*mother was very domineering*', Eric directs us to see *her* as the main orchestrator of his repressive childhood ('*she said I was a girl...and there was no getting away from it*'). Informing us that, although when he looked at the girls he '*knew*' he was not '*one of those*' and that the boys '*said*' he was not '*one of those either*', Eric thus guides us to understand that his sense in his childhood that he '*wasn't a human being*' had arisen through his mother's tyrannising treatment of him: whilst he had been unable to identify himself as a girl, in his '*curls and ribbons and frocks*', he had continually been perceived to be *especially* so by others. In suggesting that this enforced self-presentation meant he was precluded from influencing or persuading others to recognise him in any other way, as a tomboy, for example, Eric projects a further impression of having some distance from popular autobiographical accounts of transsexuality, particularly those of other female to males. In these accounts being a 'tomboy' during childhood and perhaps occasional or frequent passing as a boy is generally held to exemplify their transsexuality, whereas Eric directs us to apprehend, through his own distinctive personal history, that this, again, was a luxury of opportunity that had been denied to him.

In projecting an impression of his difference to other transsexuals but guiding us to understand this as a matter of familial and social context rather than personal

idiosyncrasy, Eric's account of his childhood thus echoes that which he offered in his preface concerning his current '*compromised life*'. In the context of his childhood, we are similarly directed to understand him as a normative 'transsexual' and to perceive the non-normative, discreditable aspects of his 'transsexual' childhood as arising through the particular interpersonal circumstances he grew up in, rather than 'who' he *really* was. Informing us at the end of the extract that the feeling of not being '*human*' had persisted until about ten years before the interview, Eric then moved on to tell of how he had coped during this period of his life:

01 ...erm I was pretending to be a woman..
02 but I did my damndest huhhm (T: hmm)
03 (...) I dressed as a woman...I didn't possess a pair of trousers,
04 I really tried...to fit
05 *T: so did you deliberately not, not buy trousers because of...*
06 I deliberately didn't buy them,
07 I deliberately dressed in frocks
08 sort of towards the end (...) it got worse,
09 I was in long skirts and long earrings and I had my hair dyed..
10 erm...really trying to be a woman
11 because that's what I'd been socialised to be (T: right)
12 and it actually nearly destroyed me mentally erm

Here, Eric uses the habitual narrative genre through which he directs us towards apprehending the quintessence of his adult years prior to seeking sex-reassignment. Describing himself through these years within the terms of having 'performed' the gender attributed to him from birth, Eric moves to align himself with other transsexuals and popular transsexual narratives, where the 'artificiality' of the past rather than the present gender is commonly conveyed.⁹

⁹ I use of the word 'performed' in this context in the sense of indicating a guise rather than in the postmodern sense of indicating a non-foundational sex/gender identity.

Informing us what his *'pretending to be a woman'* had comprised, through his uses of the phrases *'but I did my damndest'*, *'I really tried to fit'*, *'really trying to be a woman'* and his emphasis through repetition of the word *'deliberately'*, Eric depicts his adult years as a long period of personal anxiety and struggle. Through this depiction, he projects an impression of himself as having been sensible and responsible and as someone who, in light of their upstanding character, had resisted the urge *not* to be *'what they are not'*. In so doing, and by informing us that *'it actually nearly destroyed [him] mentally'*, he guides us to understand his eventual decision to undergo sex-reassignment, his *'giving in'* to the urge *'not to be what he is not'*, as reasoned, considered and above all necessarily appropriate: a reasoned response to the personal torment which his conscious efforts to conform had produced.

At this point in the interview, Eric went on to reveal how his decision to pursue sex-reassignment had eventually come about:

- 01 erm (...) it wasn't until I went into therapy
02 and err we started to talk about the possibility that I could be transsexual..
03 erm...and everything went from there really, it was,
04 when I went into therapy...as, because of the therapy as I became to be a
 human being...
05 I realised if I was gonna be human I couldn't be a woman
 (T: hmm)
06 and (...) and it just followed on from there
07 it was just so obvious that...this is how it should be..
08 and I went down to [city] to see [psychiatrist] huhh who said 'well yes of
 course you're a transsexual' erm
09 *T: did he, did he ask you lots of questions*
10 yes and I was there for about an hour and a half..
11 he said if I'd been in therapy I must know...my own mind,
12 and I was sitting and talking to him,
13 I suppose, I've heard other transsexuals say that the biggest thing you
 worry about at that time is that, you'll go and see a psychiatrist and
 they'll say 'oh no you're not a transsexual' (T: hmm) 'go away' (T: yes)
14 erm...but [the psychiatrist] had no doubts about it right from the
 beginning

15 and that, that was a big relief..
16 my next worry was that he would say 'well yes you are a transsexual
but...you're not stable enough and I can't do anything about it'
17 but he didn't say that either,
18 he felt I was a bit wobbly...because of the sort of life I had forced myself
to lead erm

In this extract, Eric continues to direct us to apprehend the appropriateness of his decision to undergo sex-reassignment by pulling us into a framework of 'professionalism'. Informing us that it was only upon attending therapy that the '*possibility*' of his being transsexual emerged, through his use of 'we' in line 02 ('*and erm we started to talk about the possibility that I could be transsexual*'), Eric guides us to see that he had had professional direction in his initial consideration and that his exploration of the possibility of his transsexuality had therefore been accredited and deemed legitimate by the therapist as well as being recognised by himself. In telling us, through lines 03 to 06, that it was whilst in therapy that he eventually started to lose the feeling of not being '*human*' and that he had '*realised*' that in order to '*be human [he] couldn't be a woman*', Eric portrays his therapy as having been the context in which his self recognition of 'who' he *really* was had occurred, moving in line 07 to suggest that it was here that his epiphany had taken place: '*it was just so obvious that...this is how it should be*'.

Through lines 08 to 18 Eric directs us to concur with his conclusion reached within the professional context of the therapy, that '*this is how it should be*', as he goes on to foreground a further *psychiatric* framework in the context of his diagnostic encounter. Informing us that as a consequence of the therapy he had then attended an appointment with a psychiatrist whose specialism was in the treatment of transsexuals, Eric then shifts into the speaking position of animator

where, through quoting the psychiatrist's words, we are pulled straight into the viewpoint of the 'professional'. Here, Eric replays for us the moment of the 'authorisation' of his 'transsexual' status: *'I went...to see [psychiatrist] huhh who said "well yes of course you're a transsexual"'*. Through recourse to the psychiatrist, Eric thus evidences his 'authenticity' as a transsexual, directing us to see this as 'what is and as what [we] ought to see as the "is"' (Goffman, 1959:24). Through the interactional intervention by me in line 09, which acts as an implicit request for Eric to account for *how* the psychiatrist 'knew' of his 'authenticity', Eric then moves through lines 10 to 12 to describe what had occurred during his appointment. Informing us that he had been *'sitting and talking to him'* for *'about an hour and a half'*, he tells us that the psychiatrist had *'said'* that as he had *'been in therapy [he] must know...[his] own mind'*. Here, Eric directs us to see a link between the professions of therapy and psychiatry: to understand that the therapy which he had undertaken had been considered by the psychiatrist to be a legitimate context for Eric to become aware of his *'own mind'* in the matter of his transsexuality. Through his expression of having 'known' his *'own mind'* Eric thus represents himself as having been an active player in the process of finding out 'who' he *really* was, guiding us to apprehend his agency as well as his 'authenticity' throughout his dealings with the 'professionals'.

In line 13 Eric breaks off from the content of his appointment with the psychiatrist and moves into an evaluative clause, where he tells us that for many transsexuals there is a worry prior to their first meeting with a psychiatrist that they will not be 'authorised' as 'transsexual'. In then returning to the events that had happened in *his* first meeting and thus contrasting how this had *not* occurred for himself, Eric moves throughout lines 14 to 18 to reaffirm his 'authenticity' as

transsexual. He tells us, for example, that '*from the beginning*' of their meeting, the psychiatrist had '*had no doubts*' about his transsexuality and that whilst he (Eric) had been concerned that, even in light of this, the psychiatrist may not have thought him '*stable enough*' to undergo sex-reassignment, '*he didn't say that either*'. Here, Eric projects an impression of himself as having been seen by the psychiatrist as undoubtedly an 'authentic' transsexual and as someone who, whilst a little unstable due to '*the sort of life [he] had forced [him]self to lead*', required sex-reassignment. Eric thus directs us here to understand his pursuit of sex-reassignment and his decision to undergo it – his 'giving in' to the urge 'not to be what he is not' – as *professionally* verified as a *need* and, therefore, as being both legitimate and necessary.

At this point Eric went on to describe how his decision to undergo sex-reassignment has been received in the context of his marriage:

- 01 ...even then I started on a low dose of hormone because of (...) I'm
 married erm (...)
 02 and...he's an okay bloke really..
 03 if he'd been a pig I would have walked away err
 04 but he's actually quite nice, I felt he deserved better (...)
 05 but we talked about it and he said 'you do what you have to do and I'll
 stay here it'll be okay' [-]
 11 it took a long time to pluck up the courage to talk about it to him (...)
 12 he said 'you do what you have to do'
 13 *T: were you fearful that he would reject you?*
 14 yes (...) and yet in a way if he had...it might have been easier (T: hmm)
 15 I could have started again (T: hmm)
 16 instead of erm...being a bit ambiguous erm (...)
 17 but he stood by me through all the hormone treatment and surgery
 18 and...and he still likes me huhh...erm (...)
 19 that means I have to keep on compromising,
 20 it's hard to throw away thirty years of marriage...and I pay the mortgage
 (...)
 21 *T: it is hard isn't it, you know, when you've had a relationship like that,
 you can't just throw it all away can you?*
 22 yes, I think it's something that females to males don't really appreciate

- 23 a male to female would understand because lots of them are in the same
situation (T: hmm)
- 24 where they, they struggle for most of their lives to be what they're not (T:
right)
- 25 until they can't cope any longer
- 26 and then they find they've got a job and career...and responsibilities (...)
mm
- 27 there's a lot of guilt...in it...that says Clare can't just walk away (...) [-]
- 30 *T: why did you choose to go on low dosage hormones to start with?*
- 31 huhh because I knew that if I did it slowly...John would get used to me
(T: right)
- 32 erm...erm...I'd, I'd met...something that stayed with me huhh, I met a
female to male who had changed over in six months...
- 33 and he'd lost everything (T: really) he'd lost his job, his house, his
partner, everything...
- 34 and whilst he wasn't sorry that he'd changed over he felt he could
have done it better (T: hmm)
- 35 and that stayed with me huhh erm (...)

Informing us in line 01 that due to being '*married*' he had chosen to start his treatment with '*a low dose of hormone*', Eric once again guides us to perceive his difference from other female to males. He directs us to see the process of *his* sex-reassignment, in the context of being and remaining '*married*', as having been more complicated than those typically described in popular autobiographical narratives. In these accounts, which overwhelmingly portray and/or reflect the lives of female to males who are not married or who are not in otherwise 'heterosexual' relationships with genetic males throughout and beyond the process of their transition, the moment of receiving 'authorisation' of their 'transsexuality' from the psychiatrist is depicted as generating an excited anticipation of the physiological changes which hormone treatment will induce. Recognition of the possibility that there may be situations such as Eric's, where choosing 'compromising' low dosage levels of hormone treatment may be preferred, is absent in the accounts and it is, rather, generally conveyed that

'nothing must stand in the way' of the individual fully 'becoming' 'who' they *really* are.

In contrast to these self-representations, by having started on a '*low dose*' of hormone, Eric suggests that at that time of beginning *his* treatment he had not wanted the physiological changes to occur so rapidly, which, through lines 02 to 05, he directs us to see as a decision *he* had made in relation to his husband. Describing his husband as '*an okay bloke really*' and as someone who '*deserved better*', Eric projects an impression of him as being 'a nice man', developing this in lines 05 and 12 where he informs us of his husband's response to him during their discussion of his treatment. Here, moving into the speaking position of embedded animator and quoting the words his husband had spoken at the time, he tells us how he had not stood in the way of his transitioning and had been nothing short of supportive. Eric thus depicts his husband to be an understanding, tolerant and loyal man, and in his response of '*yes*' to the question posed by me in line 13, indicates that his choice to transition slowly had therefore been to avoid a break-up of the relationship.

However, having answered '*yes*' in line 14 to the question of whether he had been fearful of rejection by his husband, after a long pause he goes on to qualify his response, telling us that '*in a way if he had...it might have been easier*' as he '*could have started again*' rather than '*being a bit ambiguous*'. Here Eric leads us to understand that whilst he did not, and perhaps still does not, want to lose his husband, he has some regret for the fact that five years into his transition his marriage remains intact. Drawing our attention back to his husband's loyalty to him in lines 17 and 18, he then moves through to line 20 to pull us into the core

of his understanding of his different and '*minority*' status in relation to other female to males and their self-representations. Informing us that his husband '*still likes*' him, that he has '*to keep on compromising*', adding that '*it's hard to throw away thirty years of marriage*' and that he (Eric) also '*pay[s] the mortgage*', Eric directs us to understand how the complex interweaving of both his emotional commitment to his husband and his financial and marital obligation to him mean that *he cannot*, as other female to males may do and/or expect others to do, let '*nothing stand in the way*' of his fully '*becoming*' '*who*' he *really* is. Thus, for Eric, his difference from other female to males, and also his ambivalent regret for his relationship, comes from his emotional and indeed *moral* refusal to follow the recognised '*female to male*' story line.

Having gained a temporary agreement with myself as the interviewer concerning his definition of the situation in line 21, Eric continues through lines 22 to 27 to elaborate upon his own personal position and point of view. Informing us that his situation concerning his relationship '*is something that females to males don't really appreciate*' although '*a male to female would understand because lots of them are in the same situation*', Eric aligns himself with male to females, equating his own position with theirs and thus directs us into his moral stance towards other female to males. Advising us that for male to females there are issues of '*struggle*', '*guilt*' and '*responsibilities*', through his explicit alignment he directs us to perceive that these are therefore missing for other female to males. Thus, by implication, he positions other female to males to be *what he and male to female transsexuals are not*: primarily individuals who *avoid* a struggle '*for most of their lives to be what they're not*'; individuals who *do not cope* to the point where '*they find they've got a job and career and*

responsibilities'; individuals who have no *'guilt'* and who can *'just walk away'*.¹⁰

Here, through his alignment and his (implicit) *'othering'* of other female to males - as egotistical individuals who, on the whole, lack any concern for others - Eric projects an impression of himself as responsible and sensible, guiding us to see *his* *'unusual'* and thus potentially discreditable approach to his transsexuality, as being less *'unusual'* than it may first appear although unique to him in his context of being female to male.

In response to my request for clarification of his choice to begin his treatment with a low dosage hormone (line 30), Eric confirms his earlier indicated intention of achieving a slower physiological transformation and informs us that he had done so in order for his husband to *'get used to [him]'*. At this point (line 32), Eric moves on to tell a brief story concerning a female to male he had once met which was *'something that stayed with [him]'*, and, in so doing pulls us further into his viewpoint concerning the creditable but *'unusualness'* of his position vis-à-vis other female to males. He tells us that the female to male concerned, in completing his sex-reassignment in six months, *'had lost everything'* and that *'whilst he wasn't sorry'* to have transitioned *'he felt he could have done it better'*. Directing us to fully appreciate the story as a moral tale, as he repeats in line 35 that the experience of this particular person had *'stayed with [him]'*, Eric guides us to see, in contrast, that in *his* slower process of transitioning and in maintaining his marriage, he had, unlike this male to female and other female to males, *'done it better'*.

¹⁰ In line 27 of the extract Eric refers to himself under the *'female'* name he was formerly known as prior to his transition. In referring to himself in this context of his talk concerning male to females he thus makes his identification with them explicit. By using his prior *'female'* name, he indicates that through his responsibilities he cannot, post transition, simply leave his prior self behind.

Summary

In the oral recounting of his personal narrative, Eric's engagement with popular autobiographical accounts of transsexuality showed the significance both of social positioning and gender. Positioned as both his '*husband's wife*' and as a man, Eric could neither find himself mirrored nor identify himself within the self-representations of female to male transsexuals, the popular accounts of which do not tell of being, or indeed staying, married. Through his projected impressions and thus construction of self as a person who is responsible and who fulfils his obligations to others, Eric positioned other female to male transsexuals as his necessary 'other', aligning himself with male to female transsexuals whom he constructed, like himself, to be more sensitive in their relationships and dealings with others and so more 'authentic' in their expectations of what life after sex-reassignment might bring. Whilst revealing the 'mixture' of his gender that had been imposed upon him through his social positioning, through this alignment Eric positioned himself and constructed his narrative within an alternative but nonetheless still acceptable 'transsexual' discourse. By so doing, Eric worked to generate a definition of his situation *to be patterned on, but independent of*, the popular autobiographical accounts of other female to males and establish the attribution of selfhood as a creditable 'non-conventional' female to male, but at the same time as *undoubtedly* an 'authentic' transsexual.

Significantly, throughout his account, Eric largely distanced himself from the trope, characteristic of popular transsexual narratives, of 'having been/known all along', and indeed suggested in his talk of his childhood, that such an experience is not essentially interior to transsexual selfhood but rather is a product of social

circumstances and relationships. In the light of his particular life experiences and his personal subjectivity which had developed as a result, Eric did not, and could not, simply retrospectively construct and represent himself in this way. As a critical reader and in being positioned as both his *'husband's wife'* and as a man, Eric had no personal investment in 'mimicking' conventional, popular 'transsexual' accounts but rather, had engaged in a complex negotiation with transsexual discourses, recycling them as he concomitantly negotiated and established his 'authentic' transsexual selfhood both with others and myself in the interview.

Mark: 'I didn't think too much about my childhood'

Mark is thirty nine years old, single, and was employed as a manager within the National Health Service. At the time of the interview he had been receiving hormone treatment for eighteen months and having had chest surgery three months previously, considered that his transition was now complete. Mark chose to begin his personal narrative of how he had come to recognise himself as being transsexual and how his decision to undergo sex-reassignment had come about, with his recollections of his childhood, which he started with a prefacing statement that this was not something he had thought *'too much'* about prior to his journey towards sex reassignment:

- 01 M: ...erm do you want me to just to say a few bits about my childhood?
02 T: *yes, yes, I mean I'd be interested to know about your childhood and how you experienced yourself*
03 yes, yes, it's interesting..
04 I think what happened...was, for me, while in adulthood that, for me
05 that I didn't think too much about my childhood (T: hmm)
06 and it's only when you do get into this that you think more about it (T: hmm)

07 erm it's having talked to a psychotherapist about it
08 that had I obviously went to see the consultants about it...
09 it would have been...it would have been a primary diagnosis you know...
10 it was screaming, you know
11 and nobody, nobody, picked it up erm...
12 so I guess, probably the earliest memory is five at school
13 and that's when I think it started
14 you know, the girls go to school and have to wear a dress
15 and have got to be separate from the boys, you know (T: hmm, yes)
separate toilets (T: hmm) and all that sort of stuff
16 and that's when I start to remember, is that first day of school..

Mark can be seen to establish, at the outset of the interview, his positioning in relation to popular accounts of transsexuality. In choosing to begin his own account with a reflection upon his childhood he indicates that what will follow will perhaps be a conventional transsexual story, although through his prefacing statement of '*yes, it's interesting*' in line 03, he leads us to anticipate that there will be some extraordinariness in what he is about to tell. Through the authorial speaking position in line 04 ('*I think*'), he draws us straight into this extraordinariness as he goes on to tell us in line 05 that during his adulthood he had not given '*too much*' thought to his childhood. Here, in his emphasis through repetition in line 04, of the words '*for me*', Mark projects an impression of his individuality and difference in relation to more typical transsexual accounts which usually depict memories of childhood as ever-present recollections of troubling questions of gender identification and location. Moving into an evaluative clause in line 06, to tell us that '*it's only when you do get into this that you think more about it*', Mark then directs us to understand that in his case he only began to really think about, and attribute significance to, his childhood experiences when he became aware of his transsexuality in adulthood. Whilst continuing to project his individuality '*as a transsexual person*', through the use of the general '*you*' in this clause he moves, however, to suggest that the

unusualness of his experience in relation to the more typical discourses and narratives of transsexuality is not necessarily 'unusual' in and of itself. Through the general 'you', Mark positions and associates his former self, prior to his understanding of himself as 'transsexual', with other and perhaps non-transsexual individuals, projecting the impression of his experience of lack of reflection upon his childhood years as generic, ordinary and thus not discrediting of him.

Although having moved to make his individuality and the 'unusualness' of his particular experience apparent, in lines 07 to 11 he guides us to nonetheless concur with his identification and definition of himself as 'transsexual'. Here, Mark suggests that it was whilst he was in psychotherapy that he first began to talk about his childhood and that the psychotherapist was a primary witness to his gradual realisation of his identity - the relationship providing him (and so perhaps us) with a responsible, professional framework within which judgements regarding his identity were and should be made. In employing this framework he goes on, moreover, to validate the therapeutic process within which his identity had emerged, by drawing upon medical discourses of transsexuality and positioning himself as firmly describable within them. He tells us, for example, that in spite of not previously thinking '*too much*' about, or attributing any significance to, his childhood, his actual childhood experiences nonetheless '*obviously*' would have elicited '*a primary diagnosis*' if he had seen a consultant, and that this was '*screaming*' even though '*nobody picked it up*'. Thus, although Mark guides our impression of him as being somewhat distanced from the more typical narrative accounts of transsexuals, he concomitantly projects an impression of himself as being nothing short of the 'real thing': a medically

recognisable 'authentic' transsexual though atypical in his claiming of this identity.

Mark moves to begin his actual account of his childhood in lines 12 to 16, but his prior statements in lines 05 and 06 (*'I didn't think too much about my childhood', 'it's only when you do get into this that you think more about it'*) suggest that what we are about to be told will therefore be *self-consciously* reconstructed and evaluated from his present position and point of view. His framing of his ensuing account in lines 12 and 13, where speaking in the position of current author, he suggests his transsexuality first became evident during his early school years further points to this suggestion. Here, through his use of the words *'so I guess', 'probably'* and *'I think'*, Mark also indicates some uncertainty with regard to what is to follow, furthermore suggesting that whilst perhaps the experiences in his childhood that he is going to recount have significance in the context of his new found 'knowledge' and understanding of himself, they had not been experienced as having any particular significance to him at the time. Through this frame of explicit retrospective reconstruction Mark thus guides us to anticipate a conventional 'transsexual' account of childhood gendered experience, the parameters of which he establishes in lines 14 and 15 where, in drawing upon common social and cultural practices of gender division in schools, he pulls into the classic 'transsexual' sub-plot of non-conformity.

Mark's account of his childhood which followed did indeed mirror those typically found in popular, autobiographical narratives of female to males. In his account Mark depicted himself as having been unsuitably masculine in his behaviours and outlook as a child and told of numerous instances where, for

adults, this was deemed to be problematic and sometimes punishable. In the following extract, for example, Mark reflects upon these experiences in the context of his junior (middle) school:

- 01 I loved football and that sort of thing...
02 and they'd say 'boys line up'
03 and I'd line up with the boys and things like that (T: hmm)
04 and I'd get told off erm...
05 and through, through school...well I tried to do certainly, sort of junior
School,
06 I'd always be with the boys, playing the boys' sports and all that (T:
hmm)
07 erm and they accepted me...
08 so it wasn't a problem,
09 it was never really a problem to children
10 it's always a problem to adults
11 *T: to adults, yeah*
12 So sometimes the...adult dinner ladies would drag me out of the boys
playground
13 because we had separate playgrounds (T: oh right)
14 and stuff like that...erm
15 I think when I was about ten or eleven I started to really get quite
insistent because...
16 I remember a teacher used to say that if I didn't sort of behave or do this
or do that
17 then I'd be taken to the headmaster
18 and they'd take all my clothes off and see what I was
19 *T: really? that's dreadful isn't it?*
20 yes, it's appalling really...erm
21 and things like that you start to remember so (T: hmm)
22 ...and it always seemed...I couldn't work it out,
23 it seemed so unfair (T: hmm)...you know,
24 I just wanted to be a boy and just...
25 and people labelled me a tomboy and stuff like that (T: right)
26 but I remember saying very clearly you know, I'm a boy ...

In spite of Mark's earlier interactional move to distance himself from popular accounts (*'I didn't think too much about my childhood'*), in the extract his recollections and evaluations of his childhood, which in line 21 he again admits to being retrospectively constructed (*'and things like that you start to remember'*), can be seen to lay easily alongside them. However, as Mark moved

on to talk about his later experiences from school to early adulthood, he revealed that in his past he had once evaluated and understood his recollections through a different set of discourses and discursive frameworks:

01 it was a bit more difficult in senior school erm...
02 but then I found out that...I knew that I liked, you know, that I was
attracted to girls (T: hmm)
03 so I think I was about thirteen or fourteen...I tried to explain,
04 because at that point you think, you just think well, 'you're going
nowhere', you know, 'you have to make the best of it',
05 I think that's quite interesting... [-]
06 I think I had a much harder time with the girls than I ever did with the
boys (T: hmm) so...
07 I mean I had fights with the boys...so sometimes...
08 but it was different with the boys there was no problem...
09 but with the girls I was feeling something very strange (T: hmm) very
strange
10 erm..they used to make comments about me,
11 not so much that I was queer, stuff like that
12 but I was definitely seen as different erm...
13 when I was 18 I joined a football team...an all ladies football team (T:
hmm)...
14 I was a bit arrogant actually...
15 I thought 'I don't wanna join the girls, they haven't got the vaguest idea'
(laughter)
16 you know, I'd never met anybody like me (T: hmm)
17 and yes you can get girls that play football...(T: hmm)
18 and they're quite happy to be girls
19 but I still had only met one or two...girls that liked football and were any
good

[-] (Talk about other sporting activities)

26 I did stop the football, but later on I did join another one
27 and the same thing happened
28 so that was just one thing that I couldn't work out
29 *T: so was it more the social side of it that you couldn't...*
30 yeah it was fine playing football
31 *T: (...) what sort of things went on then?*
32 well it just didn't...you just don't feel part of the crowd,
33 you just feel really different (T: hmm)
34 and you couldn't speak with them as well
35 you were sort of like...it isn't a natural thing to join in with all the girly
laughter and chat or jokes

Whilst for the most part Mark's experiences and particularly his relationships with other children were '*fine*' during his childhood, in this extract, he tells us that upon puberty and during his time at senior school things became '*a bit more difficult*'. In line 02 Mark draws our attention to discourses of lesbianism as he informs us '*but then I found out*', '*knew*' that '*I was attracted to girls*'. Through his use of the words '*but then*' in relation to line 03, Mark suggests that this then ('*then*') provided, perhaps for the first time, a discursive framework through which at thirteen or fourteen he could start to begin to '*explain*' and make sense of what others continued to label as his tomboyishness and his disdain for conventional heterosexual femininity. In line 04, however, Mark moves into an evaluative clause to guide us to consider the inappropriateness of this framework. Here, through the authorial speaking position, he suggests that whilst he may once have considered himself to perhaps be a lesbian, he had done so for the purposes of finding a place for himself in the world rather than because of any feelings of self-identification. In his evaluation from his position in the present, Mark thus justifies his past actions and prior positioning of himself and in his use of the general 'you' appears to address other, imaginary conversational partners as well as myself. At this juncture, he then goes on to suggest who these other, imaginary conversational partners may be as he guides us, through his statement of '*interest*' in line 05 onwards deeper into his justifications.

Still occupying the authorial speaking position, he leads us through lines 06 to 19 into how he had experienced himself when amongst boys and girls, which he frames with the statement '*I think I had a much harder time with the girls than I ever did with the boys*'. Mark develops this as he goes on to say that whereas with boys '*there was no problem*', with the girls he felt '*something very strange*'

and that although they used to *'make comments'* about him it was *'not so much that [he] was queer, stuff like that'* but because he was *'definitely seen as different'*. Here, Mark can be seen to obliquely address a 'feminist'¹¹ and often popular viewpoint that transsexuals are 'really' lesbian women or gay men who are in denial due to their internalised homophobia, where in lines 11 and 12 he conversely projects an impression that his difference went beyond any difference which could be attributed to being lesbian, and concomitantly, that perhaps he never actually was identified by other girls as in fact being lesbian (*'they used to make comments about me, not so much that I was queer, stuff like that'*). Whilst in line 13 Mark appears to veer off at a tangent as he informs us of how at the age of eighteen he joined a *'ladies football team'*, through this shift in conversational topic he goes on, in lines 14 to 35, to offer further evidence of his difference to the women around him. In the speaking position of embedded author, he admits to having been *'arrogant'* towards the other female football players but then, moving into a short series of evaluative clauses and taking up the speaking position of current author in lines 16 to 19, he draws us into his current point of view concerning why this had been so. Here he tells us that it had been due to the fact that he had *'never met anybody like [himself]'* and that whilst he no longer has this former attitude and believes that girls actually can play football well *and* be *'happy to be girls'*, at that time his arrogance had simply been based upon the fact he *'had only met one or two...girls that liked football and were any good'*. Through his evaluation of his experience joining *'an all ladies football team'*, Mark directs us to apprehend that it was his

¹¹ I use the term 'feminist' here to refer to the perspectives put forward by feminists such as Janice Raymond (1994) as these are held by many to constitute the definitive 'feminist' view on transsexualism. In so doing it is not my intention to propose that all feminists have indeed held, or do currently hold, this perspective.

difference from other girls that lay at the heart of his arrogance: that he had been misguided in his expectation that other girls like himself (*'who liked football and were any good'*) would also not be *'happy to be girls'*, as in his experience this had proved not to be the case (*'you know, I'd never met anybody like me'*).

In lines 26 and 27, Mark then tells us that although he then stopped playing football, he later joined another team where *'the same thing happened'*, thus repeating his earlier experience and continuing to be *'just one thing that [he] couldn't work out'*. When I asked further about this (line 29), he explains in lines 32 to 35, that whilst *'it was fine playing football'* he had had difficulties in relating to the other team members when off the pitch as he had felt this was not *'natural'* to him. Here, in his use of the general 'you' (*'you just don't feel part of the crowd'*, *'you just feel really different'*, *'you couldn't speak with them as well'*, *'you were sort of like, it isn't a natural thing'*) Mark firmly positions himself within the popular discourses of female to males and signals a further and direct address to his imaginary conversational partners - making clear his perspective in regard to the aforementioned 'feminist' viewpoint and moving to maintain his creditability as transsexual. In his pursuit of a traditionally masculine sport, he had found even here a 'difference' between himself and the 'girls' who also played the sport, thus making the label 'lesbian' inappropriate: he had never been enough of a 'girl' to be seen as one, nor to comfortably self-identify as such.

Whilst in using the word *'natural'* at the end of the extract Mark employs the sort of rhetoric common in popular accounts of transsexuality, where through the trope of having 'been/known all along' an 'essential' or *'natural'* quality of

gender is espoused, through his prior talk he can be seen to have worked up a definition of his situation as being somewhat distanced from such accounts. For example, whereas it is common for popular narratives to rely heavily on sexist, stereotypical concepts of essential differences between women and men to support the identity claim being made¹², Mark alternatively locates his earlier tendency to also think this way as residing in his own earlier confusions about himself rather than as a support of 'who' he now 'really' is. Through his evaluative clauses in lines 17 and 18 which he offers through the authorial speaking position, '*and yes, you can get girls that play football ...and they're quite happy to be girls*', throughout the extract Mark projects an impression of himself as someone who is now sure enough of his male identity to forgo recourse to sexist gender stereotypes, and so guides us to continue to see him as an 'authentic', creditable transsexual individual, independent of the other accounts which his own would otherwise mirror.

Although Mark cast lesbianism as having been inappropriate for understanding and explaining his masculinity during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, later on in the interview he went on to tell of how in his mid-twenties, he nonetheless did have a lesbian relationship which had gone on to last for almost ten years. In the following extract, Mark offers his account of how he came to have this lesbian relationship and explains how it was this relationship, together with other events in his life, which had led to his eventual decision to seek psychotherapy:

¹² See, for example, the comment made by Matthew in respect of the autobiography of Paul Hewitt (1995) p.97 above.

01 [-] as I said I had never met anybody like me,
02 I'd never heard of any...sort of condition,
03 even when you get into medical training you don't necessarily hear...
04 I think probably in my sort of late twenties
05 I read a newspaper article
06 and it was about erm...it was about somebody who was born a man and
just couldn't cope with their body at all...and had the operation
07 and it had never crossed my brain that it could happen the other way
08 *T: so you thought it was definitely a, something that only happens to
males*
09 Yeah...and I thought, by then I started to think I was gay
10 because I liked women so...erm
11 I met...through work I met somebody...err a girl called Sara
12 and erm we sort of...started off a relationship and stayed together,
13 well lived together for close to ten years actually
14 *T: really, oh that was a long time*
15 it was erm...and then I thought 'yeah this...this feels a bit better' (T:
hmm)
16 and I think...I think that was around the fact that it was okay to
like...women (T: hmm) so you could be more open about that (T: yeah)
17 but at the same time, in some ways it did feel slightly different
18 *T: hmm...how old were you then?*
19 twenty six, twenty seven...
20 erm and basically what happened over the next ten years
21 probably because the relationship wasn't really...err, it wasn't really very,
very good and...
22 there were all sorts of things going on erm...
23 so a lot of the issues got sort of sideswept erm...
24 she'd have ideas for projects and ideas for things and it was all sort of...
25 perhaps her energies were on that
26 because really what we weren't doing was looking at our relationship (T:
right)...
27 which we should have done a long time before
28 and you start to get trapped
29 I think...this was I suppose...early to mid thirties
30 and I started to feel really, really unhappy with the relationship,
31 couldn't seem to sort things out with the relationship
32 but, it seemed more than that
33 and I'd done the football club again
34 and it didn't work the second time...
35 and I just couldn't, couldn't get it together (T: hmm)..
36 so I thought, you know, 'just what's, what's going on, something isn't
right'
37 ...which you can't define at all erm...
38 and...then I went to see...I thought 'this is no good',
39 my grandmother died as well in October
40 and I was quite down about that...
41 and when it got to the new year I just thought 'this is no good I have got
to go and see someone' [four seconds of inaudible speech]

In lines 01 to 10 of the extract Mark prefaces his account of his relationship and works up a definition of the situation through which to guide our understanding of the events that had taken place. He begins in lines 01 to 07, by reiterating that he had never met another person like himself and that he had '*never heard of any sort of condition*', informing us that, although in his late twenties he had had some awareness of male to female transsexuality through reading a newspaper article, it simply had not occurred to him, nor been brought to his attention, that it was also a possibility for females. Here, Mark frames his ensuing account of his relationship in the context in which it occurred, directing us to apprehend, as previously, that he had been constrained to take up a 'lesbian' identity as he was unaware of any alternative. Having established a temporary agreement with this definition of the situation with *me* (line 08), Mark then moves into an evaluative clause (line 09) through which he accounts for his past understanding of himself as lesbian on the basis that he had '*liked women*'. Here, Mark generates the impression that although his adoption and claiming of a 'lesbian' identity had been *mistaken* it was understandable and inevitable in the light of his 'knowledge' at the time, and through the word '*because*', he guides us to see the 'common sense' which had underpinned this earlier identification.

Moving on to tell where he met his partner, he then (line 16) takes up the speaking position of embedded author and informs us that at the beginning of his lesbian relationship he had initially felt '*a bit better*' about himself and his situation in life. Having said this, however, Mark immediately breaks from his account and, in a further short series of evaluative clauses (lines 16 and 17), justifies this feeling from his present perspective. Here he directs us to

understand that, although he had felt '*a bit better*' at that time, this had been due to his particular personal understandings and the social conditions which had prevailed, that is, his *unawareness* of any alternative discursive framework within which to position and understand himself, and the greater social acceptability of being a lesbian woman. Moving then to qualify this through the statement (line 17) that '*in some ways it did feel slightly different*', Mark projects the impression that this identity had not, however, enabled him to fully actualise himself. It is through these evaluative clauses and qualification that Mark avers that, despite having established a relationship under the term 'lesbian', it had always been experienced as inappropriate for him.

Using the habitual narrative genre, in lines 19 to 37 Mark draws us deeper into his understanding of the inappropriateness of his lesbian 'life'. Describing the nature of his relationship over its ten year duration as having not been '*very good*' and saying '*there were all sorts of things going on*', and '*so a lot of the issues got sort of side-swept*', Mark continues to characterise the relationship (lines 24 to 31) as having been unsatisfactory and dysfunctional from the point of view of both himself and his partner. He tells us through lines 31 to 37, that despite his unhappiness he '*couldn't seem to sort things out with the relationship but it seemed more than that*' and, although he had tried to find a context wherein he may encounter others with whom he could identify by joining another football club, this again had not been fruitful, bringing him to a point where he found himself unable to understand what was '*going on*'. With both his personal relationship being unsatisfactory and his 'difference' emphasised through his failure to meet others 'like himself', Mark tells us (lines 36 & 37) that he had

arrived at a point of confusion (*'what's going on... something isn't right'*), suggesting that many, if not most, of the problems in his relationship were due to a problem within himself: it was in fact *he*, rather than simply his relationship, which had not been *'right'*.

However, in this sequence, Mark does not raise the issue of gender incongruity, although whilst previously recounting the earlier events in his life he had done so. Rather, within this narrative episode Mark projects an impression of himself at this point in his life as having been *completely unaware* that this may have had any significance or relevance (*'something isn't right'...which you can't define at all'*), suggesting that, at this time, his emotions and experiences had been unintelligible to him. This, along with his earlier statement that he had not thought much about his childhood, works to distance Mark from the classic transsexual narrative in that the possibility of claiming to 'have been/known all along' or to have been aware of 'being trapped in the wrong body' is again foreclosed. Indeed, Mark suggests in lines 38 to 41 that his being unable to make sense of his predicament, complicated by his grief on the death of his grandmother, which, he indicates, was the final straw (*'I was quite down about that'*) and significantly contributed to his feeling that *'this is no good'*, that, together, led to him initially seeking psychotherapy.

In the ensuing extract, Mark continues by recounting what happened during his psychotherapy, particularly how it was there that he first began to consider his gender to be a relevant and significant issue in relation to his problems:

- 01 anyway I finally got myself there...
- 02 I think this was in the February

03 *T: is this to a counsellor or somebody like that?*
04 a psychotherapist yeah (T: right)..
05 and she started asking me about things and erm (...) going back and
asking me, what she did was ask about my family (T: yeah)
06 and the sort of things that started coming up
07 because you do go back to your childhood when you talk about that and
your brother and everything and all the rest of it...(inaudible speech)
08 but aspects of my life you know, had taken her back
09 like, no I didn't want to be bridesmaid (to a family member)
10 and I lived in trousers and err
11 yeah things like that crop up
12 and you start to think a bit more...(T: hmm)
13 and we started to talk about what erm...you know,
14 did I really want to be a boy
15 or was it just that, you know, like...to do with wanting, you know, the
male role and that sort of thing (T: hmm)
16 and I said well 'no' you know, if I could have had a choice, the answer
itself if I had a choice
17 and that's how I saw the things I wanted to do, who I want to be, sort of
thing
18 I've never liked my body anyhow, erm...
19 when I was 12 or something and my breasts started growing
20 I used to strap them with a belt (T: hmm) that didn't work (T: yeah)
21 you know, the old menstruation, I just ignored,
22 until my mother said I had to do something about it, I couldn't just
ignore it like it wasn't happening erm
23 and things like that,
24 so you start to think
25 so I explored the issues with her...

Here, Mark continues to use the habitual narrative genre, first informing us of how through his psychotherapy he had been encouraged to consider and talk about his family and his past. In line 08 he tells us how once having begun to talk to the psychotherapist, aspects of his life '*had taken her back*', which he characterises in line 09 and 10 as having been due to his masculinity. In breaking from the narrative and moving into an evaluative clause in lines 11 and 12, he then informs us that it was through a focus on these aspects of his life that he first began to consider them as having any relevance and significance ('*yeah things like that crop up and you start to think a bit more*'). In his use of the general 'you' here, Mark aligns himself with the therapist and guides us to see how, in

the context of his therapy, these issues were deemed as relevant and significant to her as, in retrospect, they had been for him. Returning to his narrative, in lines 13 to 16 he tells us that it was during his therapy sessions that the question of his relationship to 'maleness' began to emerge, where through the word 'we' he continues to work up a definition of the process as involving the professional approval of the therapist.

Whilst informing us in line 16 through the speaking position of embedded author that at that time he had begun to recognise and conclude that it was not merely a male role that he desired (*'and I said "well, no"'*), he indicates, through his following hesitant and largely incomprehensible talk (*'if I could have a choice, the answer itself if I had a choice and that's how I saw the things I wanted to do, who I want to be sort of thing'*) that at that time this was not accompanied by an immediate and straightforward recognition of a desire to *be* male. However, moving through lines 18 to 22 to describe how he had been unhappy with his bodily changes during puberty, Mark goes on to project an impression of seeming to have had such a desire.¹³ Here, Mark guides us to see that whilst during this particular time in his therapy he had not yet fully recognised his transsexuality, he had nonetheless always *been* transsexual. At the end of the extract, through lines 23 to 25, Mark then informs us that by recalling these incidences and behaviours *'you start to think'*, and that in so doing he had then *'explored the issues with [the therapist]'*. As previously, through his use of the general 'you' here, Mark again aligns himself with the therapist, directing us at

¹³ In my use of the word 'seeming' here, my intention is to draw the readers attention to the ambiguity of the impression. For example, it is not unusual for young girls to dislike their newly developing bodies during the first stages of puberty and so such an impression is not therefore necessarily wholly unique to, or indicative of, transsexuality. For a discussion of this issue in relation to lesbian women, see Lee (2001) (in press).

this juncture to acknowledge the professional support he had received in taking his explorations of his gender in this particular direction and to maintain an impression of him as 'authentic' in his transsexuality.

In the next extract, which follows immediately from the one above, Mark moves on to tell of the event which had finally led to him to the full recognition of his transsexuality:

- 01 ...and shortly after that there was the programme 'The Decision' (T: hmm, yeah)
02 and I just looked at that and erm I just thought...
03 well I was dumbstruck well,
04 you know all the chords,
05 you know the church bells are out ringing all over the place
06 like you know...it just made so much sense
07 *T: so had you not actually thought about it in those terms before, in that particular way?*
08 no, not until seeing the psychotherapist
09 where I just started to explore them erm look at them
10 when 'The Decision' came on
11 and there were all these people
12 because it was all very well talking to the psychotherapist [-]
13 and err yes it was 'The Decision' that really...erm..
14 when I watched it I thought 'gosh there are other people out there, I am not that weird' (laughter)

Using the habitual narrative genre, here, Mark pulls us straight into the moment of his epiphany. Beginning with astonishment upon first seeing the television programme 'The Decision' ('*well I was dumbstruck*'), through the metaphor of 'church bells' ('*you know, the church bells are out ringing all over the place*') he goes on to depict a scene of his movement into a loud and rapturous awakening. In seeing the television programme, the issue of his gender which he had been exploring with the psychotherapist thus at once became intelligible to him ('*like you know...it just made so much sense*'), at which point he was then interpellated as a 'transsexual' ('*when I watched it I thought "gosh there are other people out*

there, I am not that weird”).

Summary

In beginning his account from his recollections of his childhood, moving through his youth and young adulthood to the present, Mark structured his personal narrative to mirror those of conventional transsexual autobiography. However, through the interaction which took place in the construction of his narrative, Mark's account, like Eric's, significantly departed from them. Through both the content of his talk and the impressions generated through it, Mark illustrated a complex negotiation with the popular discourses of transsexuality, particularly the trope of 'having been/known all along', which in relation to the events he recounted he also did not simply cast as being interior or as 'essential' to the process through which he came to recognise himself as transsexual. In not having thought '*too much about [his] childhood*' until attending psychotherapy, he showed that rather than having *been* gender incongruous, what he had later come to see as his gender incongruity and as significant to his ensuing recognition of his transsexuality whilst viewing the television programme, had been jointly accomplished between himself and the therapist. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that Mark is therefore a suspect narrator and/or that his narrative is thus necessarily a 'suspect text' (Prosser, 1998), as in the context of psychotherapy, as Polkinghorne (1988) notes:

The point of analytic work is not to lead the analysand to create a literal description of or to recover the past. Instead, the past is to be reconstructed in the light of the client's present awareness. According to the narrative understanding of the psychoanalytic process, therapy does not consist in the healing effect of the recovery of the repressed but in the reconstruction

of a person's authentic psychoanalytic story. (p.179)

Mark's explicit revealing of his retrospective reconstruction of his past throughout his talk thus mirrored the process inherent to his psychotherapy and was therefore fundamental to, and not simply an effect of, the construction of his 'self'. In relation to past events, not having considered his childhood or being able to make sense of the problems in his 'lesbian' relationship until beginning therapy, Mark was able to perform and reconstruct again his 'authenticity' of selfhood, legitimately discredit his former lesbian past, and recycle and transform conventional transsexual discourses to produce his own unique story of his 'discovery' of, rather than his actualising of, his transsexual self.

Ben: 'Having just started out'

Ben was twenty nine years old and had been through the process of receiving a 'diagnosis' of his transsexualism but had yet to begin sex-reassignment treatment. He had been born and raised in Pakistan and at the time of the interview was living in the UK whilst studying for a postgraduate degree. Like Mark, Ben began his personal narrative of how he had come to recognise himself as being transsexual and how his decision to seek sex-reassignment had come about by first recalling his childhood, prefacing his account through the opening statement '*I think it was just a process of elimination*':

- 01 B: hmm erm I think was just a process of elimination...
02 I wouldn't say erm...having just started out..
03 I mean if you go back...to childhood I think it started out at that point
04 it was very distinct sort of male identity, you know, dressing up as a boy,
behaving like a boy, saying that I was, I was a boy, all of that was there
(T: hmm)

05 and err as sort of I grew older I think it was more...a recognition that I
wasn't (T: right)
06 simply because it was as simple...as...it was like you know, you are what
you see...and when I looked in the mirror and I took off my clothes, I
wasn't a boy
07 and so I wasn't one of these people who thought that I'd suddenly grow,
you know, a penis one day and you know, that it would be okay (T: yes)
08 I don't, I find it a little amusing when people say that (T: yes)
09 because I don't know what...if they mean that literally or...or they want
to convey to others their strong sense of identity
10 I mean at the end of the day I, I didn't feel that way
11 because I knew that, I knew that somehow things worked (T: hmm) err
you know, I mean I had my biology classes and I knew that that isn't...
12 *T: so you were under no illusion then*
13 yeah...so and that was unnerving and err...

Prefacing his account with the words '*I think*', Ben begins by adopting the authorial speaking position (that is, from his present position and point of view).

Whilst his prefacing statement functions as an abstract to his narrative as a whole insofar as it indicates what his story came to be about (Labov & Waletzky, 1967), it can also be seen to constitute an interactional move through which he signals his distance from the trope, characteristic of traditional and popular accounts, of 'having been/known all along'. Ben indicates rather, that in his case the experiences leading up to his decision to pursue gender reassignment had been complicated and perhaps more confusing than such a trope would appear to suggest. He guides us into an understanding of this distance from line 02, where he breaks from telling us what he '*wouldn't say*' to inform us that what is about to follow is from his present perspective of '*having just started out*'. This could suggest that Ben's perspective is partial and/or perhaps lacks the wisdom of those who are further along the gender reassignment process, but he works up a definition of the situation through lines 03 to 13 which directs us away from the assumption that he is not therefore as knowledgeable as he could be, and/or that his perspective is necessarily limited and incomplete.

For example, in lines 03 and 04 Ben projects an impression of himself as recognisably 'authentic' in his transsexuality which he achieves by using the habitual narrative genre to convey the general sense of his cross-gendered childhood identity. He tells us that his transsexuality '*started out*' during his childhood and that he'd had a very '*distinct sort of male identity*', involving his '*dressing*', '*behaving*' and '*saying*' he '*was a boy*'. At this juncture, in moving to establish his credentials as 'the real thing' ('*all of that was there*') Ben implicitly aligns himself with other female to males. However, in lines 05 to 07 he moves on to project an impression of his difference and individuality. He accomplishes this through contrasting himself with certain 'others', directly juxtaposing his own recollection of his gendered identity and bodily perception as a child with the claim made by some female to males that, as children, they held the belief that they were boys and that they would eventually '*grow*' a penis. Ben informs us in this juxtaposition that he '*wasn't one of these people*' and that he had experienced the '*recognition*' that he was not a boy '*because it was as simple as ...you are what you see*'.

Through lines 08 to 11 he goes on from this to guide us, through a sequence of evaluative clauses, into his own interpretation and viewpoint, speculating about what may be meant '*when people*' make such claims about their childhood gendered identity and bodily perceptions. Directing us, through his statement of 'amusement', to the irony of holding a view of oneself contrary to that which can be readily perceived, Ben implies that in his view such a claim should not be taken seriously. Through lines 10 and 11 he then moves to gain an agreement for his view by drawing upon the contrasting scientific, 'rational' discourse of biology where he goes on to explain how as a child he had known from his

'*biology classes*' that this was not the way that bodies worked. With his view temporarily honoured by me (line 12 '*so you were under no illusion then*') Ben then brings his evaluation to a close and indicates that his rational knowledge had left him feeling confused and alarmed.

2

Through these segments of talk Ben directly utilises the trope of 'having been/known all along' with the purpose of distancing himself from it. His recourse to the 'rational', scientific discourse of biology draws attention to how such a claim cannot therefore be *of itself* plausible and how the claim *in itself*, when used to convey a strong sense of one's identity rather than the 'reality' and 'truth' of experience, is misleading and deceptive. Drawing on this particular discourse and contrasting himself with others who may use it, Ben thus constructs an impression of these others as having been either uninformed and naïve as children, or as duplicitous adults who are obscuring 'reality' and 'truth'. Through this construction of these 'others' Ben projects a relatively favourable impression of himself as having been informed and intelligent as a child, and as being rational, reasonable, honest and trustworthy as an adult. His prior positioning of himself in line 02 as '*having just started out*' thus takes on particular significance as, in contrasting himself to these 'others', the implication that he is not therefore knowledgeable and that his perspective is necessarily limited and incomplete is not merely foreclosed, but alternatively, projected onto them. Against this impression of the 'others' Ben guides us to see him in his position of '*having just started out*' as unsullied by the discourses of transsexuality and therefore as having more access to the 'reality' and 'truth' of experience and being more credible in his identity.

Having positioned himself in this way Ben went on in the interview to describe the '*process of elimination*' he had gone through. In the following extract he suggests that this had begun during puberty where his reluctance to let go of his tomboy behaviour had caused considerable consternation for others who had understood this to be an early indicator of lesbianism. The extract begins with Ben describing his distress at his bodily changes during puberty and particularly the onset of menstruation, which he explains as having been difficult to communicate to his mother:

- 01 B: ... well basically when sort of when puberty hit me it was very
unnerving and I was really, really upset...
- 02 I thought, you know, 'what the hell is going on, this can't be happening to
me'...
- 03 I just hated it (T: hmm) you know, I hated you know, menstruation [-]
04 and I couldn't sort of convey my distress to my mother..
05 because she sort of took it as...'well it happens to everyone and everyone,
no one likes it' (T: hmm) you know, 'it's not something that anyone
really likes...and you'll get over it'
06 and, and she said 'okay while you're a tomboy so, you know, you're
feeling more strongly about it'(T: hmm)
07 but for her it was almost like 'well this is the time for you to get over it
all', you know, 'start being the girl that you are'
08 ...and err I remember one day I came home and my mum was err crying
09 because...one of her friends had said to her that, that if she didn't...sort
me out err that I would grow up being a lesbian and, and, and, and what
sort of future would I have in Pakistan
10 and my mother was extremely attractive, feminine, woman, you know,
very delicate (T: right) and sort of stereotypically female
11 and so...so...she said that it was a criticism on her...from her friend that
she wasn't doing enough, she wasn't taking care of me (T: right, yeah)
12 and I was just incredibly disturbed
13 and it's interesting that I wasn't....so disturbed by my mother's reaction
14 but I was more disturbed at the idea that someone would perceive me as a
lesbian (T: right)
15 ...it wasn't like, 'so what', it was like, 'no fucking way' (...) it was
like...'I don't think so'
16 *T: so it made you really angry*
17 yeah because...and it was, it was sort of a catch 22...
18 I didn't want to say okay I'm gonna be like my mum now (T: hmm)
19 but on the other hand there was just a, an inevitable reality that I was told
I would fall into...

20 which would be to, you know that I would present myself as a lesbian,
21 it was...just completely repugnant..
22 I don't mean to offend anyone who is...
23 *T: no of course not, that's how you felt about it*
24 yes, I mean it just wasn't who I was...
25 and so it was disrespectful to me (T: hmm)...right?..
26 and I didn't know...who I was...
27 erm I remember that I used to have these moments of...moments of truth,
28 I mean there were times when there was some incredibly scary moments
when I knew exactly who I was...
29 when I would, when I would, I would suddenly think 'well maybe you're
really this guy who's in this body and you need to just get out of it'...
30 and I thought 'no, no, those are those weird people out there', you know,
'the sort of people who are completely cut off from society, that
everyone laughs at...'
31 *T: so you knew about transsexuality at that point*
32 yes, yes, I did...in a vague way (T: yeah)..in the most sort of...negative
way possible erm
33 and so that was like 'no way, no way'
34 and it was like part of me just didn't want to deal with it at all (T:
hmm)... 'no way'...erm
35 so...you know, I blocked it out...
36 and what, but what did happen was that...that the idea of being classified
as a lesbian was so revolting...that I started to conform (T: right)
37 ...at the age of erm fourteen or fifteen...erm...I started appearing, you
know..
38 I reluctantly...very reluctantly..
39 and yet there was a reluctance and there was a push (T: right)..
40 there was a reluctance because I thought this is completely not me
41 and there was a push because I was like, I'm definitely not, not a lesbian
(T: yeah)
42 you know...so it was weird...can't define it, it was a very strange kind of
world
43 *T: so it was the lesser of two evils then really*
44 yeah, yeah, yeah and so I said 'okay at least I can just be like everyone
else, at least I won't be picked on and I'll be invisible' (T: hmm)
45 I just wanted to be invisible I didn't want to stand out and I was standing
out and I didn't like it erm
46 and I started conforming, started wearing...you know, the minimal...kind
of you know, attire that was required to be considered a normal
heterosexual female you know, sort of the minimal, you know...but I did
it,
47 sort of grew my hair just a little bit it was still short but it wasn't you
know, short, short
48 and you know, you could paraphrase other girls
49 and so I started doing that and,
50 and err I think the only way I sort of survived it was that I was close
friends with people, with women who could really see who I was (T:
right) who could see beyond it erm

51 I never felt comfortable enough to have a physical relationship with a
woman
52 because I hated my body so much and that is true even now,
53 I'm 29 now and I've, I have been in love twice
54 but I've never felt that I could have a physical relationship with a woman
(T: right)
55 because I feel very uncomfortable with myself,
56 but I know I'm in the minority
57 so I don't know, I mean that's what I've been told that people do at some
point identify with the lesbian community

Lines 01 to 03, as Ben takes up the speaking position of embedded author, draw us into the core of his experiences during puberty, telling us that these had been upsetting, unsettling and distressing. Through lines 05 to 07 Ben breaks into an habitual narrative style where, taking up the speaking position of embedded animator, he directs us towards his understanding of his mother's failure to appreciate the extent of his anxiety. Quoting his mother's words, Ben replays the routine responses he received from her, depicting them as having been based upon perceptions of both ordinariness and intelligibility related to his tomboy identity. In so doing, Ben projects an impression of his mother's perception as having been bound within a discursive framework of normative hetero-gender which he tells us had not only left him feeling unheard and misunderstood, but had also precluded the 'correct' recognition that Ben was someone other than he appeared to be ("*start being the girl that you are*").

In lines 08 to 11, however, Ben goes on to tell of an incident where confronted by her friend, his mother's perception was ostensibly challenged. He informs us that he arrived home one day to find his mother crying as her friend had warned her that if she didn't take steps to rectify Ben's behaviour he would '*grow up being a lesbian*' and his future in Pakistan would then be jeopardised. In lines 10 and 11 he links his characterisation of his mother as '*stereotypically female*' with

her self critical reaction to the incident, indirectly informing us of his mother's perspective concerning the possibility of his potential lesbianism. Through defining the situation as having primarily involved his mother's distress at the charge that she, as a conventional woman, was failing to fulfil her role as a mother, Ben implies that she therefore neither thought nor believed that there could be any such possibility, and rather that she should guide Ben more firmly towards the adoption of more appropriate feminine self-presentation. Through this definition Ben pulls us into his point of view that the suggestion of his potential lesbianism was nothing more than the implausible guess of a remote onlooker, and that 'lesbianism' had been an alternative though inappropriate framework to make sense of and explain his feelings and behaviour.

We are drawn further into this perspective in lines 12 to 22 where we are told that he had been '*incredibly disturbed*' by the incident, not simply due to his mother's reaction but more to his awareness that he had been *seen* by someone to potentially be a lesbian. Informing us of his angry response to this awareness in line 15, Ben indicates that alongside conventional heterosexual femininity, lesbianism had presented him with yet another set of potentialities for further misrecognition, explaining through lines 17 to 20 how, through the incident, he had felt caught between two 'inappropriate' social positions and discursive frameworks. Here Ben projects an impression of his young former self as someone who had been subjected to considerable symbolic violence through the ways in which he had been positioned, although through an evaluative clause in line 21 ('*it was...just completely repugnant*') we are guided to see that for him lesbianism had been the worst of the two positional options made available to him.

Through another evaluative clause in line 22, (*'I don't mean to offend anyone who is'*), Ben shifts from a speaking position of an embedded author of a past self to that of author in the present self and moves to counteract any impression of current homophobia.¹⁴ With this goal temporarily honoured by me (line 23), Ben then goes on through lines 24 to 26 to work up his definition of the situation further as he elaborates on his refusal of, and past feelings about lesbianism as a possible alternative identification. He informs us that it simply did not reflect his personal sense of self and that, as a result, he had understood the (mis)recognition of 'lesbian' as constituting a mark of disrespect (*'and so it was disrespectful to me (T:hmm) right?...and I didn't know who I was'*). Here, in his lexical use of the word '*right?*' Ben demands that his definition of the situation is acknowledged by me, where, by adding that he '*didn't know who [he] was*', he pulls us into his view that the potential and actual attribution of lesbianism had not simply been inappropriate but had been an unwelcome encroachment upon his developing sense of self. At this juncture Ben thus projects the impression that there was nothing 'queer' about his former self, that although his behaviour may not have satisfied the rules and expectations of the discursive framework and social practices of normative hetero-gender this did not therefore mean that he was a 'non-normative' (lesbian) individual. Through this impression Ben guides us to see him as a conventional, ordinary and moreover, 'respectable' person.

Ben continues to guide us into this view through lines 27 to 35, where he informs

¹⁴ In the context of our interaction this move was most likely made due to Ben's suspicion of my own position as lesbian. As the interview progressed it became obvious that Ben held this assumption of my identity though this was not explicitly confirmed for him by myself until later on.

us that he had had some awareness of the existence of transsexuality during this period of his life. Moving on from his prior statement in line 26, of having not known '*who [he] was*', he tells us in lines 27 to 29 that he remembers there having been '*moments of truth*' where he would know '*exactly who [he] was*'. Ben describes these moments as having been '*incredibly scary*', and again taking up the speaking position of embedded author, he tells how he had then thought that perhaps he was occupying 'the wrong body'. Through this embedded speaking position, Ben recounts his experiences firmly within the trope of 'having been/known all along', thus contradicting his prior positioning of himself as distanced from it. Such a contradiction at this point in the interview, however, does not simply indicate a troublesome 'untruth' and/or inconsistency in his account, but rather highlights how Ben's interactional moves to maintain his presentation of self are interwoven into his narrative. By positioning himself in this way here, Ben moves to sustain and justify the impression of himself as having been a 'normative' (non-lesbian) individual: we are guided to see him as having been describable within the terms of normative hetero-gender all along, albeit in an 'unconventional' manner.

Ben makes a further move to maintain the impression of his conventionality in line 30, telling us that he had rejected the idea that he was occupying 'the wrong body' as he had understood individuals who felt this way to be '*weird*' and social outcasts. As earlier in the interview, here Ben once again employs an unfavourable image of an 'other' against whom, in this instance, he directs us to apprehend the ordinariness and respectability of his former self. However, in contrast we are immediately guided to see this image of the 'other' as culturally produced and problematic. In response to my statement of recognition in line 31,

that he had previously been aware of transsexuality, he goes on in lines 32 to 35 to describe this as having been '*vague*' and '*in the most sort of...negative way possible*' therefore, at the time, foreclosing the possibility for him to recognise transsexuality as a feasible and appropriate positional option for him. By suggesting the unfavourable image of transsexuality to be culturally produced '*in the most negative way possible*', Ben moves to prevent any connection of this image with his presentation of who he now is (as transsexual) and to justify his dis-identification with transsexuality earlier on in his life. Through this move he projects an impression of himself as being a far cry from this negative image but at the same time unquestionably 'authentic' as a 'transsexual'.

Ben goes on to explain through lines 36 to 42 that in the context of having 'blocked out' the possibility of transsexuality and with '*the idea of being classified as a lesbian [being] so revolting*', he had then begun to conform to the social expectations of normative 'femaleness'. In describing his move towards conformity we are told that it involved both a '*reluctance*' and a '*push*', where by evoking the framework of a motivational 'push-pull' dynamic, he again depicts himself as having been caught between two inappropriate discursive frameworks and social positions. However here, through his use of the term '*reluctance*' rather than 'pull', he distances himself from the connotation of passivity and 'keys' the frame (Goffman, 1974) to claim his agency and particularly his resistance to the position he had been constrained to take up.¹⁵ Ben thus directs us to understand his past conformity as having been circumstantial but consciously driven and not as having been innate or 'natural'

¹⁵ As Goffman (1974) notes, when a framework is 'keyed' it 'is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else' (p.44).

to himself (*'it was a very strange kind of world'*). He leads us further towards this understanding through lines 44 to 49 through telling how he had decided to conform and what his conformity had comprised. For example, he informs us that his primary motivation had been his desire to stop *'standing out'* and to become *'invisible'*, and that his conforming, involving a minimal compromise concerning his appearance, had been accompanied by his *'paraphras[ing] other girls'*. Here, Ben distances himself from conformity at the level of both content and the form of his narrative: the former through his description of *'paraphrasing'*, suggesting a conscious and selective mimicry of *'other girls'* whereby the performance was therefore not *'of himself'* but a copy of others; and the latter through his use of the general *'you'* (*'and you know, you could...'*), through which he locates the performance outside of himself, as something he might *do* rather than *be*. In so doing, Ben projects an impression of his former, conforming female self as having been someone who *'did'* rather than *'was'*, forestalling the potential for his prior conformity to be seen as discrediting to his current self.

Through a framework of *'survival'* in line 50, we are then guided to see, however, that throughout his earlier conformity who Ben was had nonetheless remained. Although he did not know at this point in his life *'who [he] was'* (as we are told in line 26), he informs us, through the speaking position of current author, that his *'true self'* had later been recognised by close female friends who had been able to see *'beyond'* his performance of conformity. At this juncture Ben again contradicts his earlier positioning as distanced from the trope of having *'been/known all along'* as he works up his account firmly within these

terms. In (re)positioning himself in this way, Ben aligns himself within the master discourses of transsexuality which pervade popular autobiographical accounts and in so doing projects an impression of his 'authenticity' as a transsexual. However, he does not align himself with other female to males. For example, after telling us through lines 51 to 55 that he had '*been in love twice*' but had '*hated [his] body so much*' that he had not, and still could not have a physical relationship with a woman, he informs us in lines 56 and 57 of his knowledge that this places him '*in the minority*' amongst female to males. Supporting this knowledge claim ('*but I know*') by distancing himself from direct engagement with lesbian 'others' ('*that's what I've been told*'), Ben directs us to concur with his definition of his situation as being '*in the minority*' and to see him as someone who stands apart from other female to males. Differentiating himself from others on the basis of having refused any identification with lesbianism, Ben projects an impression that he therefore has more individuality, 'authenticity' and indeed integrity of the 'self'.

Immediately following the above, Ben described his female conformity as continuing from his early teens until his mid twenties, reiterating that it had been a '*minimal*' '*compromise*' and that throughout these years he had '*just blocked everything else out*', gaining his only '*relief*' from friends. I then asked Ben about his close friendships and enquired whether their recognition and understanding of who he was had ever been a topic he had discussed with them. He responded by telling the story of one particular incident where the question of his identity had arisen and how it had been dealt with by himself and the friend involved. As the story tells of a specific past event, having almost all of the

structural properties identified by Labov and Waletzky (1967) as constituting a traditional narrative, it is presented in this form:

01 *T: when you say your friends could see through this façade (...) did they know anything, had you ever talked to them about how you felt?*

Orientation

02 B: Well, there was one person in particular that I was extremely close to,
that I had very deep feelings for, you know,
03 which I only discovered...which I wasn't even acknowledging to myself
(T: right)
04 and I knew her for ten years
05 and I think she was my best friend
06 and I suppose it was like being in a relationship I mean the whole ...
interaction was...the way it would be between two people in a
relationship (T: yeah)
07 only nothing was ever said
08 but she somehow...I think always saw it,

Complicating Action

09 I mean I remember I was sitting in her room once
10 and she just said 'oh' you know, you know, 'this is a mistake...you know
what happened to you is a mistake'
11 and I said 'what the fuck are you talking about'
12 and she said 'oh well, you know what I'm talking about so why are you
pretending'
13 and she was laughing she was joking, she was, (T: yeah)
14 I think she was nervous
15 and she said, you know, 'you should have been a guy' and she said
'you're a guy' you know, 'you're just stuck in this body'
16 and I was like 'why don't you just shut the fuck up'
17 and I just left, left her house
18 and I remember I was driving home
19 and I was just shit scared (T: hmm)
20 because I thought 'she's right'

Embedded Evaluation

21 *T: I guess that was really frightening that she'd actually seen that*
22 B: yeah but it was really scary...because...
23 I didn't know what that left me with...I didn't know what I could do
then...it was weird because...

Present Evaluation

24 now when I look back I think I should have thanked her and you know,

done something about it
25 and saved of all these years of denial and, you know, memory and
confusion
26 but I just wasn't ready I guess...
27 I needed a push and I wasn't getting a push (T: yeah)

Resolution

28 I mean she just laughed about it,
29 if she had said 'look Ben' you know, 'you've got a problem and you need
to deal with it (T: yeah) and I'm gonna help you and you cannot say shut
the fuck up and leave the room (T: hmm), I'm not going to let you do
that' (T: hmm) and you know, and 'talk to me' you know...(T: hmm)
30 if she had said 'we have to deal with this' (T: hmm)
31 I would have
32 I needed a push
33 but she...I mean at the risk of sounding boastful I was more intelligent
than she was (...)
37 and so it was 'okay, whatever' you know...
41 all she could do was laugh about it...
42 and of course it put me you know...

In the orientation sequence of his narrative, Ben characterises the relationship within which the incident concerning his identity had occurred within the terms of the romance genre. Ben had 'very deep feelings' for his friend which remained largely unacknowledged until the friendship had ended although he was aware they had been more than 'just friends'. Lasting ten years, the relationship between them and their interaction had exceeded what could be seen to be a deep and platonic attachment, mirroring rather, the dynamics characteristic of an intimate and romantic relationship. Despite this mirroring, neither Ben or his friend ever talked about it, foreclosing the potential for the friendship to develop into an explicit expression of the loving, romantic relationship it really was. Thus Ben locates the incident concerning his identity in the context of a 'love story', involving himself and his friend (the protagonists) in a close relationship that neither initially and/or consciously recognised as signifying a deep and romantic attachment.

We are directed away from reading the romance as 'lesbian', however, as Ben guides us to understand both the romance genre he utilises and the 'relationship' between himself and his friend as being heterosexual in kind. For example, in the complicating action sequence of his narrative, Ben's telling of the incident where his 'true' (male) identity had been seen is told *as an example* of how and why his friend had perceived their relationship as being beyond the bounds of ordinary friendship. Taking up the speaking position of embedded animator, Ben reinforces our heterosexual reading throughout the sequence as he replays the conversation which had taken place. Here, quoting his friend's words, he informs us that she could see through his performances of (female) conformity and recognise 'who' he *really* was, a male in the body of a female, and reconstructs the atmosphere of the interaction as he tells us of his friend's nervous laughter and joking and his responses of anger and denial. In the sequence Ben depicts a scene which had been uncomfortable for them both and in which his friend had recognised that their friendship was 'more than just friends' *because* she had had an awareness that he was *not* a woman. For Ben, it was upon leaving the house that he had felt most of the impact of the incident, experiencing this as an 'epiphany'. Telling us that he was '*driving home*', he symbolises the moment as being a journey towards self recognition: coming home to 'himself'. On his way home he had been '*shit scared*', as despite his anger and denial at the interaction which had taken place, he had recognised that what she had said had made sense ('*I thought "she's right"*').

Ben moves on in the evaluation sequence to direct us to interpret the event both as it was at the time and from his present position and perspective. In the embedded section of the sequence, he tells us that he had been frightened by this

recognition, as it had generated feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, whereas in the present evaluation sequence, Ben indicates that he now sees the incident as a missed opportunity. He tells us, for example, that with hindsight he wishes that he had '*thanked her*' and '*done something about it*' as then the years of '*denial*', '*memory*' and '*confusion*' he had subsequently lived through would have been avoided. He judges, however, that his inaction indicated that he had not been ready to seriously consider sex-reassignment, stipulating that the '*push*' in this direction which he needed had not been forthcoming. Ben thus construes his past unreadiness as having been caused by social and interpersonal circumstances and in so doing, guides us to absolve him from the responsibility for missing his opportunity.

In the resolution sequence of his narrative, Ben goes on to provide support for this interpretation. Here he juxtaposes what actually happened in the closure of the incident with what might have happened had his social and interpersonal circumstances been different. He tells us, for example, that what actually happened was that his friend had '*just laughed about it*'. She had not taken the incident seriously either at the time it occurred or afterwards, even though for Ben it had had a deep and frighteningly personal significance. Thus, whilst his friend's insight into who he was had forced Ben to acknowledge an aspect of himself (his maleness) which he had attempted to '*block*' out, her lack of recognition of what her insight may have suggested to him had left him without both the support and necessary impetus to explore the issue further.

Using the hypothetical narrative genre in lines 29 to 32 of the sequence, Ben then offers an alternative ending to the story. Here he guides us into his preferred

outcome. Through the speaking position of embedded animator Ben moves back in time, taking up the role of his friend and re-enacting her confrontation in the form that he wishes it had been. Rather than laughing about it and allowing Ben to walk away, *this* friend challenges Ben to face up to his '*problem*'. She tells him that she is going to help him, that she wants him to talk to her about it and that his problem is something which they have to deal with together. Through this hypothetical reconstruction of the incident we are guided into how Ben feels he needed his friend to act in order for him to have benefited from her confrontation. Had she understood the implications of her insight and shown support, care and concern rather than laughing about it, she would have provided Ben with the '*push*' he needed to seek the solution - sex-reassignment.

In telling the story of this incident Ben evidences the latency of his transsexuality and shows the missed opportunity to have been, like his conforming behaviour, the outcome of social circumstance and personal location. Whilst in his hypothetical conclusion he suggests the story to be one of having been let down by his friend and consequently disappointment in a love relationship, he went on after telling the story to defend his friend's (in)action in similar social terms, framing the incident within the context of social understandings of transsexuality in Pakistan:

T: [...] maybe she was just as scared as you and didn't really know what you could do

B: yes, or, or maybe consider it inappropriate (T: hmm) you know, I mean to me she, I mean living in Pakistan it's not exactly the best thing you can do for yourself...in terms of society (T: yeah) and, and people's reactions...[-] most of them are shunned and marginalised...I mean, I think most...people that I know of are...you know, you just laugh at them, there's a particular term we use for them and you, they're just

considered to be freaks and they are people that you invite to weddings and they sing songs for you and you throw some money to them you know (T: right) give them some money, it's like a very sort of condescending, patronising relationship with these weird creatures from Mars [-] people who are really...fucked up...not people who erm...you know, who, who err...have found a solution but people who have...gone off on the wrong track (T: right) never to return..

Through this description Ben accounts for his friend's failure to give him the '*push*' that he had needed and guides us to see the incident - the unacknowledged relationship, the interaction between himself and his friend, the disappointment in love, and his inability to have made the decision to seek sex-reassignment without his friend's support - as unfortunate, though understandable in view of the social and cultural context in which it had taken place.

I asked Ben at this point, when he had therefore decided to seek sex-reassignment. In response he again used the form of a story to describe not only when but 'how' his decision had eventually come about. Ben recounted two episodes in his story, both of which had preceded his decision but had ultimately led him to it. In the first, he described how, having had a further '*intense*' close relationship with another friend which similarly ended in '*confusion*', he eventually started to consider the possibility that he might be a lesbian who was simply '*not dealing with it*' and so had arranged to meet a small group of lesbian women to talk to. He recounted how upon meeting the women he '*instinctively felt like [he] did not belong*' and that, on arriving home and discussing his reaction and feelings with a friend who had come to visit, she had berated him for '*writing them off*' and being unwilling to seriously consider the possibility that lesbianism may still prove to be the answer to his '*problems*'. The following extract comprises the second episode of Ben's story, where he recounts how, in

their argument concerning his attitude towards the idea of being lesbian, his friend finally asked him if he wanted '*a sex change*':

- 01 and you know and I, and then this friend again said to me very
casually... 'so do you want to have a sex change is that what you're
telling me?'
- 02 ...and I remember brushing my teeth and she was sitting outside and she
just said it
- 03 and I remember just staring at myself in the mirror...and thinking 'oh my
God, she's right'
- 04 I mean I knew she wasn't saying it the right way (T:hmm)
- 05 I mean even when she said it,
- 06 I'm not being politically correct, I just thought 'I'm not gonna change
something I'm just gonna fix it' (T: yeah)
- 07 I mean I felt that way not just because I've read it since and I know (T:
yeah) that's the appropriate way of saying it
- 08 I just thought 'there's no change'
- 09 but I did feel 'damn it she's right and I can't tell her that'
- 10 and I said 'of course not, are you crazy?' ...I said 'don't talk nonsense' (T:
hmm)
- 11 you know I thought 'it has to be but there's no way I'm gonna
acknowledge that'
- 12 and after that for a whole year I completely blocked it out
- 13 because I didn't do well in my exams
- 14 and I've normally done well in school (T: right)
- 15 and I thought this is controlling my life (T: yeah) and I'm not going to let
it control my life...
- 16 and I thought that was my [subject] degree, you know, I didn't do well
erm (...)
- 20 and I thought 'if I think about all this I'm just gonna', you know...

Quoting the words of his friend in line 01, Ben informs us that during their conversation his friend had eventually properly understood his protestations towards lesbianism, recognising them as indicating that perhaps sex-reassignment was the preferable and more appropriate solution for him. For Ben this had been an(other) epiphany: a moment in which he himself had fully recognised 'who' *he* really was. Recalling the detail of the scene, in this sequence (line 03) he literally comes 'face-to-face' with *himself* in the mirror, where the mirror acts as a as metaphor for his 'facing' up to his situation for the

first time. At this point, Ben then breaks from the narrative and through a series of evaluative clauses (lines 03 to 07) conveys his point of view concerning this epiphany. Contrasting the way in which his friend had framed her question in terms of '*sex change*' with how he had responded, he tells us that at the time he had understood himself as necessitating a '*fix*' rather than a '*change*'. Ben thus once again locates his experience firmly within the trope of 'having been/known all along' which he posits as being the appropriate '*way*' in which his experience should be understood. Locating his experience of his epiphany thus, he directs us to understand it as having been the discovery of a personal truth existing beyond its uniqueness to himself, and at the same time as pre-existing his later and more consciously informed knowledge. Here, Ben not only projects an impression of his 'authenticity' as a 'transsexual', but distinguishes this from the earlier recognition episode by signalling his shift into 'membership' of a (transsexual) collectivity: that he '*knew*' that his friend '*wasn't saying it the right way*' and that he felt the need to '*fix*' rather than '*change*' his '*sex*', evidencing the 'truth' after all of the trope of 'having been/known all along'. Seen in the context of his story, Ben's adoption of the trope does not, however, constitute a contradiction to his earlier distanced position, but is rather the signification of the moment of his changing consciousness and personal transformation: the constitutive moment for the beginning of his new retrospective construction of his self.

After the series of evaluative clauses, in lines 08 to 10 Ben returns to his replay of the conversation, informing us that he did not reveal the moment of the epiphany he had experienced to his friend. In spite of his recognition that she had correctly understood him, albeit in inaccurate terms, he had denied the 'truth' of her insight, steering her instead to view the development of her assessment of the

situation as misguided. Bringing his story to an end, Ben tells us that for the year following the incident he had then '*completely blocked it out*'. Whilst this echoes the anticlimactic conclusion of his earlier story in that, once again, the resolution of his pursuit of sex reassignment does not occur, we are guided throughout his recounting to understand it in this instance as arising through Ben's agency rather than its obstruction. Aware that this 'predicament' was '*controlling*' his life, he had recognised that if he continued towards a resolution at that point, the potential for his academic failure, already signalled by poor results in his undergraduate examinations, would be increased. This recognition stimulated Ben to take control ('*and I'm not going to let it control my life*'), and he forestalled the resolution (sex-reassignment) and his emotional need to pursue it by '*completely block[ing] it out*'. Ben thus recontextualises his (in)action in the anticlimactic conclusion to this story in positive terms. With a change in consciousness and his personal transformation underway he had been able to act, deciding, with his new found knowledge of 'who' he *really* was, to forestall becoming 'himself' until his personal circumstances were more favourable.

In this episode of this story Ben pulls us into his past-time 'world' of both the events which had taken place and his experience of them, guiding us to perceive the emergence of his (previously latent) transsexuality. Through the prior foray into lesbianism and the conclusion of his positive (in)action, he projects an impression of himself as a rational, sensible and responsible person – a creditable transsexual who firstly, had explored all the potential options available to him and who finally, in the exceptional circumstances which he later 'found himself', had been able to 'get his priorities right'. In the following extract, which

followed immediately on from the one above, Ben continues to project this impression as he goes on to tell how, after '*completely block[ing] it out*', he had eventually reached his decision to pursue professional conformation of 'who' he *really* was:

01 I completely, completely blocked it out (T: hmm)
02 and it was only when I did the exams, got through,
03 I said 'I have now...I have to deal with this thing', you know (T: hmm) 'I
cannot let it go on...'
04 and I remember I got to a point where...I was so distressed,
05 this was September 96,
06 I just felt...'this is the only option this is the only...err unexplored option
(T: hmm)
07 and it's the, the only likely one...erm
08 that nothing else has worked (T: right)
09 so unless there's something else out there that I've never heard of
10 again, well I don't know, this is the only thing that makes sense to me'
(T: right)
11 and so I was desperate
12 and I looked up a number and I went to see someone...and
13 *T: so who did you go to see?*
14 I went to see (counsellor)? (T: right)
15 yeah and I poured my heart out to her
16 and err...she was like...you know
17 I think I was really in complete agony (T: hmm)...and despair you know
erm...
18 and I remember using, calling that number and hanging up lots of
times...(T: hmm)
19 but finally I called one day
20 and I said 'I have to see you' and all that...
21 and I don't know if she did the right thing or not
22 but she actually said to me...'you're transsexual'
23 ...and I said, I immediately said, 'how can you say that to someone
you've seen for twenty minutes?'
24 *T: yeah, what did you tell her?*
25 erm...I told her everything that I've told you basically (T: right) but
probably...in even more detail (...) just elaborated on what I've told you
(T: hmm)
26 and I said, and I remember thinking 'is she doing the right thing, is she
supposed to tell me this', you know?...
27 *T: so you didn't have much trust*
28 well it wasn't trust I think it was a combination of things
29 I think you want to be responsible to yourself (T: hmm, hmm) which if
you've waited this long (T: yeah) you want to be responsible to yourself
(T: hmm)
30 you want to be sure the other person is being responsible to you

31 *T: yes it's not something you take lightly is it*
32 no and it's also something that is...it's ground breaking (T: hmm)
33 I mean it's monumental, for someone to just say that this is who you are
(T: hmm)
34 and someone that you are told is, is the specialist in the field..
35 you know...it's like you know, the ground was taken from, you know,
beneath me
36 and err I mean in a way it was like 'yes that makes sense'
37 and in a way it was like 'well how do you know?' (T: hmm)
38 and of course you can say how does anyone know, you know, when you
talk to someone for half an hour...
39 but having said that she said that she knew that I wasn't lying to her (T:
hmm)
40 she said that she could tell that what I was saying to her was true,
41 she saw that I was in a lot of pain
42 and she said that she would normally not tell someone so soon..
43 she wouldn't necessarily, you know, announce her diagnosis (T: right)
44 but she just felt well...it will put me out of my misery
45 *T: so she felt so strongly about it she just said it*
46 yes, yeah and I remember not getting much sleep that weekend
47 *T: hmm I'm not surprised*
48 and just thinking... 'oh-my-God..'(...)
49 and I just remember just feeling like I was completely on another planet
where I didn't want to talk to anyone I didn't, you know (T: hmm)
50 I was completely shit scared...
51 and yet a part of me said...something had snapped (T: hmm) and, you
know I was scared..
52 but you know it was like somehow all that confusion and anguish,
suddenly there was...was...a break (T: right, yeah)..
53 you know, like when you reach a dead end (T: hmm, hmm)...and...and
you're.. and you're forced to like...you know, stop there (T: hmm)..
54 and you think...and so your momentum is broken
55 and yet that's what you've been looking for anyway (T: yeah, yeah)
56 I can't explain it...and that's how it felt...that was two years ago.

Ben begins by informing us that the period in which he had '*completely blocked it out*' had lasted until he had successfully completed his undergraduate examinations, whereupon he had then felt that the time to deal with his problem had arrived. Describing himself as having been '*distressed*', he draws us through lines 06 to 10 into his point of view at the time. Taking up the speaking position of embedded author and re-enacting his past interior dialogue, he tells us how he had felt about the option of 'transsexuality' which he was about to pursue: that

this was the *'only unexplored option'*, the *'only thing that ma[de] sense to [him]'* and given that *'nothing else ha[d] worked'* it was *'the only likely one'*. Here, by employing a framework of 'distress', Ben again projects an impression of rationality, sensibility and responsibility, guiding us to see his action of making contact with the counsellor (line 12) as having been emotionally driven but at the same time thoroughly considered. Moving on to tell of his meeting with the counsellor, Ben then shifts the emphasis on to his emotionality as he tells us that he was *'desperate'* and in being *'in complete agony...and despair'* he had *'poured [his] heart out to her'*. In making this move Ben directs us to understand that whilst he was sensible, responsible and rational his predicament had, nonetheless, been a highly emotional ordeal, the seriousness of which we are guided to apprehend as he breaks from the sequence of events and informs us (line 18), that prior to the meeting he had called the counsellor many times but had not been able to go through with the call.

Having provided the emotional and psychological context for his meeting with the counsellor, in line 19 Ben continues with his narrative of the meeting, restarting from the point where *'finally [he] called one day'*. From here, Ben leads us straight into the meeting itself, framing what he is about to tell by informing us of his uncertainty of the propriety of the counsellor's actions. Through the speaking positions of embedded animator and author in lines 22 and 23, we are pulled into the scene of the interaction. Quoting the counsellor and then himself at the time, he tells us that she had recognised and told him of his transsexuality and that he, surprised by her sudden declaration, had then challenged her. Here, through the words of the counsellor, Ben provides us with the 'proof' of his transsexuality but at the same time he distances himself from

her, which suggested to me (line 24) that perhaps he had felt that she had not been told enough to justify her arrival at such a conclusion . In his response - that what was being told during the interview had also been told to the counsellor '*in even more detail*' - we are led away from this suggestion, at which point Ben then returns to his distancing from the counsellor and leads us into understanding his reservation concerning her action.

As he reiterates his earlier reflection (line 21) in the context of how he had felt at the time of the meeting ('*I remember thinking "is she doing the right thing, is she supposed to tell me this"*') his distance from the counsellor is then understood by me as indicating his lack of trust. In the speaking position of present author in line 28, Ben however, refuses this interpretation and goes on to explain through lines 29 and 30 that what lay behind his uncertainty of the counsellor's declaration was not a lack of trust in her professional knowledge but, rather, the issue of being '*responsible*'. Here, he again projects the impression of rationality, intelligence and responsibility, against which he indicates that the counsellor had not acted as responsibly as he would have liked or expected. Having gained a temporary agreement from myself with regard to the necessity of '*responsibility*' in such circumstances (line 31), he then moves to guide us, through a series of evaluative clauses, into his view of the counsellor's declaration.

In lines 32 to 34 he describes the pronouncement of transsexuality by a '*specialist in the field*' as '*groundbreaking*' and '*monumental*', which in his use of the general '*you*' ('*I mean it's monumental, for someone to just say that this is who you are*', '*and someone that you are told is the specialist in the field*'), he guides us to understand as being generalisable to all those who experience it.

Here, Ben aligns himself with other transsexuals and in so doing, projects an impression of the ordinariness and commonality of his personal and particular reaction to his counsellor's pronouncement. Shifting back into the context of his specific experience, in lines 35 to 37 Ben tells us that upon being told of his transsexuality he had felt that '*the ground was taken from [...] beneath [him]*' and that although the counsellor's declaration in itself was unsurprising to him and had made '*sense*', at the same time he had had difficulties in fully accepting what he was being told. After directing us to see the rationale behind this experience in line 38, where in using the general 'you' he assumes popular and general agreement as to the improbability of being able to fully '*know*' something about a person in only '*half an hour*', thus forestalling any discrediting due to his admission of his questioning, he then moves in lines 39 to 45 to justify both what his counsellor had '*known*' and the declaration she had made. Here, Ben indicates that upon his challenge to the counsellor (line 23) a conversation about his concerns had then ensued.

Using the habitual narrative genre, he conveys a general sense of a conversation that had taken place and directs us, by adopting the speaking position of embedded animator, into his counsellor's perspective. Telling us that she had broken her usual procedure and had '*announce[d] her diagnosis*' because she could see that Ben was telling her the truth and wanted to alleviate his '*pain*' and '*misery*', Ben accounts (on her behalf) for both her knowledge of him and her seeming lack of responsibility. Projecting the impression of her professional credibility here, Ben guides us to apprehend both his personal sincerity and his '*authenticity*' as a transsexual, and to see her action, being based upon the '*truth*' that Ben had told to her, as having been responsible after all. Gaining a

temporary agreement with this definition of the situation by me (line 45), Ben then goes on to inform us of how her 'official' confirmation of 'who' he *really* was had then affected him.

From line 46 until the end of the extract Ben continues, through both the content and form of his narrative, to emphasise the severity of his predicament. In lines 46 to 50 Ben depicts a scene of both shock and fear, which he intensifies in line 48 by dragging us, through the slow and drawn out lexical expression of '*oh-my-God*', into his past feeling of emotional paralysis. Moving into a series of evaluative clauses from line 51, he directs us into an understanding of his past emotional state. Here we are told that '*something had snapped*' and that alongside his fear he had felt a '*break*' from his prior feelings of '*confusion and anguish*'. Upon using the term '*break*' in line 52, Ben shifts into a slower pattern of speech and punctuates his talk through lines 53 to 56 with pauses. Through this shift in his pattern of speech, he projects the gravity and significance of what he is telling, which comprises his description of the '*break*' from his prior emotional state. Here, describing the '*break*' through the metaphor of '*a dead end*', Ben depicts himself as having been brought to an emotional and psychological halt ('*and so your momentum is broken*', '*and yet that's what you've been looking for anyway*'). In both the content and form of his talk in this section of his narrative, Ben projects the impression that his experience of the 'official confirmation' by the counsellor was one of resignation rather than affirmation. By so doing, he directs us to see his process of self actualisation as having been one of acceptance and not self (re)construction through which we are then led to concur with the conclusion, reached by both himself and the counsellor, that he is indeed an 'authentic' transsexual.

Summary

Like Mark, Ben constructed his personal narrative, from childhood to adulthood, as not dramatically departing from the types typically found within transsexual autobiography. However, similarly to both Eric and Mark, his oral recounting showed a complex engagement both with the familiar and popular trope of 'having been/known all along' and the discourses and representations of the transsexual self. In particular, Ben pointed to the importance of cultural difference and positioning. Born and raised in Pakistan, in Ben's account both he and the other Pakistani born protagonists in his account did not simply engage with the white, Western representations of transsexuality, typical of transsexual autobiography to date. The specific and negative understanding of transsexuality (and indeed lesbianism) in Pakistan were shown to be highly significant to the 'knowledges' of gender, sexuality and deviance which Ben had to negotiate, both in respect of his own self awareness and in his relations with others, and played a substantial role in the difficulties he faced throughout the '*process of elimination*' he went through in coming to recognise himself as transsexual.

Like Mark, Ben constructed his narrative to tell a story of self discovery. However, through the impressions of himself which he generated in the interactional context of the interview, Ben specifically worked to construct himself as a 'reluctant transsexual' - refusing to locate his agency as a transsexual in his own prior knowledge and belief of his own transsexuality and rather, locating it as residing in his own preferred 'rational' and 'responsible' exploration of all other possibilities before coming to such a conclusion. Through this construction, Ben sought to establish his 'authenticity' as transsexual as

residing firmly *within* his otherwise 'reluctant' selfhood, as being fundamentally interior to himself, but as having emerged in spite of, rather than because of, the transsexual discourses he later accessed. In so doing, far from simply 'mimicking' other transsexual accounts, Ben largely resisted the self-representations of the 'knowing and then simply becoming' of published transsexual autobiography. Through recourse to culture, rationality and science, and his story of struggle and indeed suppression of his transsexuality, Ben constructed his identity within the context of the interview to be both more credible and creditable - as being beyond the stereotypical and formulaic representations of other transsexuals and being rather, the 'real thing'.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of how the interviewees worked to project and maintain impressions of themselves as 'authentic' transsexuals and creditable individuals in the context of the interview. As they interacted with me they were aware that I constituted a 'knowing other', but one who may initially have been seen as potentially hostile. To present myself as a 'willing reader', I acted at all times to *affirm* the projected impressions the interviewees sought me to apprehend and thus, in the context of their interviews, they did not have to engage with lack of understanding, challenge, disbelief, rejection, or any particular investment in their gender and their gendered bodies which (as Chapter Four will show) will affect the responses of others to their stories of self.

In establishing their authenticity the interviewees, each in their different ways, engaged in negotiations with the medical 'story' of transsexuality, illustrating

their 'post-colonial' relationships to medicine (see Frank, 1995, Chapter Two above). For example, Mark's account, in its consciously retrospective construction, follows the *form* of the classic medical story, from troubled gender dysphoric childhood to adult self-recognition, but in its *content* casts doubt upon that story's status as 'authentic' as this story relies upon the continual presence of *awareness* of 'gender trouble' and the struggle to actualise the gender one felt oneself always to *be*. Moreover, in the diagnostic encounter and in their subsequent and ongoing 'treatment' the interviewees showed themselves as actively intervening in the medical process. Ben, for example, *challenged* his therapist as she provided her diagnosis and Eric *negotiated* his hormonal treatment in the light of his understanding of his personal circumstances. Thus, the interviews showed these individuals to be active participants in the medical verification and construction of their transsexual identities, rather than simply the passive products of them.

These narratives were therefore not simply produced through 'transsexuality' as a medically constructed 'master narrative' of self: as the interviews demonstrated, individuals cannot be read simply *as transsexuals* as if this is sufficient to account for their consciousness of self – such a reading is reductive. Therapists and psychiatrists are gatekeepers to the medical interventions essential to bodily transformation and both therapist and the client/patient are aware of the what the diagnostic encounter should comprise, engaging in that encounter in the light both of that knowledge and their individual investments in its outcome. For the client/patient this is the diagnosis which gives them access to 'treatment' and for the psychiatrist this is maintenance of professional authority, even as the

client/patient is also 'knowledgeable'. Scholars who only address the diagnostic encounter and the search for validation in the context of medical discourses and practices *will* inevitably find that individuals seeking diagnosis only have variations on one 'traditional' story to tell. However if accounts are taken beyond that limited context active critical engagement with the 'master narrative' becomes visible and can be seen to work towards a more nuanced individual subjectivity, constructed beyond, as well as in a relationship to, medical discourses and practices.

As was highlighted in the Introduction, the dominant paradigm for discussion, analysis and representation of transsexual subjectivity is that produced through the male to female transsexual 'career', leaving female to males lacking both critical attention and opportunities for self-recognition through access to representations of female transsexuality: as Mark said, although he was aware of male to female transsexuality, it had not occurred to him it could happen the other way around. The significance to most of the interviewees of the 'The Decision' television programme in coming to recognise themselves *as* transsexual perhaps *became* significant because it was the first to deal solely with females to males, providing a framework against and through which their 'authentic' subjectivities could be conveyed. However, for Eric, the popular accounts of male to female transsexuality and friendship with male to female transsexuals provided, for him, a more useful framework within which to locate himself and identify, not perhaps as a *transsexual*, but as a parent and a spouse.

'Authenticity' was variously constructed through self-positionings in a negative relation to particular 'others', notably heterosexual women and lesbians, and for

Eric other female to males, rather than in a positive relation to the gender of transition. In other words, in none of these accounts is 'authenticity' claimed through the reference to an always-known desire to realise oneself *as a man* or to have been aware of having been 'born in the wrong body', as Prosser (1998) suggests. Despite Ben's claim that he was aware he did not want to change his sex but rather 'fix' it, his deferral of action and repeated statements of his need for a 'push' towards self-identification, deny an impelling desire to realise an essential 'male' self, but rather indicate a need for him to be *socially* apprehended as other than a 'woman'.

In each case also, 'authenticity' is constructed through dominant constructions of homo/heterosexuality. Ben found himself unable to have sex with a woman as a woman, therefore casting his transsexual manhood as firmly heterosexual and, similarly, Mark rejects both heterosexual womanhood and lesbian identification, being now a heterosexual man. Although Eric's account could be read as 'queer' in relation to his husband (as his husband could be in relation to him), his projection of this as resulting from his 'responsible' acceptance of his marital obligation to his husband, rather than the realisation of desire, leads perhaps to their being cast as an 'odd' rather than a 'queer' couple. Eric therefore directs a reading of his 'authenticity' as a transsexual through his accounts of his struggle with female gender and his 'authenticity' 'as a responsible individual through accounts of his cognisance of his marital obligation.

Although the body, in its originary female form, was cast as problematic to the realisation of self-hood especially through menstruation and the development of

breasts, these accounts of emerging transsexual identity do not locate the body as the critical point of focus for the recognition of gender incongruity. Rather feelings of not 'fitting' as individuals within normative female gender stimulated senses of social and personal incongruity. Having struggled in their various ways with this lack of fit they became intelligible to themselves as transsexuals through complex interactions with others, with therapy, psychiatry and representations of transsexuality. Having achieved that recognition, the process of accounting for it (and thus signalling their 'authenticity') was retrospective (and consciously so, in Mark's case). Whilst this concurs with Prosser's view that autobiography, either written or oral, always involves the retrospective production of coherence, the shifts in positioning which occurred in this dynamic, interactional narrative construction cast doubt upon his opinion that behind the narrative lies the 'real transsexual' who ultimately has only one 'authentic' story to tell.

Contrary to Hausman's (1995) argument of the 'discursive hegemony' (p.143) of transsexual autobiography, the analysis of the personal narratives of these three interviewees showed them to be critical readers who, in constructing their own 'authentic' identities as transsexuals within an interactional context, did not simply 'mimic' the discourses and self-representations of others. Throughout the narratives, each rather engaged in a complex negotiation with these discourses and self-representations and significantly, sought to establish their personal distance from them. Whilst Prosser's (1998) concept of the 'recycling' of transsexual discourses through the process of moving from 'life to text to life' (p.125) was shown to be valid in the context of the interviews, these processes,

however, were shown to involve more than merely 'textual exchange' (p.105) as the interviewees could not simply convey their understanding of self and their interpretation of their life histories without direct engagement with myself and other potential readers as their audience. This dynamic produced less formulaic constructions of 'selves' and accounts than those of written autobiography, suggesting that the literature-based analyses and critique of transsexual narratives such as those of Prosser (1998), Hausman (1995) and Stone (1991) cannot simply be mapped on to narratives generated within a dynamic social context where different imperatives operate. Throughout the interviews, the construction of self had to be *actively* produced, managed and sustained, involving gaining recognition of their 'authenticity' as both transsexuals *and* as individuals through interactional as well as narrative strategies: through strategies of talk as well as forms of story.

Standing between Hausman's (1995) view that the 'authentic' transsexual story can only be told through the discourses which brought it into being and Stone's (1991) view that there are multiple and divergent stories yet to be told, these narratives show that the contiguities between narratives do not constitute straightforward re-tellings of an already-written 'master narrative', nor did the narratives represent 'original', subversive accounts. Rather, cultural differences, social circumstances and relationships with others, (notably here Eric's marriage, Ben's relationships with his mother and close friends and Mark's 'lesbian' relationships) were seen to significantly affect both the processes of recognition and realisation of transsexual identity, the manner in which transition could be

undertaken and understood and the active (re)constructions of 'authenticity' in their accounts.

Moving from interviewees narrative accounts of the processes of self-identification and self-representation as they came initially to recognise themselves as transsexual (in the specific context of their interaction with myself), Chapter Four moves on to consider these latter two issues in more depth. Beginning with a critique of scholars' views on the significance of embodiment to gendered identity and progressing to analyses of the accounts of the interviewees, the Chapter explores the ways in which past and present knowledge of the interviewees as particularly embodied and gendered individuals by these 'knowing others' impacted upon their recognition and acceptance of them as men.

Chapter Four

Our Bodies, Our Selves?

Are there constraints which bodies themselves place on the discourses through which they are – or may become known? Not, it would seem if we accept a thorough-going social constructionism.

(Segal, 1994:227)

Introduction

The previous chapter focused upon the construction and representation of the 'authenticity' of unique transsexual selfhood through narrative construction in interaction. However, individuals are not simply 'known' only through their talk. In social contexts we are all apprehended as *embodied* individuals, this being of particular significance to transsexuals in that changes in their physical bodies are integral to the processes of gaining recognition by others of the 'authenticity' of the gendered identities being claimed. Drawing upon the accounts of all of the fourteen female to male transsexuals who were interviewed, this chapter will therefore address the significance of the material body to the apprehension of their gendered and 'authentic' selves, in the context of the ways in which their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment were recounted to have been received by others known to them, particularly family members, partners, friends and work colleagues.

As discussed in Chapter One, most social constructionist and indeed all postmodern and queer perspectives of gender characteristically deny the need to

make a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'¹. Conceptualising the latter as comprising the social and discursive conditions through which the former is then compelled to 'exist', 'sex' is conflated with the term 'gender' and there is a refusal to accord any significance to the materiality of the 'sexed' body in the construction and performing of gender. However, in the context of transsexuality can such a denial and refusal be sustained? Following the question posed by Lynne Segal above, can it be said that the bodies of female to male transsexuals do not place constraints upon the discourses through which they are known or may become known as men? And if they do, what do the constraints comprise? This chapter will seek to address these questions. Beginning with a discussion and critique of the arguments put forward by Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1978) and Judith Halberstam (1994)² concerning the processes which enable transsexuals to establish their gendered identities, I will examine firstly whether each set of arguments is in fact consistent in its assertion that the material trans-sexed body does not matter. This critical discussion will then provide the foundations for the remaining sections of the chapter where, drawing upon the work of Erving Goffman (1963)³, the significance of the material 'sexed' bodies of the interviewees will be traced through their accounts of how their decisions to transition had been received by known others and had been seen to impact upon their relationships with them in their everyday lives.

¹ The tendency to dispute a distinction between sex and gender has not always characterised social constructionist perspectives of gender. Feminists throughout the 1970s and 1980s initially developed constructionist theories of gender upon the distinction, and indeed whether or not a distinction is necessary and/or useful in theorising gender remains under debate.

² Previously discussed in Chapter One.

³ Introduced in Chapter One.

Gender Attributions and Bodily Intrusions

The kinds of constructionist approaches to the bodies of transsexuals put forward by Kessler and McKenna and Halberstam do suggest, as Segal (1994) observes, an adherence to the notion that bodies do not place constraints upon the discourses through which they are and can become known. Kessler and McKenna, in their phenomenological study of the construction of gender, argue against attributing particular significance to the materiality of transsexual (and non-transsexual) bodies. In their investigation of the ways in which transsexuals 'do' gender, that is create the attribution of their gendered identifications with others in everyday life, they focus upon the ways in which the material transsexual body is consistently both figured and recuperated through what they term the 'natural attitude of gender' (the belief held by members of Western societies that there are only two immutable genders) - whereby those who present themselves as either male or female will, by and large, be seen by others to *be* that gender.⁴ They identify 'general talk (both what is said and *how* it is said)', 'public physical appearance', 'the private body' and 'talk about the personal past' as the 'four broad areas of self presentation which contribute to gender attributions' and assert that: '[s]ince gender attributions are made in the initial stages of an interaction, usually long before a person undresses or talks about her/his personal past, we assume that public physical appearance and general talk are the major contributors to initial gender attributions' (p.127).

For Kessler and McKenna, 'talk about the personal past' and the 'private body'

⁴ For an outline of the 'natural attitude of gender' see Chapter One.

are areas where the created attribution of any given gendered self is subject to 'maintenance' by the presenter. Thus, for transsexuals, once the desired gendered attribution has been made by others it must then be maintained, firstly by making sure that when talking of their personal past to others any references to their past gender will not conflict with their current gendered presentation (a female to male, for example, may recast his tomboy childhood in terms of 'when I was a lad' or 'when I was a child') and secondly, by ensuring that their bodies are not unnecessarily exposed to others. However, in terms of the latter, Kessler and McKenna indicate that due to differential access to successful surgical techniques for genital reconstruction, the private bodies of post-surgical male to female and most female to male transsexuals generally require different levels of everyday management.⁵

Whilst highlighting how in general social situations where people are clothed, the female to male once perceived as male will be assumed to have a penis - gaining the attribution of 'cultural genitals' ('the one which is assumed to exist and which, it is believed, should be there') (p.154) they concomitantly show that the absence of a bodily penis places him in the position of having to continually guard against any exposure of this absence. For example, when using public toilets or public changing rooms he will ensure that his genitals are either completely hidden from view or, if there are no facilities to enable this such as private cubicles, then he will avoid using such places. In contrast, Kessler and McKenna note that in attaining a body which, postoperatively, satisfies normative conceptions of embodied femaleness, '[p]ostoperative male-to-female

⁵ For a brief discussion of how female to males and male to females are differentially placed in relation to the medical technologies involved in sex-reassignment, see Chapter One.

transsexuals have little or no reason to protect their bodies from being viewed' (p.130). They illustrate this by citing an incident where Janet, one of their post-operative male to female interviewees, attended a gynaecological examination where the physician, unaware of her transsexuality, informed her that she had a cyst on one of her ovaries, arguing that:

This example not only attests to the excellence of male-to-female genital surgery, but it also provides a good illustration of the construction of gender. The doctor, having decided by visual inspection (*undoubtedly prior to Janet's undressing*) [my emphasis] that she was female, would interpret anything else he saw or felt in light of that attribution. The swelling beneath her abdominal walls *must* [emphasis in original] be a cyst; there was no reason to expect it to be a prostate gland. As a nurse who heard this story so aptly phrased it: "If you hear hoofbeats, you don't look for elephants." (p.131)

For Kessler and McKenna, it is thus possible for many male to female transsexuals such as Janet to maintain the initial gender attribution of femaleness upon revealing their naked bodies and the body itself is accorded little material significance. In their view it was Janet's gendered presentation *prior* to the actual gynaecological examination that afforded her the continued attribution of femaleness. However, it could of course be asked, what would have happened if Janet had been pre-operative? Or what would happen if a female to male transsexual attended an examination which required the revealing of his genitals? Would their initial gender attributions, of female and male respectively on these occasions be maintained by the doctor once their naked bodies were fully exposed?

Although the question of the possible failure to maintain the initial gender

attribution in such an instance might be seen to constitute grounds upon which to suggest that the material body *does* have significance in some situations, Kessler and McKenna, argue that this is not necessarily so. In a later example, where they refer to the same interviewee telling of her sexual encounters with men prior to genital surgery where both she and her male partners had experienced the encounters as unproblematically heterosexual, they argue that: 'if the physical genital is not present when it is expected (or vice versa), the original gender attribution is not necessarily altered. When expectations are violated a change in gender attribution does not necessarily follow. It is the cultural genital which plays the essential role in gender attribution' (p.154). On these grounds it is thus implied that if pre-operative male to female transsexuals or female to male transsexuals *were* to find themselves in situations where their naked bodies were revealed, then their initial gender attributions may not necessarily be altered or questioned. A key word here, however, is *necessarily*⁶ and, most significantly, in their account of the ways in which their transsexual interviewees engaged in maintaining their gender attributions through the management of the private body they show none, apart from Janet, as recalling such experiences of an 'unproblematic' revealing of their nakedness. Rather, they write: '[p]re-operative male-to-female transsexuals and virtually all female-to-male transsexuals manage their bodies in such a way that others do not see them undressed' (p.131).

Critically, in their discussions of how the private body is managed, it is the

⁶ Kessler and McKenna do state prior to their discussion of Janet's pre-operative sexual encounters that initial gender attributions will not be altered 'unless a monumental error is made' (p.137). However, they do not state what 'a monumental error' may comprise and do not discuss instances where such errors will necessarily result in a discrediting of the initial attribution.

techniques employed by their female to male transsexual interviewees which are accorded attention. In occupying a body which Kessler and McKenna theorise to be inconsequential to the social processes of creating the attribution of maleness yet which paradoxically needs to be hidden to maintain that attribution, the female to male transsexual emerges as the primary figure through which the tension running throughout their arguments concerning the relationship between the material body and gender presentation/attribution can be discerned. This is particularly evident in relation to their critical perspective on the idea of 'passing'. For Kessler and McKenna, whilst the idea of passing 'commonly refers to 'being taken for something one is really not' (p.19, note 7), they assert that in their usage 'everyone is engaged in passing, in creating a sense of themselves as being one gender or another' (p.126). The problem, they argue, with studies of transsexuality such as that offered by Feinbloom (1976) which conceptualise transsexuals' passing as involving 'discrete management devices', 'is that this emphasizes its deceptive features and overlooks the ongoing processes of "doing" gender in everyday interactions that we all engage in' (p.126). In providing an illustration of the different ways in which 'passing' may be conceptualised by transsexuals themselves and non-transsexual others, they write:

... Jane Fry, a male-to-female transsexual, served duty on all-male ship during the years when she was preoperative (Bogdan, 1974). From her point of view, she was "passing" as a male, since even though she knew she was female, she needed to be seen as male in order to remain on the ship. Because she had a penis, she would not have been considered to be engaging in deceptive behavior by most people. On the other hand, Mike would have been. Mike, a female-to-male transsexual, also served duty on an all-male ship. His behavior might have been considered passing, in the deceptive sense, since he had what others would have judged to be female genitals. (pp.126-7)

Whilst presumably Kessler and McKenna believe that Jane Fry might be considered by 'most people' to have been passing 'in the deceptive sense' if she had, for example, joined the WRENS during her pre-operative years, they suggest that when Mike creates the attribution of maleness in his 'doing' of gender in the 'everyday interactions that we all engage in' 'most people' would see him to *always* be passing 'in the deceptive sense' due to the absence of a penis upon his body. Underpinning their conception of deceptive versus non-deceptive passing is thus the issue of the material, physically 'sexed' body, which they suggest for female to male transsexuals in particular poses some significant constraint on how they and their bodies can be known. Thus, with bodies which do not either pre- or post-sex reassignment fully satisfy normative conceptions of embodied maleness, they are placed in the final analysis as significantly troubling figures for Kessler and McKenna in their general thesis that: '[t]he cultural/biological distinction traditionally associated with the usage of gender versus sex is a technical one, applicable to scientists in the laboratory and some textbooks, but little else' (p.7).

Ailing Fictions? (Un)willing Readers and the Female to Male Body

In a later 'queer' analysis⁷ concerning 'the making of female masculinity', Judith Halberstam (1994) similarly proposes that trans-sexed bodies should not be accorded any specific ontological status over clothing (public physical appearance) in the production of gender which, on the basis that '[t]here is no "other" side, no "opposite" sex, no natural divide to be spanned by surgery, by

⁷ For a brief outline of queer theory, see Chapter One.

disguise, by passing' (p.212), she refers to as a 'fictional' performance. For Halberstam, both the body and clothing are 'costumes' which can *equally* be utilised in the calling forth and signalling of gendered (and sexual) codes. Crucially, however, whilst Halberstam refuses a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' she covertly reinstates it. Whilst she claims that both clothing and the body must be accorded equal status, she shows that bodies *do* reflexively interact with the discourses through which they are and can become known. Discussing an interview with a pre-operative female to male transsexual who identifies as a gay man, for example, Halberstam writes:

In an interview with a pre-op female-to-male transsexual called Danny, Chris Martin asks Danny about his very particular desire to have sex with men as a man. "What's the difference," she asks, "between having sex with men now and having sex with men before?" Danny responds: "I didn't really. If I did it was oral sex ... it was already gay sex ...umm ... that was a new area. It depends upon your partner's perception. If a man thought I was a woman, we didn't do it." Danny requires that his partners recognize that he is a man before he has "gay" sex with them. He demands that they read his gender accurately according to his desire, in other words, though, he admits, there is room for the occasional misreading. On one occasion, for example, he recalls that a trick he had picked up discovered that Danny did not have a penis. Danny allowed his partner to penetrate him vaginally because, "it was what he had been looking for all his life only he hadn't realized it. When he saw me it was like 'Wow, I want a man with a vagina.'" (pp.212-3)⁸

Echoing Kessler and McKenna's example of Janet's telling of her successful (hetero)sexual encounters with men prior to genital surgery, Halberstam shows how a similar process can be invoked in relation to the (homo)sexual encounters of female to male transsexuals. However, whilst Kessler and McKenna insist that

⁸ Halberstam cites the interview as: "Guys With Pussies" by Chris Martin with "Vern and Danny." Part of this interview was published in *Movement Research Performance Journal* 3 (Fall 1991): 6-7.' (pp. 226-7, note 3)

their example attests to the primacy of the 'natural attitude of gender' over the material body, Halberstam hones in on the potential for the material body to contribute to 'the occasional misreading'. Rather than considering such a potential to perhaps constitute what Kessler and McKenna propose as a 'monumental error' in the process of maintaining a gender attribution, Halberstam points to how a revealing of the non-conforming male body of the female to male transsexual in a failed 'homosexual' encounter can have a productive rather than negative effect. Thus, in Danny's partner's sudden realisation that he 'want[ed] a man with a vagina', a new sexual desire for the partner and perhaps a new gendered and/or sexual subject position for Danny himself is produced.⁹

Following Kessler and McKenna, Halberstam highlights how 'contexts' and 'readers of gender fiction, as much as bodies, create sexuality and gender and their transivities' (p.220). She departs from them, however, insofar as in the context of transsexuality and other forms of cross-gendering, she sees this as necessarily involving the need for readers to read *against* any notion of a 'natural attitude of gender' rather than reading within it.¹⁰ In her analysis of the film *Vera*, for example, Halberstam berates both the characterisation of one of the protagonists in the film and the film's director for misreading or refusing to read

⁹ Whilst it is possible that Danny could have experienced a new gendered and/or sexual subject position for himself, whether this occurred is neither revealed nor discussed by Halberstam.

¹⁰ Kessler and McKenna (1978) state, for example, that: 'gender attribution is maintained by virtue of two things: (1) Every act of the displayer's is filtered through the initial gender attribution which the perceiver has made; (2) The perceiver holds the natural attitude (e.g. gender is invariant)' (p.137).

the central character's gender. *Vera* concerns a female character (a cross-dressing pre-operative female to male transsexual or a butch lesbian¹¹) named Vera (who renames herself Bauer), and her partner Clara, and deals with the issue of Bauer's 'gender dysphoria'. Whilst Bauer insists to Clara that she is a man and indeed is seen to be a man by Clara's parents, Clara is either not able or willing to see Bauer as the man she presents herself to be. In her close reading of the film, Halberstam suggests that underpinning Clara's refusal to read Bauer's gender and indeed the director's refusal to allow Clara to make such a reading, is an essentialist belief concerning Bauer's 'female' body. Halberstam describes a sex scene between Clara and Bauer where Clara insists that Bauer remove all her clothes. However, Bauer finds that she cannot continue undressing and leaves. Halberstam argues that this scene reveals Clara's unnecessary misreading of Bauer's gendered sexual desire:

Bauer needs another woman to validate her gender fiction so that she can be the man she needs to be. Bauer must fuck in her clothes because her clothes represent her gender in a way that her anatomy cannot; as long as anatomy is not destiny and as long as gender can perform a sexuality that appears to be at odds with biological sex, there is no reason why Bauer should undress. Indeed, the very act of dressing for Bauer is making herself vulnerable; she has bared her desire, she has revealed her sexuality, and she makes explicit the gender performance that produces and is produced by her costume. (p.223)

For Halberstam, the tragedy of the film is not the 'gender dysphoria' that Bauer experiences but 'her girlfriend's inability or unwillingness to read the code of

¹¹ Halberstam indicates that the film can be read as concerning either a butch lesbian or a pre-operative female to male transsexual. For Halberstam, however, there is no concrete specificity which marks one identity from the other.

Bauer's desire from her cross-dressed performance' (p.222).¹² The closing scene of the film showing Bauer sitting on a toilet drawing her hand out from between her legs and finding that she has blood on it, represents for Halberstam an unnecessary and ambiguous portrayal of bodily limits. The scene, suggesting that Bauer has either mutilated herself or has started to menstruate, is fraught with essentialist symbolism – Bauer either rejects her body as it cannot anatomically allow her to realise her gender or she is confronted with the biological 'fact' of her 'female sex' – either way, Halberstam argues, 'the body loses, and the conventions [of the heterosexual, 'natural attitude'] of gender win' (p.225).

Contrary to their assertions that a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' cannot be drawn and their respective refusals to accord any significance to the materiality of the 'sexed' body, both Halberstam and Kessler and McKenna *do* in fact utilise the distinction and *do* show the body, particularly the female to male body, as having a significant role to play in the processes of creating and maintaining the attribution of gender. With regard to the 'natural attitude of gender', despite their efforts to argue otherwise, Kessler and McKenna do make it evident that the female to male transsexual body *can* pose constraints upon the discourses through which they are known and can become known, whereas Halberstam refuses the terms of constraint and focuses instead on the productive capacities which both gender presenters and readers of gender can employ and bring forth in their doings of gender as 'fiction'. Both sets of analyses, however, can be seen to be limited in the scope of their arguments.

¹² It could of course be argued that Halberstam does not take into account the issue of Clara's need for a 'willing reader' where the tragedy of the film could then be read as also involving Bauer's refusal to 'read'.

Kessler and McKenna focus predominately on the ways in which transsexuals create their gender attributions in *anonymous* social situations in which their past histories are largely unknown by others, and do not take into account the four broad areas of 'general talk', 'public physical appearance', 'the private body' and 'talk about the personal past' in relation to the *range* of personal relationships which most transsexuals will necessarily have reason to negotiate. They assume, in other words, that transsexuals only create their gender attributions and maintain them with unknown, unrelated and largely insignificant others. Halberstam, on the other hand, restricts her analysis to the realm of sexuality and does not extend the problem she identifies of 'unwilling' readers into other areas of social life and other kinds of personal and social relationships. Indeed, Halberstam's 'willing' readers of what she terms 'female masculinity' are shown only to be those who reflect the female to male's 'masculinity back to her in the form of desire' (p.224). Clearly, however, the issue for female to male transsexuals is not only to be seen as men by their sexual partners but by *all* people – sexual desire in itself is simply not enough.

It is these spaces, brought into view through the juxtaposition of Halberstam's and Kessler and McKenna's work, that form the basis for the remaining sections of this chapter. Based in the personal narratives told to me by the fourteen interviewees and utilising the work of Erving Goffman (1963), what will be of concern is how, and the extent to which, the female to male transsexual body might be said to place constraints upon the discourses through which it is and can become known. Discussion and analysis will focus upon the ways in which, in the context of their everyday lives, the interviewees negotiate and continue to negotiate their identities with a variety of known others, and will address the

following questions. Does it make a difference who is doing the perceiving and attributing of gender? In what contexts and relationships might female to male transsexual bodies pose identity constraints? If contexts and 'readers' of gender are as important as bodies in the doing and 'being' of gender, which contexts and/or which readers enable certain gender 'fictions' to be lived but thwart others? And where, how, to what extent and with whom do the bodies of female to male transsexuals hold significance, insignificance and/or create 'trouble' in their ongoing establishment of their male identities?

Negotiating Relationships: the re-embodied self and the significant other

The central feature of the stigmatized individual's situation in life ... is a question of what is often, if vaguely, called "acceptance"

(Goffman, 1963:19)

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, by virtue of undergoing or having undergone sex-reassignment transsexuals are socially *positioned* as individuals who Goffman (1963) describes as dealing with 'stigma', which it will be remembered arises through an exposure of a 'discrepancy' between an individual's 'virtual' social identity (the identity assumed and attributed to her or him by others), and their 'actual' social identity, the attributes of an identity category that s/he 'could in fact be proved to possess' (p.12) either through personal identity documentation such as the birth certificate or the 'positive mark' of personal identity: the images

and memories of the individual as a specific person which others known to them will hold in their minds.

In terms of transsexuals' own personal sense of self, undergoing sex-reassignment or making plans to undergo the process offers, according to Prosser (1998), the possibility of *healing* the 'gendered split of transsexuality' (p.9), the incongruity between their own inner sense of their gender and the gender which their bodies outwardly signify. However, the construction of 'personal identity' (Goffman, 1963) and the 'natural attitude of gender' (Kessler & McKenna, 1978) with which this is fundamentally entwined, suggest that for others sex-reassignment will represent a *rupturing* of a 'self', the *creation* of a 'discrepancy' between the 'sex' of birth (the 'actual' social identity) and the 'gender' identity (the new 'virtual' social identity) being claimed and presented.

In relation to others who know about their pasts, transsexuals are therefore placed in what Goffman (1963) terms a 'discredited' social position, where in claiming the social identity of a sex/gender which was not attributed to them at birth they cannot simply assume that others will accept and continually affirm their own personal, interior sense of selfhood. In occupying this social position they are thus invariably involved in the management of tensions between self and other. As Goffman observes, a fundamental aspect of occupying a 'discredited' social position is that the individual may experience 'the sense of not knowing what the others present are "really" thinking about him [or her]' (p.25). Drawing upon Goffman's work concerning 'stigma' in the context of the processes through which transsexuals work to 'pass', Feinbloom (1976) suggests the kinds of tension management which can be involved with others when occupying the

'discredited' position in her identification of five key possibilities for the potentially 'knowing audience'. These are: '(A) An audience who *knows* and either shares the same problem, or is totally accepting.', for example, other transsexuals, or individuals or 'professionals working for the acceptance for transsexuals' (p.224, emphasis in original); '(B) An audience that *knows* about the "stigma" but is actively involved in trying to minimize and ease passage.' (p.224, emphasis in original), '(C) The audience that *knows* and is overly solicitous.' (p.225, emphasis in original), those who work overly hard to avoid using any talk which they feel might be offensive or taken the wrong way; '(D) The *knowing* and rejecting'(p.225, emphasis in original), those in coming to know of, or about the plans for sex-reassignment who then cease their relationship with the transsexual person and/or tell others with the aim of jeopardising other friendships; and '(E) The audience who *knows* when the transsexual does not know they know, or when the transsexual is not sure they know.' (p.225, emphasis in original). Thus, as Feinbloom highlights, inherent to both the 'discredited' and 'discreditable' social positionings that transsexuals invariably occupy is thus the question of *how* any particular audience might react to the 'known about' or potentially 'knowable' transsexual status. As she succinctly summarises:

There are those who will know, those who won't, those who will react positively, and those who will react negatively, and those to whom it will be a matter of small importance. There are some who will mask their feelings, others who will be bothersomely curious, those who will gape and gossip, and those who will be honest. What this means ... is that the transsexual both preoperatively and postoperatively has a rather

more unique and complicated process of interacting with others than "normals". (p. 225)¹³

Echoing the female to male participants of Devor's (1997) study, none of the fourteen interviewees for this research were living lives where they were completely estranged from family members and/or from friends and other acquaintances who knew of their female pasts. As they told me their life stories, what was of significance to them in their lives post sex-reassignment and/or since they had made the decision to transition was not how they managed information about themselves when in the presence of those who did not know of their pasts (the primary focus of Kessler & McKenna's (1978) study) but rather their intimate and personal relationships with 'knowing others' - their families, friends, loved ones and work colleagues. As in Devor's study, the interviewees reported that the reactions of these others to their sex-reassignment had been mixed, covering a range of responses within Feinbloom's (1976) characterisation of the 'totally accepting' to 'rejecting' knowing audience, although most considered that overall, the responses they had received had been positive.

The following analysis and discussion will address the ways in which the interviewees gained or had not gained 'acceptance' of themselves as men in their relationships with 'knowing others', identify the tensions which the interviewees revealed they had dealt with in this process, and what impact the 'discrepancy' between the originally 'sexed' body and their gender identities as men had across the broad range of relationships in which the interviewees were located. The

¹³ Feinbloom uses the term 'normals' in the spirit of Goffman's use of the term, that is, akin to the term 'stigmatised', as a social and culturally created concept and social position which all individuals may be said to occupy or not depending on the social contexts and relationships which they continually move through.

conclusion to this chapter will relate this analysis back to the questions first raised regarding the materiality of the body and the constraints it may potentially impose. Analysis and discussion will focus firstly upon relationships with family members, moving through to partners and friends, and finally, to work colleagues.

Families

The likelihood of sex-reassignment to be perceived as 'rupturing' a self can be seen to be most probable for the immediate families of transsexuals, all of whom would have certain personal investments in their particular relationships with them as specific sexed and gendered persons. In their families of birth and/or upbringing, all the interviewees had occupied the social position of 'daughter' in relation to their parents and many had also occupied the positions of 'sister', 'granddaughter', 'niece' and 'aunt'. For many, their families also extended to those of partnership and/or what sociologists have traditionally termed the 'family of procreation', within which they had occupied the positions of 'wives' or (female) partners of either male or female lovers, and for some, also the position of 'mother'. Through their membership within and across these family units, the interviewees thus had to negotiate their new social identities as men not only in relation to their 'known-aboutness' by these others, but also in relation to the various investments and expectations that these others individually held in respect of their former social and interpersonal positionings as 'female' and as 'women'.

Holly Devor (1997), in her discussion of what her female to male

transsexual participants reported to her when asked about how their families had dealt with their transsexuality, writes that:

Participants asked their family members to do a fantastic thing. They asked them to disregard lifetimes of direct knowledge and experience of participants as girls and as women. ... In order for their families to be able to make sense of participants' transitions and new lives, they had to be able to believe it possible for persons to be men without having been born and raised in male bodies. ... Participants and their families had to be able to believe that participants' bodies were wrong but that their minds were right, and that participants' mental states were more definitive arbiters of gender than were their bodies. This understanding of the relationship between gender and sex makes sense of transsexualism but runs counterintuitively to the everyday beliefs of most people. As such, it presented a major hurdle. (p.434)

Devor concludes in her study that such beliefs were largely established between her participants and their families and that the acceptance from family members that her participants reported to have generally received had been gained on this basis. However, the accounts of the interviewees for this research showed there to be more complex interpersonal dynamics at work.

Of the fourteen interviewees (Mark, Mike, Jack, Lawrence, Matthew, Ben, Joseph, Adam, Eric, James, Paul, Aaron, Keith and Peter), all but Matthew talked about their relationships with their families and about how their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment and to live their lives as men had been received or were being received by them. However, for each interviewee some family members were deemed to be more significant in their lives than others. Some interviewees spoke very little about certain family members other than that their relationships with them were 'unproblematic', whereas others said little about those who had rejected them or those who they were not close to. The responses

of some of the interviewees to enquiries about these relationships were sometimes evasive, indicating that particular family members were either of little significance to them or that they did not wish to discuss them in the context of the interview. Interviewees who responded in these ways were therefore not pressed to elucidate further.

Parents

'telling your parents is very hard, you know, they gave you a name and all the rest of it and there were all the expectations around it'

(Mark)

As all of the interviewees had been assigned a female actual social identity at birth, their parents, who had borne and/or raised them as female children, expected them to remain female throughout their lifetimes. Echoing Devor's (1997) participants, with this awareness of their parents' expectations the interviewees reported having initially been concerned about how they would react to their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment. Parental responses to their decisions varied. None recounted having been rejected by their parents although for some this had seemed like a strong possibility when they were first told. Others stated that they had received positive responses from them, whilst some recounted that although their parents had not responded badly to their decisions they had not adjusted as well as they would have liked.

Of all the interviewees, only Paul, Jack and Ben considered that their parents had reacted badly to their decisions, though only Jack and Ben recounted in some

detail what had occurred. Jack stated that whilst both of his parents had been shocked when he had told them of his decision, he had received a better reaction from his father than from his mother which, through his precipitating account of his childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, he indicated had not been surprising to him. Jack had described his parents as having always been aware of his discomfort at being a girl and that it had consistently been a problem for him. As a child, adolescent and young adult, Jack had regularly been perceived to be a boy by unknown others which he portrayed as being of some amusement to his father but as having caused considerable concern and anxiety for his mother. Recounting how his parents had reacted to being told of his plans to undergo sex-reassignment, Jack suggested that this family dynamic had continued to be played out in this context.

Jack had involved his parents in the process of his transition prior to gaining the authorising 'diagnosis' of his transsexuality, having informed them of his decision to go and see a psychiatrist about his 'gender problem' before having made his first appointment. Jack explained that his mother had at first supported him in his decision to do this as she initially assumed that a *'psychiatrist would sit [him] down and somehow talk [him] round to liking, liking being a girl' and wanting to wear big frilly dresses'*. However, upon telling his parents after his first meeting with the psychiatrist that instead he had been informed he was *'a text book case'* transsexual she had been extremely distraught, though his father had been more measured in his reaction:

... she was crying, we were having conversations where we were both just in tears and she had, she was just putting the phone down on me erm... [-] I mean my dad was very good...he was like 'okay, well you've always been very calm so

take things in your stride' he wanted to know what it was and see somebody...but my mum said to me, she said 'I know what you've done, you've read all the right books so you come out with exactly the things they want to hear', in a...you know when you've been talked to by the psychiatrist (T: yeah)...as if...why would anybody want to do that you know? (T: hmm) I just couldn't get my head round it I mean she was so upset (T: hmm)...it took her many years to err, it's been five years now, it's taken her a long, long time to err to not be upset, she still doesn't want to know, she doesn't really want to think about it (T: hmm) she doesn't want to see anything on television, you know, she's just dealing with me...

In the context of the particular dynamics between Jack and his parents, Jack suggested that his mother and father differed in their investments in him as their only child, indicating that his father's more reasoned reaction to his decision had possibly been due to his previously unfulfilled investment in having a son, whilst his mother's distress had been due to her having had and continuing to have a strong personal investment in having a daughter. For Jack, his sex-reassignment had thus constituted a gain for his father but a loss for his mother, which later in the interview he suggested had since been easier for his mother as she had been able to relate to his female partner, Mandy, as the daughter he was never able to be for her.

Through the differing investments that he depicted as negotiating in relation to his parents, Jack suggested that it had been these that had underpinned his parents (un)willingness to accept him. Through their individual investments they had been differentially placed and therefore differentially predisposed to believe that his mind was 'right' but his body was 'wrong' (Devor, 1997). In the context of his particular vested interest, Jack's father in wanting to 'know' about Jack's transsexualism had been predisposed to believe and had been a 'willing reader'

(Halberstam, 1994), whilst having a vested interest in her 'daughter', Jack's mother had refused and continued to refuse to 'know' and believe. The acceptance that Jack established with his parents was therefore more than merely discursively produced and differed in its basis between his mother and father. Whilst for his father Jack had perhaps become the son he had always wanted but previously believed he did not have, for his mother, his 'actual social identity' could not be changed. Refusing to locate him within the category 'transsexual' she could only accept Jack within the terms that he was her child of the past, present and future – a daughter who had failed to fully become one but who nonetheless still essentially 'was'.

Ben, who had not yet begun sex-reassignment, described how, upon being told, his parents had similarly been '*extremely upset*' and that in spite of the numerous discussions he had had with them they have not been able to approve of his decision to begin treatment:

... I told my parents erm they refused to handle it I mean they were extremely upset [-] they are convinced that if I make the decision to correct the situation they feel that I...they're convinced that I'll be destroying my life (T: right) they think that I will, that I'm setting myself up for a great disaster [-] they say that while they acknowledge the turmoil within, they feel that at least it's within, whereas if I do go ahead they just see like I'm setting myself up for all kinds of prejudices and biases and rejection and you know? (T: hmm) [-] they've also made some enquiries, they're extremely erm concerned about erm I mean not that, I mean they never even sort of concede that I should do this but when they do in their weaker moments or when love takes over logic you know when they see the pain and they want to help me they always say erm 'yes but what about' you know 'look at how, bad the phalloplasty techniques are', you know 'you'll never really be able to function as a man' and once my dad said to me 'oh you know for a man if you can't, you know if you can't have sex with a woman that's the worst thing to poison an ego, you want to be in the bedroom with a woman and not be able to function and feel like

shit?'...and I was like...you know, I was scared because I don't want to be in that situation..

Ben depicted his parents as constituting a knowing audience who could not accept him as being a man and who, although sympathetic with regard to his emotional state, were concerned above all to protect him from the potential discrediting by others that sex-reassignment could generate. Although Ben suggested that his parents had perhaps been able to believe that his mind was 'right' but his body was 'wrong', aware of the inadequate techniques for genital surgery (phalloplasty), they could not believe that in the body he would occupy post sex-reassignment he would be able to fully become the man he felt himself to be. Paradoxically, Ben indicated that he shared his parents fears. In hypothetically locating his material, sexed post-transition body in the context of normative heterosexual sexual relations, both Ben and his parents could only envisage his potential manhood to be something which would be continually discrediting of him. Whilst for Ben his parents concerns were therefore reasonable and objective and thus a great source of discomfort for him, it is of course possible that for his parents such a focus also served to foreclose drawing any attention to their own personal investments and interests.

As Goffman (1963) observes, those who are related to individuals who are socially positioned as dealing with 'stigma' themselves possess a 'courtesy stigma' as they are placed in 'a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one' where 'all are obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related' (p.43). Ben's parents thus had their own as well as Ben's potential discrediting to be concerned

about. In the portrayal of his parents as perhaps believing in his interior sense of gendered selfhood but dissuading him from going through with medical treatment, Ben suggested that his parents were unprepared, not only to support him in '*destroying [his] life*', but also to deal with the effects his need would have on them. Being aware of Ben's investment in and sensitivity concerning his 'normativity', the focus upon the inadequacy of genital surgery was perhaps their way of working towards preventing their potential loss, both of their only daughter and their creditability as parents and a family.

In contrast to Jack and Ben, Adam reported that his parents had not responded well to being told of his transsexuality but had been passive rather than confrontational in their reactions. Adam did not talk about his parents specifically but rather referred to them alongside his three brothers and four sisters. He explained that much to his frustration, they had not taken him seriously in his new identity as a man:

I mean I've had loads of problems with them...I didn't sit them down as a group, I sort of told them individually one by one, you know, and I was just honest, I said 'I have to do this to be happy' you know, and they just wouldn't accept it, you know, they wouldn't call us by the name I wanted to be called and...they just had no respect, I know it was hard but all they had to say was 'I find this very difficult', do you know what I mean? (T: hmm), and 'I'm gonna try but I might slip up' but they didn't, you know [-] but I mean they've known me for twenty five years as well, you know...so I suppose it was hard for them...and I've always been a very rebellious sort so maybe they thought I was a bit crazy as well, you know...but they're all...mostly they've got professions and stuff like that, you know, they're all settled and married and stuff like that and I've been the rebel of the family and I think they thought this was just something I was doing ...I know I've been crazy in the past but I was crazy because of the way I was, I was unhappy and erm and I wanted to sort it out and for them to take it seriously for once, but they couldn't so I wasn't prepared to go

up there and see them [-] in fact I haven't really kept in contact with me family..

Adam thus suggested that underpinning his family's lack of ability to take him 'seriously' and to become 'willing readers' of his new identity as a man is their knowledge of him from the past. When hearing of Adam's feelings and about his plans to undergo sex-reassignment they drew on their prior understanding (and positioning) of Adam as '*the rebel of the family*' and interpreted what he was telling them within these terms. For them, Adam's plans were simply symptomatic of his general 'deviant' character and being told of his transsexuality did not constitute for them 'new' knowledge through which to re-evaluate him. Whilst Adam considered his situation with his parents and siblings to be understandable, it had not only prevented him from gaining their recognition of him as the man he felt and presented himself to be, but had proved to be an obstacle to any support that they could and might otherwise have perhaps offered him.

As Goffman (1963) notes, intimates and families of those who are socially positioned as dealing with 'stigma' play a crucial role in protecting the individual from potential discrediting by others, a role which involves their concealment and co-management of any potentially discrediting attributes. Adam's parents and siblings, however, refused to take up this role. For Adam, they constituted a knowing audience who, although not rejecting of him, were failing to protect him from the potential discrediting by others and, as 'unwilling readers' of his new selfhood, were rather contributing to the possibilities for such discrediting. In negotiating his identity in the context of the interpersonal dynamics between himself and his family, in order to minimise the risk of continual exposure and

establish his creditability of selfhood, Adam therefore had little choice other than to adopt the strategy of distancing himself from them.

Experiences of not having been rejected by their parents but having the inner sense of their male identity largely dismissed and ignored by them were also reported by Eric, Peter, Mike and James. Eric, who had a brother but had been the only daughter to his parents, recounted having had a bad relationship with his parents since being a child. He stated that he was '*not on good terms*' with them and that they '*just about speak*', although his mother will not address him in any way than as '*daughter*'.¹⁴ For Peter, Mike and James, however, such a dismissal was experienced with parents with whom they reported to have continued to maintain good relationships. Peter, whose mother had died whilst he was a teenager and who had no brothers but one sister, described a fairly close relationship with his father who, when told by Peter of his plans to undergo sex-reassignment two years earlier, had reacted '*really well*'. His response to Peter had been that whilst he personally '*didn't agree with it [sex-reassignment]*', he respected the fact that Peter '*must live [his] own life*' and so did not intend to stand in his way. However, Peter went on to explain that since that time his father has consistently refused to recognise him as no longer being female. Describing how whilst his six year old son, Philip, had easily adjusted to seeing and referring to him as a man and calling him '*dad*', he recounted that in spite of his efforts to help his father, he either would not or could not accept him within these terms:

¹⁴ Eric reported that he did not see his parents on a regular basis and considered that the bad relationship he currently has with his parents was not brought about by his decision to undergo sex-reassignment but was rather rooted in the relationship he has had with them since childhood (for his account of his childhood see Chapter Three). Eric did not talk about his brother or father during the interview.

...he insisted that Philip refer to me as his mum...and 'her' and 'she' and all that...he just didn't get it at all [-] and Philip wouldn't put up with it, Philip kept telling him...I don't think he really understood, maybe he thought it was a phase or something like that...and he gets me birthday cards, girly birthday cards where he puts my old name on it and things like that...

The accounts offered by Mike and James of their relationships with their respective parents were strikingly similar. Mike had been the only girl amongst his parents four children and since his sex-reassignment had maintained a good relationship with his mother, who was in her eighties (his father had died many years previously). James had been one of two adopted daughters to his parents and had maintained a good relationship with both his mother and his father, who were in their seventies. Both recounted that although their parents had at first appeared to be accepting of them when they had initially told them of their transsexuality, they had since not found it easy to either fully accept their new male identities or 'see' them as no longer being female. The similar experience and point of view concerning their parents that each recounted is captured particularly well by Mike:

...we'd be out somewhere and she refers to me in public to somebody else as her daughter (T: really) and I said 'do you think they'll actually believe you' [-] 'well they'll either think you're mad...or...or they'll think maybe I'm a transsexual' and if she's so hung up about me going through this she won't want to reveal that anyway...she can't see...people superimpose the old image on to you (T: hmm) and erm they can't see I've gone through changes [-] it is difficult for her...it's difficult for everyone probably but for her it's the most difficult...

James recounted how even the recent representation of transsexuals on some television programmes which his parents regularly view had not stirred them into fully recognising him:

I mean my mum and dad do watch 'Coronation Street' (T: hmm) erm but I don't think they equate Haley with me at all, they don't see¹⁵ [-] and it's funny, there's the 'Airport' programme,¹⁶ I don't know whether you've seen it (T: yeah) we were watching that and this woman was trying to get through customs (a male to female) and err my mother said 'eee aren't there some strange people about!' (laughter) but she doesn't, you know, she doesn't equate it...

As for Adam, Eric and Peter, both James and Mike's parents had constituted for them knowing audiences who had failed to take up the position of protector in relation to their potential discrediting by others. Similarly, although their parents had not rejected them they had, however, been discrediting of them, which had regularly placed both James and Mike in the position of potential exposure in public, increasing the risk that they could face further discrediting by others.¹⁷

Like Adam, both Mike and James considered that the failure of their parents to recognise them as being men was understandable given their past knowledge of them. For each, this past knowledge comprised the 'positive mark' (Goffman, 1963) of the sexed and gendered personal identity assigned to them at birth: the image and memories of them as being a 'daughter' that their parents held in their minds, and which could not simply be erased or easily shifted through their having undergone sex-reassignment. Whilst James and Mike's parents had not been 'readers' of their new gendered selves, unlike the parents of Adam and arguably Eric and Peter, they were not 'unwilling readers' but rather, in their

¹⁵ 'Coronation Street' is a British soap opera shown on ITV television. 'Haley' is a male to female transsexual character in the soap.

¹⁶ 'Airport' is a British 'Docu-soap' television programme in which viewers see the daily work routines and activities of the staff who work in a British airport.

¹⁷ As Mike observes, for transsexuals whose physical appearance enables them to 'pass' well in public spaces, such discrediting can often turn back on the person who is engaging in it. Thus, when in the presence of unknowing others who perhaps do not know the discreditor well, by engaging in such interaction the discreditor may in fact be seen to be discrediting themselves.

particular positioning in their relationships to their children, were simply *unable* to read.¹⁸

Of all the interviewees, only Mark, Joseph and Lawrence reported that the responses they had received from their parents had been very positive. Each considered that whilst during the first few weeks after they had told their parents of their decisions it had occasionally been difficult, ultimately they had been fully accepted by them in their new lives as men. Of the three, however, only Mark and Joseph talked about their parents in any detail. Mark, who had a brother but had been the only daughter to his parents, stated that having been in a ten year lesbian relationship prior to seeking sex-reassignment had served to soften the 'blow' when he had told them of his transsexuality:

...you know telling your parents is very hard, you know, they gave you a name and all the rest of it and there were all the expectations around it but they always knew that, their expectations...that I'd...I had already...they probably had quite a lot of hassle, you know the fact that I'd got a girlfriend and in fact I think they took it easier than me saying I'd got a girlfriend (T: right)...

Prior to informing his parents of his decision Mark had thus already been perceived by his parents to possess a 'stigmatising' attribute. In his view this had constituted the central interpersonal dynamic between himself and his parents through which it had been easier to gain his parents acceptance: in undergoing sex-reassignment, Mark could be seen by them to be unconventional though nonetheless normative – it was a 'step up' from his previous social positioning.

¹⁸ Neither Eric nor Peter revealed very much about how they engaged with their parents. However, in what they did say about them each suggested that their parents were unwilling rather than unable to 'read' their new gendered selves.

In describing how he had told his parents of his transsexuality and their reactions, Mark suggested that they had been calm and collected upon hearing his news and that the '*hassle*' which he had felt he had often caused them through his previous identity as a lesbian had not characterised the responses he had received from them:

...it was typical, you know, we'd gone through a whole afternoon and there hadn't been a natural break and they were just thinking of going and eventually I said 'there's something I want to tell you'...they looked at me, like this isn't routine (laughter) and I started off saying something like...'I've got like this rare, rare condition which has been diagnosed', well I thought they'd go for the, they will tap into this (T: hmm) erm and they started to look really worried and I thought, 'they think I'm gonna die in six months or something' (T: hmm) which I hadn't meant to do, but I could see their faces and I sort of had to stop going down that path and change it...I can't remember exactly how...what words I used at that point...but I think did say that basically it worked out that I've got a male brain, I should have been male and that they reckon it happens with the hormones in the womb (T: hmm) erm I said 'it makes a lot of sense doesn't it if you look back at how I was' [-] well they sat there and they asked a few questions...and my mother said well, you know, 'what happens about men's toilets, you'll be duffed up if you go in there'... [-] she was, well 'how are you going to manage you know, with showers and things' and my father was the best...in terms of taking it very calmly, he was much better than I thought he might be erm he said right, well I mean 'you don't go down Oxford circus with no clothes on do you?', I mean, you know (T: yeah) he just asked about the treatment and what I was doing and, you know, they didn't question it at all...

When telling his parents, Mark had explicitly guided them to see that he had always *really* been male and that whilst his body was 'wrong' his mind was 'right'. For Mark, to establish this belief it had been necessary to give careful consideration not only to how he might deal with their potential reactions but how he could explain himself to them. In the context of the particular personal dynamics between himself and his parents, where previously he had already

occupied a 'discredited' position in their eyes, Mark had considered that his best course of action was to draw upon the 'authority' of medical 'diagnosis' and upon 'scientific' explanations of transsexuality.¹⁹ By so doing and urging them to reframe his past in light of this 'new' knowledge of him, Mark sought to forestall the potential for any further discrediting by his parents and to be absolved from any responsibility for the fact of his past and present failure to meet their expectations of him as their daughter.

Like Ben's parents, Mark's mother had similarly expressed concern that, by occupying a body which could not accurately meet the social expectations of embodied maleness, in relation to others Mark would be 'discreditable' as a man. However, by not locating his body in the context of heterosexual sexual relations, Mark's parents were able to agree that this would not prevent him from becoming the man he felt himself to be. Through the interpersonal dynamics between Mark and his parents, together with their engagement with medical discourses on transsexuality, lesbianism and the normalising capacity of the 'natural attitude of gender' (Kessler & McKenna, 1978), Mark's parents had thus been predisposed to believe that Mark's mind was 'right' but his body was 'wrong' and were able to become the 'willing readers' and 'protectors' of his

¹⁹ Interestingly, Mark did not account for the 'cause' of his transsexuality in his interaction with me during the interview in the same way as he had done with his parents. Later on in the interview, Mark stated that he considered transsexuality to be about *'who you feel most comfortable with and identify with'* rather than having a *'male brain'*. Whilst understandings can of course shift over time, in recounting what he had told to his parents Mark suggested that at that time he had used this particular understanding strategically: *'well I thought they'd go for the, they will tap into this'*. Mark thus illustrated, as Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993) observes, that accounts and stories of the self often take different forms when being told to different listeners (p.11). The particular account he offered to his parents was therefore not an 'untruth' but a particular (scientifically advocated) version of his 'truth', the one which at the time he felt would best be received by his parents in the context of his particular relationship with them. This, of course, both relies upon and reinforces the dominance of medical 'authority' even as it is used strategically.

new male selfhood that Mark had hoped they would be.

Joseph, who had been one of three daughters to his parents, similarly reported that he had had no problem in gaining his parents acceptance although he recounted how his father had initially been very upset upon hearing of decision:

...now they're brilliant, I mean erm they always were behind me [-] erm...my dad cried when he heard, because erm he felt he was losing a daughter (T: right) he wasn't quite sure how to cope with that...erm so I sort of did a brief therapy on him, you know, I took him through the old photo albums and showed him that he never really had a daughter (T: hmm) and I think he does understand that now (T: hmm) and there's a psychological continuity even though physical changes haven't happened completely yet, that erm I'm the same person...perhaps just that there's less of a barrier between me and the world and that sort of thing...

Joseph indicated that his father had had deep investments in him as being one of his three daughters. Like Mark, Joseph had sought to gain his father's acceptance and ease his grief over his ensuing loss by urging him to reframe his past knowledge of him and to believe that his mind was 'right' but that his body was 'wrong' and that he had in fact been male all along. By so doing, Joseph had worked to invoke his father's recognition of him as being '*the same person*' but one whom he had previously not fully recognised. On this basis, Joseph had been able to establish the grounds upon which his father could become a 'willing reader' of his new gendered selfhood and upon which the particular relationship between himself and his father could be more smoothly maintained. When talking of his mother, however, Joseph suggested a relationship in which the issue of his acceptance had been superseded by the effects of 'courtesy stigma':

..my mum's a bit funny about who knows in the, in the extended family so erm I still get cards from people who (*T: right, who don't know*) who don't know, yeah erm...and I'd rather just tell them, I don't care whether they accept me or not [-] I don't know whether my mum...just doesn't want to be, or whether there's still an aspect of guilt, you know, well, 'did I do something to make you like this', or whatever (*T: hmm*) or whether it's just that she's trying to protect me from the reactions that I might receive but, you know, I've got to the stage where I don't really care...

Joseph suggested that there was some conflict between himself and his mother. Although Joseph did not '*really care*' about how other relatives might react to his decision, much to his frustration his mother clearly did. For Joseph, whilst his mother had been willing to take up the role of protecting him from potential discrediting by others, her way of so doing by not immediately informing the extended family of his decision had prevented him from fully moving into the new identity which he had otherwise established. For his mother, however, there was a personal interest in choosing to occupy this role in this way. Joseph indicated that for his mother, carrying the 'courtesy stigma' of his decision to undergo sex-reassignment was seen by her to involve the potential for direct, rather than indirect, discrediting of herself. As a mother who had been Joseph's primary carer throughout his childhood, adolescence and young adult life, she saw herself as therefore perhaps responsible for Joseph's transsexuality and thus in the eyes of others, a woman who had failed to meet the social expectations of motherhood: to have raised a healthy 'normative' child. Thus whilst the process of keeping quiet about Joseph's decision had prevented the full establishment of his new identity, it was serving to forestall the discrediting of her own.

In his talk about his parents, Joseph thus suggested that whilst he had gained

their acceptance and that they were 'willing readers' of his new gendered selfhood, this had been at great personal and social cost to them. For Joseph, this had meant that rather than simply negotiating his own identity with them he had had to actively engage with the impact that his decision had wrought on his parents own senses of selfhood: his father's, who had prided himself as being a father of three daughters, and his mother's new sense of herself as a mother who had raised a socially 'non-normative' child.

Siblings

Whilst many of the interviewees spoke at some length about their relationships with their parents, the majority of the interviewees did not cast their siblings as significant others within their adult lives. Most revealed very little about them during the interview, although all mentioned them. Joseph, James and Peter stated that their sisters had responded well to their decisions and that gaining their acceptance had been unproblematic. Mark remarked that his brother had been very upset when first hearing of his sex-reassignment but had since come to accept him, and Ben commented that his brother had simply agreed with the view of his parents and had therefore not been supportive. Of all the interviewees, only Mike attached any significance to his relationship with his siblings, in particular, his twin brother.

Mike explained that whilst his two elder brothers had responded very badly to his decision to transition and had ceased all contact with him, he had been particularly disappointed that his twin brother had also chosen to reject him.

Recounting how previously he had written to his twin brother to explain his decision Mike described the reply which he then had later received:

[He] eventually wrote a letter to me via [other brother]...by an e-mail and he called me by my old name right the way through...although the second paragraph, he said 'oh whoops I mean Mike'...in brackets, and then went on to call me by my old female name all the way through...and at the end said err...'oh' he said 'erm...we haven't...we've nothing in common'...he said...err and erm...it was oh 'contact me if there's any err more births, marriages, deaths or sex changes' and I thought well, charming...

Whilst for Mike his twin brother was not significant to him in the everyday living of his life, when talking of his childhood earlier on the interview he had described having had a very close relationship with him. As his twin and in view of this close relationship, Mike had not expected him to react as badly as he had. As the only sister to his three brothers, by undergoing sex-reassignment, Mike could be seen, however, to have radically altered the gendered composition of their sibling group, where the rejection by his brothers together with the anger that Mike portrayed his twin brother as feeling indicate that they all had particular investments in him as their only 'sister'. That Ben and Mark also reported an uneasy negotiation of their new identities with their brothers suggest that for them a similar dynamic of investment had perhaps also been present.

It could be surmised that sex-reassignment had thus variously impacted upon these interviewees' brothers, not only in terms of their having lost a sister but in terms of their own senses of personal and social selfhood. Holly Devor (1997), in her discussion of the relationships with brothers which her participants reported, concludes that:

From one direction, participants' brothers were challenged to cease seeing participants in the sexualized terms in which most men view most women. From another perspective, if participants' brothers were to acquiesce to affording participants the status of men, then issues of masculine competition and hierarchy arose ... Participants brothers had been accustomed to enjoying certain prerogatives which came to them as men and as sons. (p.431)

Whilst this is a feasible explanation it is not the only possible one. Devor arrives at her conclusion under the terms that the brothers, as knowing audiences, were able to accept their sisters as no longer being female and as becoming 'ordinary' men. However, the accounts which the interviewees for this research offered concerning their parents suggest that achieving their brothers' acceptance of them under these terms would be unlikely. For brothers, to wholly accept their sisters' masculine status would inevitably involve them in questioning the bases of their own masculinity: a process which they may not be willing to undertake. Moreover, as they had become men through the unconventional route of sex-reassignment and thus occupied bodies which do not fully approximate social expectations of embodied maleness, to their knowing audiences they were seen as 'discreditable' in the male 'virtual social identity' which unknowing others would ascribe to them.

The interviewees brothers' investments in them as sisters and the unease or rejection the interviewees received from them upon announcing their decisions can therefore perhaps be best understood as being played out in the social context of 'stigma' and its management rather than simply in the context of familial and social 'normative' gender hierarchies. Through their sisters' decisions, the brothers were positioned as 'courtesy' carriers of their 'stigmatising' attributes, a position which they may have been resentful of having to occupy through no

doings of their own, and which concomitantly could call their own credibility as genetic men and as their parents' sons into question.

Significantly, the interviewees who reported having been unproblematically accepted by their siblings involved sisters rather than brothers. Commenting on the interpersonal dynamics between her participants and their sisters, Devor concludes that the sisters had to 'reconcile' themselves to having a lost a sister who would have previously taken a share in the duties that daughters are usually assigned in their families and that in having 'to adapt to the increase in status and privileges which participants amassed as they grew into men ... participants were leaving their sisters marooned in a socially lesser valued status which they once had shared with them while they themselves socially stepped up to lives as men' (p.428). Again, in this conclusion Devor problematically relies upon the notion that upon being accepted by their sisters, her participants were seen by them to no longer be female and to have become 'ordinary' men. In the context of this research, however, from the accounts Peter, James and Joseph offered concerning their relationships with their parents, it could be surmised that the unproblematic acceptance they had received from their sisters was based in more complex familial interpersonal dynamics.

As always potentially 'discreditable' as men when in the presence of unknowing others, it is doubtful their sisters would see them as accruing the 'status and privileges' of 'normative' manhood, but possible that they did see them as failed daughters to their parents. With this understanding and in the context of their family's 'courtesy stigma', their sisters would perhaps be more likely to view themselves rather than the interviewees as 'stepping up' in their status,

particularly in the eyes of their parents and other family members. As daughters who *were* able to fulfil their parents expectations of them and who did not bring discredit to their parents, the sisters potentially had much approval to gain by the interviewees' decisions and on this basis were perhaps predisposed to become 'willing readers' of the interviewees' new gendered selves.

The reluctance of the interviewees to reveal very much about how their siblings engaged with them and how they had been affected by their decisions poses the difficulty of providing support for these alternative conclusions, though at the same time may be seen to be suggestive of them. In their silence concerning their siblings but their talk about their parents, the interviewees could be seen to reflect, in the context of the interview, their positioning within the interpersonal dynamics of their families: their desire to establish and maintain their new identities with their parents as an individual and without compromising contrast with their creditable, 'normatively' gendered siblings.

Partnerships and Families of Procreation

Partners and children of those interviewees who had them were depicted as highly significant in their lives where most spoke at considerable length about how their decisions had variously impacted upon them. Whilst some reported that their decisions had initially been difficult for their partners and/or children, all considered that overall, the responses they had received from them had been good ones.

Partners

Of the interviewees, Keith, Paul, Jack and Eric all had partners at the time of the interview. All but Jack, who had not met his partner until shortly after his transition, had been with their partners during the time in which they made their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment. Keith, Eric and Paul had lived heterosexual lives in their pasts and were each currently living with and married to heterosexual male partners. Jack had had one brief lesbian relationship in his past but had not lived an open lesbian lifestyle and was currently living with a heterosexual female partner.

Whilst Keith, Jack and Eric considered that they were in long term relationships which they wanted to continue, Paul, who had been married for almost twenty four years, stated that although he had remained married since beginning his transition this had been for practical reasons and that he envisaged a time in the future where he and his husband, Tim, would part and begin lives of their own. Paul considered himself, post-transition, to be a heterosexual man and explained that he had first *'fell for'* Tim as a *'person'* rather than as *'a man'* and that throughout his life he had in fact been sexually attracted to women but had never felt comfortable enough to consider having a lesbian relationship as *'it didn't feel right [being] with a woman as a woman'*. For Paul, his transition had since made his desire for a relationship with a woman stronger and more comfortable for him to contemplate and although Tim had not rejected him and they had maintained a *'deep friendship'* throughout his transition thus far, he felt that it would be unfair on them both if they remained together indefinitely.

Paul explained that when, two years previously, he first told Tim that he had been '*diagnosed with gender dysphoria*', he had not been shocked or outraged but had been surprised by his intention to go through with sex-reassignment. He explained that although Tim was not pleased by his decision, he nonetheless wanted to continue to support him: '*when I told him what I intended to do...he said I can't turn my back on you, he said we've been together for twenty two years I can't turn my back on twenty two years of friendship just like that*'. Whilst Paul had been relieved at Tim's response and pleased about the support he has received from him,²⁰ he recounted that throughout the process of his transition their relationship had been painful for them both:

...he doesn't tell me a lot of things because I don't think he wants to upset me [-] he desperately wants a female partner...he hasn't got one, you know..(T: hmm) we both want the same thing...if we wanted the same woman it would be wonderful (laughter) but err...we've been married for twenty three years, Tim doesn't want the marriage annulled so err legally we are still married...he wanted to see the twenty five years out, it was a milestone he wanted to reach (T: right) I feel very guilty about it, you know, what I've done to him is unforgivable...I know it's not something I could help...

For Paul, undergoing sex-reassignment had generated a lot of guilt. Tim had had deep investments in him as his wife and by making his decision he had failed to live up to Tim's expectations and aspirations for their future life together. In Paul's view it was Tim's belief and acceptance of him as *really* being a man which had underpinned the grief Tim had had to deal with in the loss of his wife. However, later on in the interview, Paul indicated that the interpersonal dynamics between himself and Tim held more complexity than was initially

²⁰ Paul recounted how Tim had not only given him emotional support throughout his treatment but had also taken out a personal loan in order for Paul to undergo the chest surgery he needed.

visible on the surface. This was revealed as, in the light of his current heterosexuality, he accounted for the sexual relationship he had had with Tim throughout their marriage. Paul stated that he '*used to shut off from that side*' of their relationship and that their sex life had not been fulfilling for him but continued to describe how the hormone treatment, in increasing his libido, had led to their having had sex together since beginning his transition:

...I mean we've even had sex since...which is pretty weird I mean it's probably because my hormone levels have gone sky high and I needed something as well...but again if he's not doing something I enjoy then I shut off I'm not there...(T: hmm) part of me feels a bit strange that he should even want to, but you see looking at it from his point of view I'm still the person that he married and loves which is different from his side of the fence, he loves me in the way that he loves a partner, I just don't look the same (T: hmm) but I'm still the same person, you know, so it's different from Tim's point of view than it is from mine...

Whilst it is not uncommon for people to partake in sexual relations with those whom they are in the process of negotiating separation, in the context of the change in the gendered composition of their relationship which Paul's sex-reassignment had brought about, Paul suggested his relationship with Tim and the recognition and acceptance he had received from him to be less straightforward than he had initially portrayed. Although justifying his own (now homosexual) actions on the basis of the effects of the hormone treatment, and maintaining his heterosexual status through the idea of sexual relief rather than desire, within the terms of Tim's heterosexual identification, Paul indicated that he and Tim in fact held differing perspectives concerning 'who' he is.

Whilst referring to himself, post sex-reassignment, as being seen by Tim as '*the*

same person' (as Joseph, above, had done in the context of his relationship with his father), Paul suggests that for Tim the person he still is, is his 'wife' who no longer looks like she did rather than a man whom he had previously failed to recognise as being such. As for the parents of Mike and James above, for Tim, the 'positive mark' of Paul's previously ascribed personal identity as a female upon Paul's body and which Tim held in his mind, could not simply be erased through the process of Paul's sex-reassignment. This, together with Tim's investments in Paul as his 'wife' whom he loved, positioned Tim as able to accept Paul but not under the terms that Paul's mind was 'right' but his body was 'wrong'. In the context of the particular interpersonal dynamics of their relationship, for Paul, Tim was a knowing audience who had been willing to take up the role of protector but who, due to his own investments and inability to become a reader of Paul's new gendered selfhood, would ultimately, though unwittingly, serve to discredit both his own and Paul's heterosexual manhood.

Eric was fifty two, had been married for thirty years and described his husband, John, as having responded well when he had told him about his transsexuality suggesting that John had been both accepting and supportive of him.²¹ However, like Paul, whilst being pleased at John's response he recounted holding some ambivalence concerning their relationship. Having begun sex-reassignment five years previously, Eric had chosen to take a lower dosage of hormone treatment in order to bring about his physiological changes slowly so that John and other people around him would simply get used to him as appearance changed. Apart

²¹ Eric's account of telling his husband is also dealt with in the context of his personal narrative in Chapter Three.

from John, Eric had not informed others of his transition, although he had changed his name which he stated others had readily accepted.

By making this decision Eric had maintained his social positioning as his husband's 'wife' which, particularly in the context of their friends and family, had placed considerable constraints upon the extent to which he could fully live out his new manhood. However, in spite of this and unlike Paul, Eric did not plan to leave his husband and begin a new life for himself. He stated that in being sexually '*attracted to males*' he self-identified as a gay man, and that due to this identification together with his age, he considered that if he left John his life would not necessarily improve for him:

...sex was a big consideration when I started doing this because...erm...I was thinking I could lose my sex life altogether and nobody would ever want me again erm...there is that about relationships that...maybe especially at my age you're inclined to hang on to the one you've got because you think you might never have another one (T: right, hmm) and the truth is that maybe nobody else would ever want me again...a straight man would find it difficult to be with me and a gay man would probably wouldn't want me because I don't have a willy [-] when you live in a minority it's hard to find somebody (T: hmm) so if what you've got's okay then you hang on to it...

Unlike Paul who through identifying as a heterosexual man, had his identity foreclosed and discredited by remaining in a relationship with his husband, by maintaining his relationship with John, Eric suggested that he was able to subjectively, if not socially, accomplish and live out his gay male selfhood. However, whilst Eric considered that the continuation of his relationship with John was therefore advantageous to him on this basis, the difficulties he recounted his physical body would pose for both heterosexual and homosexual

men indicated an ambiguity concerning the terms within which John had accepted him and had wanted to continue with their relationship. Later on in the interview and speaking about their sexual relationship since beginning his transition, Eric suggested a complex interpersonal dynamic between himself and John which he implied involved a process of misrecognition which he had a vested interest in sustaining:

...erm it's a bit catch 22 really, you need the sexual relief but if you're gonna have sex you've got to have sex as a woman (T: hmm) although we don't go in much for penetrative sex erm...but it's yes, it's very important to me (T: hmm)..we have managed to maintain it although (...) I, I'm plainly still sexually attractive but I can't really work out why...to him...I mean I'm quite hairy underneath erm (...) either he must love me an awful lot erm or, or, it can't be that he just doesn't care at all or he wouldn't still be having sex with me erm...maybe he's just attracted to a masculine woman (T: hmm..hmm) there are men like that [-] maybe it just heightens his sense of...well he never wanted a frilly woman in the first place (T: hmm) I'm just more of what he wanted (T: hmm, hmm) erm...I'd love to sit down and talk to him about it but I haven't the nerve because (...) I think it might...if I were to say to him are you aware we look like a gay couple I think he might be quite shocked...

For Eric, the potential for John to re-evaluate his sexuality in relation to him had been present but not realised. Despite Eric's physiological transformation, which included a visibly male upper body as he had undergone chest surgery four years previously, John had not been able to recognise their sexual relationship as potentially a 'homosexual' one. In his reasoning and understanding of John's sexual attraction to him as arising through John's desire for a '*masculine woman*', Eric suggested that John did not hold the belief that his mind was 'right' but his body was 'wrong' and accept that through his sex-reassignment, Eric had become a man. As for Paul, due to the 'positive mark' of Eric's previously

ascribed personal identity upon Eric's body, John had been unable to 'read' Eric's new gendered selfhood, despite the changes in his appearance, and had been able to continue their sexual relationship through the images and memories of Eric as his 'wife' which he held in his mind. For Eric, this process was personally confusing but nonetheless advantageous, as through John's misreading of him the possibility of being rejected and losing his '*sex life altogether*' had been avoided.

John's perception of Eric had not been confined to their sexual relationship. Recounting how John had dealt with some telephone calls which Eric regularly receives from work, Eric explained how John's predisposition to think of him as his 'wife' had led John to unintentionally discredit him to people who called:

it's taken John a long time...to stop referring to me as the wife...which is offensive by anybody's standards (T: hmm, hmm) but...he slips now and again (...) which would leave me in situations where somebody would phone, I take some calls from work and they would expect a Mr. and it would dawn on him that it wasn't him they wanted it was me (T: right) and he'd say 'oh you want the wife' (T: oh!) (laughter) erm but he's really tried hard to stop doing that (T: hmm) erm...things are difficult from my point of view now...

Later on during in the interview, Eric suggested that John had directly experienced some of the effects of his positioning as carrying the 'courtesy stigma' of Eric's 'discredited/discreditable' social positioning, which as John's 'wife' Eric occupied in terms of both his 'womanhood' as well as his 'manhood'. Whilst Eric's transition was not common knowledge amongst their friends, Eric's change in appearance had, however, resulted in there having been some gossip. Eric recounted how John had previously received occasional enquiries from his friends and work colleagues regarding the '*problems*' they assumed he

was *'having with [his] wife'*, which they had interpreted as possibly concerning Eric's involvement in a *'lesbian'* love affair. In his masculine appearance, Eric had been seen by John's friends and colleagues as embodying *'stigmatising'* attributes as a (heterosexual) woman which they perceived to be discrediting to John himself. John's *'courtesy stigma'* and the discrediting effect this potentially had on John's own social and personal sense of heterosexual manhood was therefore a concern for Eric, which he described as necessitating his *'protection'* of John. He explained that in order to do this he refrains from using men's changing rooms and toilets in the town where they live to avoid being seen by John's friends and colleagues as occupying and living out a male identity.

The role of *'protector'* which Goffman (1963) ascribes to those socially positioned as the *'courtesy'* carriers of their related other's *'stigmatising'* attributes was thus reversed in the context of the particular interpersonal dynamics between Eric and his husband. Through John's inability (or unwillingness) to *'read'* Eric's new gendered selfhood, John was concomitantly unable, not only to protect Eric from potential discrediting by others, but also to protect himself from such a potentiality. In the context of their relationship, Eric was positioned as having to *'manage'* both his own and John's *'stigmatising'* attributes without the help of the otherwise supportive *'knowing audience'* of his husband.

Whilst Eric reported that his husband had accepted him both upon and since making his decision to undergo sex-reassignment, he suggested throughout his account of their relationship that John's acceptance was not based in his belief that he was *really* a man, but had rather been gained and sustained through the

interpersonal dynamics of misrecognition which were being played out between them. In continuing their relationship, Eric and John were each at cross purposes but both able to fulfil their differing personal investments in one another. Through John's misrecognition of Eric as a '*masculine woman*' and Eric's refusal to insist otherwise, together with his role in managing 'stigma', both Eric and John had been able to maintain their relationship. Eric had been able to avoid failing to meet John's personal expectations and investments in him as his 'wife' whilst at the same time subjectively fulfil his own sexual and personal identification as a gay man. John, on the other hand, had been able to keep his 'wife' and continue to live his own reality of his sexual and personal identification as a 'heterosexual' man.

Keith, who had been married to his husband for seventeen years, had not yet begun sex-reassignment but had told his husband of his plans six months previously and was beginning to establish his new life as a man. Like Paul and Eric, Keith reported that his husband, Barry, had reacted well upon being told of his transsexuality and had accepted him, although he explained that he was uncertain as to how Barry really felt about his decision to undergo medical treatment. In his current stage of organising his transition Keith stated that he was thus unsure of how his relationship with Barry would ultimately work out, though his aim was to maintain their marriage. Keith recounted that whilst he had not recognised himself to be transsexual until his mid to late twenties it was Barry, several years into their marriage, who had put how he had felt about himself '*into words*' which he described as having occurred in an incident where in getting dressed to go out he had asked Barry whether he looked too feminine in appearance:

I was saying something about oh 'does this make me look like a female', 'do I look delicate in this' or something and he said 'oh I don't think it matters what you wear does it, as long as you're happy dress in what you want, it doesn't bother me' [-] so I thought 'that's all right...he's all right with these things' and then he said 'just as long as you're not one of these poor people who's trapped in the wrong body eh!'...and I thought...'oh...that's it isn't it...he's put it into words'...

Although the incident had clarified for Keith that he was transsexual, he had been concerned at Barry's apparent disapproval, at which point he had decided that his only course of action was to '*make him...like it*'. For Keith, this had involved gradually increasing his masculine appearance so that by the time he had been ready to make the decision to pursue sex-reassignment, Barry had had time to adjust to his male presentation and had told Keith that he was able to accept the further changes that he was planning to make.²² However, in describing the interaction which typically occurs between Barry and himself concerning his transition and his appearance, Keith depicted Barry as being reluctant to fully engage with his efforts to transform his identity and as being reserved about his decision:

...he's getting a little bit better at talking about things (T: hmm) erm even to the point of erm...making a prosthetic erm...genital organs (T: right) I would sort of say erm 'do you mind looking at this?'...'no'...'you don't have to look if you don't want to'...'no I'll look'...'what do you think?'...'yes...that's great, that's fine, that's the one'...'yeah?'...'yeah' ...'do you wanna see it?'...'no I don't wanna see it anymore' (T: right) so he is getting a lot better (T: hmm) erm in that respect [-] I've said to him you know, 'well, what is it going to be like, how is it going to be for you living with it?' and he said 'well, I'll cope with it' and I say 'well we can talk about it?'...'no, it's all right I'll cope with it' [-] and I paraded downstairs today and said 'how do I look?'...'great'...'do I look masculine enough?' ...

²² It is important to note that although Keith had not yet begun any treatment his male presentation was extremely convincing. He reported that 'passing' as a male in public places was unproblematic for him.

'great...nobody's gonna take a second look'...'are you sure, am I looking manly today?'...'yes, you are'...'right, give us a kiss' (T: yeah) so you know...so I said, 'you'll still give me a kiss when I've grown a beard won't you'...'oh god!' he said, 'well I s'pose so' sort of thing...

Keith indicated that whilst Barry had accepted him upon being told of his decision, he is still coming to terms with it and that despite Keith's efforts, he does not in fact '*like*' Keith's desire and request to be recognised by him as being a man. Thus, for Keith, in the current stage of his transition Barry was a knowing audience who, whilst supportive of him and complicit in the ongoing construction of his male presentation, was an ambivalent and reluctant 'reader' of his new gendered selfhood. Arguably, Barry's complicity in the material construction of the impression of Keith's maleness may have underpinned his reluctance or unwillingness as a 'reader'. Such an involvement possibly signified for Barry the impermanence or indeed 'fiction' of his 'wife's' masculinity: that she could add and take off her masculinity almost at will. Keith's suggestion of the future permanence of his male presentation through reference to a beard he hoped to grow, producing an almost despairing response from Barry, indicated that Barry's retreat into a refusal of recognition was, however, unsustainable and under threat by Keith's impending treatment as this would produce permanently visible signs of masculinity.

Later on in the interview, Keith recounted an incident which indicated that Barry's perception of him also involved wilful ignorance of the impact of his appearance upon their potential social positioning. In Barry's refusal to 'read' Keith's new gender he refused to acknowledge the 'virtual' male social identity which unknown others imputed to Keith, and by so doing also refused to take up

the role of protector from the discrediting that through their relationship would potentially be attributed to them both:

...we take the dogs for a walk on the rec which is just across the road and you get the kids playing football and they say 'oh look here come the queers' (T:hmm) because we made the mistake of holding hands (T: hmm) erm so we had to stop doing that erm he didn't like that...people would shout something obscene, and I'd say 'oh god here we go again, let's go home' and he'd say 'why?' and I'd say 'well they're shouting at us' and he'd say 'well they don't mean us' and I said 'they do, they mean us' (T: hmm) so all this...that upset him a lot, he won't talk about that kind of thing...

Like Eric, Keith suggested that in the particular interpersonal dynamics between himself and Barry, he himself had had to take responsibility for protecting them from the 'stigmatising' attributes which through his male appearance, were potentially ascribed to them both when seen as a 'couple'. However, unlike Eric, Keith did not undertake this role surreptitiously to protect his husband from the 'courtesy stigma' that in the context of their relationship Barry would continually find himself facing. Rather, Keith's strategy was to draw Barry in to the process of 'stigma' management in an endeavour to provide Barry with the means to take up such a role himself.

Unlike Eric, Keith did not have any personal, sexual investment in his husband. He stated that he and Barry had not had a sexual relationship during their marriage and considered that their celibacy, which he asserted had been mutually agreed since the beginning of their relationship, would contribute to their being able to cope with the changes which lay ahead for them both and that he did not envisage that either of them would want to end their relationship. Throughout his talk concerning their relationship, Keith described a marriage which was largely

the continuation of a deep and platonic friendship. As they had not and did not sleep together and had always been more like loving friends rather than a conventional, heterosexual 'husband' and 'wife', Keith discounted the possibility of perhaps having a 'gay' relationship with Barry on the completion of his transition, where he further explicitly stated that without '*the correct organs*' this could not, in any case, constitute an option.

In contrast to Eric, for Keith, maintaining their relationship necessitated his *enabling* Barry to manage his 'courtesy stigma' rather than shielding him from any awareness of it, as by so doing he felt that he *maximised* the chances for their relationship to survive, of their being able, ultimately, to live together as if they were brothers. Thus, as continuing a sex life was neither an issue or at stake for Keith in making his decision to transition and there was no sexual dynamic between himself and Barry, and never likely to be one on any basis, he reasoned that this would be an outcome which could satisfy them both. Keith did not attach any significance to the non-sexual investments which Barry would arguably have in him as his 'wife'. As at the time of the interview other family members and friends had not been informed of Keith's decision, this was a factor in their relationship which both Keith and Barry had yet to encounter, address and negotiate, both between themselves and with their significant others.

Jack, who had begun his sex reassignment five years previously had been living with his female partner, Mandy, for four and a half years. He stated that apart from Mandy, his family and a few very close friends whom he has known since a teenager, no other people with whom Mandy and himself associate themselves, including Mandy's family and close friends, know about his transition. Jack

recounted that he had met Mandy several months into his hormone treatment and, having had chest surgery, had completed his transition and was living as a man. He had first met Mandy upon moving house, at which time Mandy was married and she and her husband, who lived across the road from Jack, became friends. During the first year of their friendship Jack and Mandy became very close and it was shortly before Mandy and her husband were due to leave the country to work abroad for a year that they started their relationship, at which point Mandy then left her husband and she and Jack began living together.

Jack stated that throughout their friendship he had not told either Mandy or her husband about his transition and that Mandy had simply thought him to be '*a real cute looking young man*'. He explained how it was only hours prior to beginning their relationship, and days before Mandy was due to leave the country, that he plucked up the courage to tell her about his past and that whilst at first she had been '*shocked*', it was the honesty of his admission that had finally led them to reveal their feelings for one another. Recounting the moments leading up to their first sexual encounter, Jack described Mandy as fully accepting of him as a man and as having been unperturbed by the fact that he did not have a penis:

...I figured this woman was in shock, she was gonna...and she still had a day to go and I said 'look', you know, 'I have nothing, I have nothing...down there' [no penis] (T: hmm) and err anyway she, she watched a film and she went back home and the next day we...spent the day together again and err [-] we managed to be briefly physical 'cause we were sitting on the sofa next to each other, you know, and she held my hand [-] all the fears I had were immediately erased so I, I ended up being the one to say shall we go upstairs (T: hmm) anyway we spent the, but I wouldn't take...my boxer shorts off because, 'cause I thought 'I don't know, all right she's got it in her head but', I mean she looked at my top and she's

saying...‘you’re...no, you’re, you know, this isn’t, you’re lying!’ and she said ‘look at your hands, your nails, look at you, women’s nails don’t, you know, even your nails are like’...I said ‘yeah but look, small hands’ and she said ‘but...but your chest’ but I figured okay that’s fair enough but ‘if’, I thought, if I took my boxer shorts off and then she is presented with the, you know, absolute, you know, no denying (T: hmm) I just felt that was gonna be too much for her but gradually she was [-] what I do remember well is her insistence that, ‘it’s you, I love you and I don’t care’ and she was all, I mean all of the issues...just no problems, no problem at all, she was fine so...and we started on what we’ve got now today...

In recounting how he and Mandy had established their relationship, Jack depicted Mandy not only as having accepted him on the understanding that he is a man but as having been in disbelief that he could ever have been anything other than a man. Whilst for Jack this attested to the authenticity of his manhood in spite of his lack of a penis, he suggested, however, later on in the interview, that her acceptance of him was not quite so straight forward and problem free for him as he had initially implied. This was revealed by Jack when speaking about the physiological changes that had occurred in his appearance since transitioning. He remarked that Mandy had only seen ‘*a couple of photographs of [him] as a female*’, that ‘*she doesn’t want to see very many*’ and that he was not entirely sure ‘*how she feels about [his past]*’. He continued by recounting how Mandy had reacted during incidents where he had brought his female past to her attention. The first incident involved his having offered advice to Mandy by drawing upon his knowledge of how painful menstruation can be, and the second involved a recent conversation that they had had after receiving two unordered skirts in a catalogue order:

...but occasionally when she’s on about period pains and I’ve...earlier on together, I used to say ‘oh, I know it’s awful isn’t it, have you tried Feminax’ or something and she’d go ‘no,

no don't please, just don't think about, don't tell me that', you know, 'just don't!'...

...the other day I got a catalogue order err through and for some reason there were these two little like skirts in there and I hadn't ordered them, I hadn't paid for them, they obviously just got slipped into my order (T: hmm) anyway I sent them back and stuff and I was talking to Mandy in the car the other night, driving back, I said, I said 'oh', I said, 'I was really rather enchanted with those skirts' and she said 'oh', she, you know, she had, she's so adjusted, she went, she says stuff like 'oh you would look nice in them!' and of course she doesn't properly realise that I...I said 'well I always used to' and she said 'oh don't, don't, don't!' like this at me because she doesn't wanna, you know (T: yeah)

Jack depicted the incident of the skirts as having occurred for Mandy within a framework of 'ordinary' heterosexual banter and teasing, where being '*so adjusted*' to him as a man, Mandy had not considered the irony of the situation in light of his past. Whilst for Jack the irony had been immediately apparent, as with the menstruation incident, bringing his past to Mandy's attention had broken the framework for her teasing and had resulted in her distress. Jack continued by explaining Mandy's reactions in both incidents as arising through her personal experience of him:

...I mean she's never known me as anything different (T: hmm) and as far as she's concerned I don't look that different until she looks at the photographs [-] erm but she sometimes can't quite hack the idea of erm, of whatever and I don't talk about it, it's not something...it's like doing a prison sentence you know, if I'm honest...

Jack suggested that Mandy's reaction had been due to the fact she has never known him to be anything other than a man and that she cannot envisage him as ever having been a female until she is presented with photographic evidence. For Mandy, who had met Jack after his transition, the impact of Jack's 'positive

mark' of his personal identity ascribed to him at birth was experienced in reverse to that of Paul, Eric and Keith's partners, who had known them previously. Having only known Jack since his transition, the images and memories of him which Mandy held in her mind and in which she had personal investment, were those of a man, which by looking back at past images of Jack or when reminded of his previous 'female' status, from her positioning *could be and had been* ruptured and destabilised. Whilst lending some support to Kessler and McKenna's (1978) argument of how initial gender attributions are not necessarily altered 'if the physical genital is not present when it is expected' (p.154), in that Mandy *had* been able to still believe Jack to be a man although one who did not have a penis, this belief could *not*, however, be sustained for Mandy within the fuller social framework of a deepening knowledge and awareness of Jack's past. Only by being told of his past and then immediately allowed/encouraged to forget could Mandy maintain the credibility of her belief and foreclose the potential for her to see Jack and herself as 'discreditable' in their individual positionings and in relation to one another within the social relations of 'normative' gender and heterosexuality.

Although stating that his past was not something he liked to '*talk about*', in recounting these incidents Jack suggested that there had been occasions with Mandy where he has in fact wanted to do so, and that it is Mandy rather than himself who does not like it being spoken about. Jack thus indicated that although his manhood is and *must* be unquestionable to Mandy, and that she is a 'willing reader' who has taken up the role of protecting him and herself from potential discrediting by others, this has been at the cost of effectively being denied any recognition of his unique personhood, that there is a significant

portion of his life and character which since beginning their relationship, Mandy can neither acknowledge or accept. For Jack, the initial disbelief that Mandy had held upon first being told of his transsexuality had continued into their relationship, her acceptance of him thus being precariously based in her denial of 'who' Jack is and has been. Rather than recognising Jack as having always been a man within the terms of traditional transsexual discourse, as someone whose mind had been 'right' but their body had been 'wrong', Mandy's recognition and acceptance of Jack's manhood could only be maintained in the absence of any such acknowledgement. Arguably, for Jack, the '*prison sentence*' he felt as if he was serving was therefore really rooted in his present: in relation to Mandy, he could only be a man if he refused to own his past.

Children

Of all the interviewees, Peter, Paul, Eric and Mike had children who were born to them. Peter had previously been and was continuing to be a single parent to his eight year old son. He had previously identified and lived as a lesbian and had conceived his son, whilst not in a relationship, with the help of a male friend who had agreed to assist him in having a child. Paul and Eric had children whom they had conceived and raised in their marital relationships. Paul had one seventeen year old son and Eric had two adult sons in their mid and late twenties. Mike was a single parent to two children. He had an eighteen year old son from a previous marriage and a fourteen year old daughter whom he had conceived by artificial insemination whilst he was living as a lesbian but not in a relationship. Of these children only the sons of Paul and Eric had relationships with their biological fathers and none had relationships with either male or female co-parents.

All of these interviewees considered that their children had been able to accept them. Peter described having a very close relationship with his son, Philip, where most of their time was spent together. He stated that as he had had only two brief, casual relationships since Philip had been born, Philip was very closely attached to him as his only parent. Peter recounted that when immediately prior to beginning sex-reassignment he had explained his transsexuality to his son, who was then six years old, Philip had had '*no problem*' with it and more easily adjusted to the situation: '*I just told him and he said "okay, shall I call you dad now then?" ...no drama, no nothing, he seemed happy after I'd told him*'. Earlier on in the interview, Peter stated that prior to his sex-reassignment he had never presented himself as a conventional, heterosexual and feminine woman, indicating that Philip had already been used to his masculine appearance and that perhaps the physiological changes which he had told Philip would occur through his transitioning were therefore not as shocking for him as they may otherwise have been.

Mike, who similarly described having a very close relationship with his daughter, Sue, indicated that his pre-transition masculine appearance had also played a significant role in the acceptance he had received from her. He recounted how Sue, who was twelve years old when he had first explained his transsexuality to her, had responded '*very well*' upon being told and has since suggested to him that she is pleased by his decision:

...my daughter says, oh about two to three months ago now erm...just out of the blue she said...err 'I used to be embarrassed in your company socially' you know ,because she said ' you didn't fit...being a woman'..(T: right) 'you didn't fit' (T: hmm) you know, 'you came across quite odd really' and erm she said

'now I enjoy being around you...in company...and it suits you'...

Both Peter and Mike indicated that due to their prior masculine appearances, neither Philip or Sue had had investments in them as 'female' parents. For Philip, who had been only six years old when Peter transitioned and who did not have a father figure to compare with Peter, recasting his mother as his 'father' had made sense, not only through Peter's explanation that he was about to begin living as a man and that his mind was 'right but his body was 'wrong', but through the masculine appearance which he had always seen and accepted Peter as embodying and in which he therefore had a personal investment in Peter maintaining. Thus, arguably, if Peter had decided to present himself in a feminine manner, for Philip this would have constituted a more dramatic and unsettling violation of Peter's gendered self. In the context of the discourses and social relations of 'normative' gender and heterosexuality, which by his age Philip would be aware of, it is thus probable that in Philip's perception, by transitioning, Peter was therefore fulfilling rather than failing to fulfil a 'normative' conception of selfhood and possibly, able to become the 'father' that he wanted but had never had.

Mike suggested that for his daughter, Sue, a similar process had also taken place although her age had meant that this had involved the additional factor of her awareness of the 'discrediting' and 'stigmatising' effects of her mother's masculinity and lesbianism. Unlike Philip, Sue was of an age where heterosexuality, 'sex' differences and the social, 'normative' imperative that one's 'gender' match one's 'sex' mattered a great deal, whereby her mother's previous violation of these had been a source of deep embarrassment and

'discredit' to her. Having an investment in her mother's 'normativity', but aware that as a female her mother could not and would not fulfil the female, heterosexual ideal, Sue had been able to both accept and invest in the alternative option of her mother's transition into a man. For Sue, the 'normativity' which as a man she saw Mike as able to socially achieve outweighed the 'stigmatising' attributes which, through his transition, could potentially be ascribed to them both by others. Though Mike had become a man through the unconventional route of sex-reassignment, for Sue, he was at least now more conventional and more acceptable than he had been.

Eric, who as mentioned above had undertaken a slow transition, reported that his two adult sons were also accepting of him. His elder son was married and had a young child and did not live with Eric and his husband, though the younger son still lived at home with them. Eric stated that he had a good relationship with his sons but recounted that in the five years since beginning treatment he has never told them of his sex-reassignment:

I suppose I let them guess because...I thought if they want to know they'll come and ask me...and I'm quite prepared to talk about it if they want to know but they just accept me erm...they accepted my change of name...they accept the way I dress and erm...my younger son borrows my clothes...

Eric stated that throughout the process of his transition neither of his two sons have asked him about his physiological changes or commented on them to him, by which he indicated that the acceptance he had received from them was therefore not necessarily within the terms of his manhood. This was further suggested by Eric as later on in the interview, he described how in his

relationship to his sons and his elder son's wife and child, the use of both his 'male' name and other (female) 'role' names were used by them:

...they do still call me mum yeah erm...I have a grandchild who calls me grandma and...my eldest son calls me Eric...and certainly his wife calls me Eric...my younger son calls me mum, I don't suppose he'll ever stop (T: hmm) I should have done something about the grandchild...erm I didn't, I let it slip by and I regret that really, I should have started them off calling me Eric...

Eric thus indicated that whilst his sons 'accept' him there is perhaps some confusion and/or ambiguity over what is at issue for their acceptance. Whilst Eric had not told his sons of his transition, it could be possible, for example, that they know about it and that they do accept Eric on the basis that he is now a man but have chosen not to reveal to Eric that they know, as Eric had not told them and so they are maintaining his unawareness of their knowledge. On the other hand, however, their acceptance of him may be based upon their understanding that their 'mother' no longer looks like 'she' did, that perhaps 'she' is embodying the effects of a severe menopause and has changed 'her' name and is wearing male clothing to protect 'herself' from the 'stigmatising' attributes which others would assign to 'her'. For Eric, his sons thus constituted a knowing audience though he could not be sure of what it was they knew, and where the basis for the acceptance he has received from them was unclear, not only for himself but also for his sons who had been willing to offer it. In the absence of their knowledge of what one other 'knew' no clear grounds could be established for what the 'acceptance' either did or should comprise.

Paul similarly indicated that there was some complexity in the acceptance he had received from his eighteen year old son. He explained that when he had told his

son, William, of his plans to transition William had initially been shocked and very upset but had soon begun to accept him. Paul suggested, however, that his acceptance by William did not easily or simply translate into an unproblematic acceptance of him as a *man*, which in recounting an incident where William had brought a new girlfriend home, he signalled to be complicated by the specific relationship that William has with both Paul and Paul's husband, Tim, as his parents:

...it was quite funny, I was washing up in the kitchen...and he came in and he introduced Tim to her, he said 'this is my dad' and he went into the back room, the cats were in there, and he says 'and this is Penny and this is, this is Sammy' and I thought any second now and he said 'this is the other person who lives in the house'...and I said 'hi, I'm Paul' (laughs) and she was fine with it from day one...

Paul indicated that although William accepts him, Paul's dual positioning as both a man and his 'mother' produces some discomfort and perhaps some confusion for William who, positioned within a relationship with both Paul and Tim as his parents, cannot find a suitable way to relate to Paul in the male social and personal identity he now occupies. Already having a father in Tim, unlike Paul and Sue, William was unable to recast Paul as his 'father' upon Paul's transitioning. For William, Paul's occupation of the positions of both 'mother' and 'man' socially and discursively cancelled one another out and constrained him to accept Paul only within the gender neutral terms of 'personhood' and outside of a parental social framework. The social positionings and dynamics between Paul, Tim and William as a family also posed some problems for Paul himself. Referring to his son earlier on in the interview, Paul stated:

...my son, well I refer to him as Tim's son actually because Tim is his father and I can never be his father (T: hmm) and Tim is his father and always will be so who does that make me?, if I'm his father who does that make Tim?, I can never be his father so therefore he is Tim's son...

Ironically, Paul thus suggested that through his transition, the issue of 'acceptance' between himself and his son had cut both ways instead of one and that whilst he had gained his son's acceptance, albeit on an ambiguous basis, his son had effectively lost it from Paul. The presence of Tim as William's 'father' and Paul's being William's 'mother' had placed constraints upon Paul's own social positioning and personal sense of manhood which he had felt could he could only fully establish and maintain by severing his ties with them both. For Paul, the acceptance he had received from both his son and his husband had been desirable but at the same time unwanted, as located within their individual investments in his 'actual social identity' as a 'female' ascribed to him at birth and which had later been reinscribed through the birth of his son and thus also upon his *son's* own 'actual social identity', in relation to them he could not escape the potentially 'discrediting' effects of his past, either socially or interpersonally.

Friends

Most of the interviewees reported that their friends, whether heterosexual or lesbian, had responded well to their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment and had easily been able to accept them in their new lives as men. Apart from Paul and Lawrence, who both stated that a few of their casual acquaintances had ceased all contact with them, none reported having experienced rejection. The majority of the interviewees, echoing those participants in Devor's (1997) study,

recounted that to their relief and indeed pleasure, most of their friends had not only responded well when being told of their transsexuality and had been able to accept them as men, but had not been at all surprised by their revelations. Such experiences were succinctly described by Mark and James. Mark explained:

...when I was telling people a lot of people just went...‘so’...they just saw it as putting a name to what they thought I was...I mean one couple, husband and wife, I’d met the wife because she’s [in Mark’s profession] but the guy, we used to go out and play pool and all the rest of it and she said ‘we’ve always thought, you know, you’re more of a guys mate than...’ (T: hmm) and a lot of people said that (T: hmm) and one very close friend who is training to be a psychotherapist said that she’d seen it in me from the first time we’d spoken so I had lots of support...

For Mark, the positive reactions he received from his friends together with their perception of his decision as being coherent within their experiences of him – that they were able to agree with him that his mind was ‘right’ but his body was ‘wrong’ – gave him confidence, both in going ahead with his treatment and to finally tell his parents who were the last people to know about his transition.

James described how whilst all of his friends had not expressed shock or surprise and had easily accepted him, since beginning his treatment he had noticed how many of the men within his friendship group were now more relaxed in his company than they had been previously:

...most of my male friends sort of erm...are either married to other friends or, you know, so we’re like in a group but I’ve found like...they sort of relax a lot more...with me which is really good...I don’t know why (T: hmm) maybe they sort of looked at me and thought strange sort of girl and then it’s fallen into place for them...

For most of the interviewees, as illustrated by Mark and James, their friends had not considered them to be conventionally 'female' in their previous presentations of self and thus had not been perturbed by their decisions. As James and Mark both indicated, for many heterosexual friends of the interviewees, as for Mike's daughter above, the decision to transition perhaps signified for them the possibility for the interviewees to overcome the 'stigmatising' attributes which, in their prior self presentation as 'masculine' women they previously embodied, thus enabling both parties to more easily avoid potential discrediting by unknown others. Many of the interviewees heterosexual female friends, for example, were likely or at least potentially likely to have been cast as lesbians by unknown others when in the company of the interviewees in public spaces. Heterosexual male friends may have been or potentially could have been cast by unknown others as either gay men (when out with those interviewees who stated that they were often assumed to be men), or, by being assumed to be in a heterosexual relationship or friendship with the interviewees, as therefore failing to meet the 'normative' standards of heterosexual masculinity, thus being ascribed the 'stigmatising' attribute of not being an 'ordinary' man.²³

As for Mike's daughter, in social contexts and relations of 'normative' heterosexuality, where credibility and credit of the self is accomplished only through appearing to meet these norms, the heterosexual friends of the interviewees were able to transfer their investments in the interviewees from their old to their new gendered status. In so doing and becoming 'willing readers', the friends were thus able not only to assist the interviewees in socially

²³ Those interviewees who stated that prior to their transition they were regularly perceived to be men were James, Mark, Jack, Peter, Mike and Keith (who had not yet begun any treatment).

establishing their personal sense of gendered and perhaps also sexual selfhood, but also maintain their own.

For those interviewees who had previously lived openly as 'lesbians' and whose close friendships were therefore largely with lesbian women, clearly a different interpersonal context had been involved and had had to be negotiated by the interviewees. In their prior social positioning, they had once shared with their friends a particular 'stigmatising' attribute which, as for the heterosexual friends above, they might have been seen to be leaving behind as they embarked upon their transitions. From the viewpoint of Janice Raymond (1994)²⁴, in the eyes of lesbian friends, the interviewees may have been seen to have become men albeit through the unconventional route of sex-reassignment which would bring with it its own 'stigmatising' potential, but as having become 'men' nonetheless and by definition, as having joined even if not unproblematically, the ranks of 'normativity' and/or masculine privilege which they themselves were marked against.

Of the seven interviewees who had previously lived openly as lesbians, all identified as heterosexual men post-transition. Some did not differentiate between their lesbian and heterosexual friends and of them all, only Aaron, Peter, Matthew and Joseph spoke specifically about their friendships with lesbian women. Whilst each either described or indicated that there had been some engagement with the aforementioned issues each, however, reported that they had been accepted and that the reactions of their friends had been positive ones.

²⁴ Previously discussed in Chapter One.

Aaron and Joseph recounted that they had initially feared that their friends would feel let down and angry about their decisions to undergo sex-reassignment but when they had eventually revealed this to their friends they had been pleasantly surprised at the good responses they had received. The similar experience which each described is captured particularly well by Aaron:

...erm I was surprised actually...because everybody was fine about it...a lot of people found it difficult to get over the 'she/he' bit (T: hmm) but they were very understanding and I've actually been quite proud of some people because I know that if I was them I probably would have been 'oh I hate men!', I would have gone that way...and a lot of people have said 'if I was brave enough' or 'if I had my go again' or whatever, 'I would have done what you've done' (T: right) and I think to me...when a lot of people say you're brave to do what you've done, to me that's braver to actually be able to say that (T: hmm) I think they're the ones...and I admire them for it and I don't feel that they persecute me for doing it, in a way they feel envious, I've done what they perhaps wish they could do...

For both Aaron and Joseph, the positive responses they had received from their friends had deepened the friendships they now had with them. Rather than leading to a break in the friendships, which they initially feared might occur, each considered that their transition had led to an awareness, for both themselves and their friends, of the complexity inherent both within and between their respective identities. Matthew, who was waiting to begin treatment, also indicated that a similar awareness had been developing between himself and his friends. He recounted an incident where, revealing his transsexuality to one close friend during their discussion of the television documentary 'The Decision', he had taken the opportunity to begin to explain to her the way in which he perceived the distinction between some lesbians and female to male transsexuals to be more complex than she was assuming:

I talked to a friend of mine and she said 'we saw that programme...oh he was a real, really was a lad wasn't he that Fred'²⁵ and I said 'well Fred reminded me very much of me' [-] I learnt to hide it more but basically very similar erm and she said erm she looked at me curiously...'but you're a lesbian aren't you' and I said 'well...yes and no' I said 'I think that there's a lot of gender dysphoria in the lesbian community and where you decide someone's lesbian and where you decide they're actually transsexual can be very awkward' [-] 'I think there's a lot more complexity there than you realise, you should never over simplify any community' erm [-] and I...we started talking and erm...she was a bit shocked when I first explained to her how I felt...

Like Aaron and Joseph, Matthew considered that the negotiation of his new identity with his friends had enriched the friendships he had with them and had constituted interpersonal contexts where he had been able to establish a more fluid understanding of their differences, overcoming an 'us and them' approach to his new positioning which may otherwise have threatened his relationships with them.

In the description of their friends and themselves which they had variously given throughout their talk of their friendships, all suggested that their prior selves and their friends had largely presented as masculine 'butch' women, and had shared a disinvestment in any form of femininity in their own selfhoods. Each indicated that on this basis their friends had therefore more easily been able to become 'willing readers' of their new gendered selves. Of the four interviewees, only Peter suggested that the positive response which he had received from a close friend had been unsatisfactory to him. Like Matthew, Aaron and Joseph, Peter had described himself as having been very masculine in appearance whilst he had lived as a lesbian although for him this had been a problem for many of the

²⁵ Fred was a young school age female to male transsexual in the documentary.

lesbians he had at one time socialised with, whom he described had ranged in their self presentations from feminine to androgynous but not overtly masculine or 'butch'. Peter stated that apart from one particular friend, Michelle, he was no longer in contact with the lesbians he used to meet with and that he had broken off his friendships with them many years prior to deciding to transition. Speaking of his close friend whom he described as androgynous in her self presentation, Peter recounted that whilst she had been accepting of him upon being told his plans to undergo sex reassignment, to his amazement she had not and still did not seem to understand the meaning or significance of his transition: "...when I told Michelle, I thought she'd be really cool but she didn't get it...she didn't get it at all, she still doesn't get it, she thinks I'm an extension of a very butch lesbian, but then she's not the most intelligent person in the world (laughs)".

Earlier on the interview Peter had stated that his friendship with Michelle had been a long one and had described a very close but undoubtedly platonic friendship in which each offered one another a lot of their time and support. In so doing, Peter indicated contrary to his facetiousness, that Michelle had had deep investments both in him and in the particular close friendship they had developed and that in this context Peter's transition had more probably than not been seen by Michelle to be potentially threatening. In relation to Peter who was Michelle's close and significant friend and in Michelle's personal investment as a lesbian and her androgynous gendered self-identification, Peter suggested that it was likely that Michelle had been an unwilling reader of his new gendered selfhood due to her unwillingness to contemplate the issue of 'difference' which his transition signified. In his becoming a man, Michelle would potentially find herself positioned as a heterosexual woman when with Peter in social spaces, a

position which as a lesbian she had a personal investment in *not* occupying, and perhaps on this basis had dealt with her fears but desire to maintain their friendship by recuperating Peter's transition into the more 'similar' and for her more 'acceptable' framework of 'butch lesbian'.

2

Arguably, that Peter had not completed his transition constituted a further factor which had underpinned and enabled Michelle's continuing misrecognition of him. Whilst embodying many of the masculinising effects of hormone treatment, at the time of the interview Peter had not undergone chest surgery and was not able to disguise the existence of his breasts which detracted from the otherwise male physiological characteristics he visibly presented. Thus, through his embodiment of masculinity upon a visibly 'female' bodily form, Peter could therefore be seen by Michelle to be physically extending rather than moving beyond a 'lesbian' representation of masculine gender.

In having personal investments in their own masculine identification and appearance, the friends of Aaron, Matthew and Joseph were thus differently positioned within their friendships with them than Michelle was with Peter, where arguably it was due to the absence of their potential 'heterosexing' by unknown others as well as the previous masculine identifications of Aaron, Matthew and Joseph which had enabled them to be more readily accepting and

willing as 'readers' than Michelle had been.²⁶ Although only Peter suggested that the acceptance and recognition he had received from his friend had been within the terms of lesbianism, Aaron, Matthew and Joseph did not indicate that their friends simply accepted and recognised them through the terms of 'normative' manhood. In the relationships with their friends where the issue of 'difference' had been negotiated *within* as well as *between* their respective identities of 'lesbian' and 'female to male transsexual', each suggested that they had been accepted as being a man, *but a different kind of man*, a man whose prior positioning as a lesbian could not, in the eyes of their friends, simply enable them to be repositioned, post-transition, as an (un)problematic and 'normative' 'other'.

Colleagues at Work

Of the interviewees, Ben and Lawrence were both attending university and only Paul, Joseph, Keith, Mark and Eric were employed in regular occupations. Jack, Aaron and Adam were self employed and worked alone and Peter, Matthew and James were unemployed. Matthew and Peter had been unemployed since before deciding to transition but James stated that he had left his last job in order to avoid the stress of transitioning whilst at work.

Paul, Joseph, Mark and James (in his previous job) had each informed the people with whom they worked about their sex-reassignment and all considered that the

²⁶ In many ways, the positioning of Peter and Michelle and the effects this produced mirrored those which can be found in the sexual relationships between some lesbians and female to male transsexuals. In lesbian relationships where one partner decides to transition and live as a man, it is not uncommon for the remaining 'lesbian' partner to experience a crisis of personal and social identity and for the relationship to become strained or difficult as a result. For an excellent autobiographical essay tracing such dynamics from the point of view of a lesbian partner of a transitioning female to male, see Heather Findlay (1998) 'Losing Sue' in Sally Munt (ed) *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*.

reactions they had received had been good ones. Apart from James whose usual occupation was a teacher of twelve to sixteen year olds, all were positioned within their employment in predominately 'female' occupations. Paul worked in a small factory and was one of a team who built electronic boards for computers. Within his workplace, the men and women undertook different duties and in his particular job, he worked with a group of women. Joseph, who was working during his year out from university, was working as a shop assistant in a local department store and worked mainly alongside women. Mark was an occupational therapist and was employed as a manager of a 'Wheelchair Service' provided to the local community. In this post Mark was a boss to several male team workers but mainly worked alongside colleagues and a boss who were all women. Apart from Joseph, who only remarked that his managers and colleagues had been '*brilliant*' when he had told them of his sex-reassignment and that he had had '*no problems*' in gaining their acceptance, all suggested that although the responses from people at work had been positive, the acceptance they had received had not been straightforward.

Speaking about his decision to leave work in order to begin sex-reassignment, James explained that although the head teacher had been accepting of him and had been positively encouraging and supportive of his decision, the main issue for him had been the potential disapproval and fear of the parents and the bad publicity that his transition could have caused for both himself and the school:

...I decided to hand my resignation in because erm...I wasn't bothered about the kids particularly knowing and I wasn't bothered about the staff knowing, but if the kids did know then you'd have the thing about parents coming up to the school, you know, (T: hmm) the newspapers round first thing in the morning, you know, and I didn't want any of that and I didn't want the

school to have it either [-] it was hard to do erm but fortunately the head was absolutely brilliant...I went to see her and I said 'this is my resignation and I'm gonna tell you why' and she was fantastic she was absolutely brilliant...she was very supportive [-] it was not the thing I wanted to do (T: hmm) erm I mean if I'd have had the choice, if the head said to me look you don't need to go [-] but I didn't feel that that would have been particularly comfortable for anybody (T: hmm) but err...you know, I regret having to leave my profession to do that...

James indicated that whilst he had received support and a good personal response from the head teacher he had not received a good *professional* response. As his line manager, James might reasonably have expected that his gesture of resignation would not so easily have been accepted and that the support the head teacher had given him would also be extended into her professional role, where, responsible for her staff, she could have sought to establish the means by which James could have continued in his post. James thus suggested that the response he had received from the head teacher had been *sympathetic* rather than practically supportive and that, by having failed to fulfil her professional obligation to him as a member of her staff, it had been *her* rather than his transition which had ultimately cost him his job.

Mark and Paul both considered that they had received both professional and personal support from their managers. Paul stated that the male bosses at the factory where he worked had been '*a bit surprised*' when he had told them of his sex-reassignment but that they had since '*been fine*' with him. He explained that he had not made a formal announcement of his transition to his work colleagues, most of whom were female, but rather had told one or two he regularly worked shifts with and had asked them to inform others on his behalf. Paul asserted that none of the men and women where he worked had '*recoiled in horror*' at his

transition and that he considered that the reactions he had received had been good ones. However, in recounting an incident where a female colleague had asked him about his sex-reassignment, Paul indicated that he was in fact a target of ridicule and amusement:

...there was one rather amusing incident, there's this very large woman at work, big Alice they call her and err she was on a different shift to me she was on overtime and err I got the impression that if anybody would know she would definitely know and I was just waiting and there was a time when we were...just the two of us together and she scooted over on her wheelie chair and I thought 'here it comes' and she said 'is it true?' and I said 'is what true?' and she said, 'you know, that you're turning into a man' and I said, you know, 'in a basically roundabout sort of way, yes, I'm turning into a man, yes' and she said 'oh so are you gonna get a willy then' and I said 'oh I don't know, I haven't decided yet' and she said 'well if you do, make sure it's a big one...and I said 'okay' and she said 'yes, get a big one', she said 'I'll be your girlfriend' (laughter) it was so funny and it's been like that though, nobody's recoiled in horror yet...

In the context of his workplace, Paul suggested that his new gendered selfhood was not taken seriously and that rather than having been accepted and believed to be a man by his colleagues they comprised of knowing audiences who were discrediting of him. Arguably, being positioned within the workplace in a 'woman's job' which was a lower rank to those occupied by the men, had reduced any challenging potential that his 'newly' acquired manhood might otherwise have brought to both his male and female colleagues. In occupying such a position throughout his transition, Paul had claimed his manhood without disturbing the gendered hierarchy of his workplace which although had most likely contributed to the lack of recognition he had received from his colleagues, would undoubtedly have served to spare Paul from the more hostile reactions he potentially could have received.

Mark, who recounted that his boss and work colleagues had responded well when he had informed them of his decision to undergo sex-reassignment, did not suggest that he was subject to such overt ridicule at work but did suggest that some of his working relationships were strained and that gaining the recognition of his manhood from some colleagues was not easy. As a manager within his department that had a female boss and which largely comprised of female managers and male working staff, like Paul, Mark was positioned in his workplace in what was considered a 'woman's job', although in his working environment this was of a higher rather than lower rank to the men.

Mark explained that when he had first told his boss about his decision to begin sex-reassignment she had been understanding and highly supportive and had organised and assisted him in the process of informing colleagues and other members of staff. He stated that he himself had told everybody where he worked by speaking to staff in groups and also individuals on a one to one basis over a two day period. Mark recounted that although he had only received positive responses and had since felt that he had been accepted, the men at work had adapted to his transition more easily than the women and that he was uncertain of whether most of his female colleagues, with whom he spent the majority of his working time, really recognised him to be a man. For Mark, his uncertainty was primarily due to what he described as the '*mind-set*' of many of his female colleagues:

...the only problems I experience, I suppose now...erm is that people still have a mind-set around you which unfortunately is difficult to change [-] my managers, my peers are mainly female so...you know, when they get together and they talk or

whatever...and they talk about issues and I sit there and I think 'you're talking about it in this way'...as if they'd always perceived me as a man (T: hmm) so it's interesting to sort of think erm and sometimes they'll come and go 'oh sorry, and gentlemen', and you think well 'is that just because it's all girls or...and it's easy to forget the gentlemen or is it because their mind-set is else where?'...

Mark continued by recounting an incident where, after all of his announcements, one of his female colleagues in a different department had directed him to the wrong toilet:

...but some things at work...which in the early days people could be forgiven for...but it just shows people's mind-set erm...I went to erm [another department] to collect some things, they knew my change of name, they knew everything, they knew me before, they were people I'd known a number of years and stuff and they were pretty cool, and they called me 'Mark'...and I said to one of the women, you know, 'where's the nearest toilet?' so she showed me to the toilet, there was one toilet there, the 'Ladies', and I said 'that's the "Ladies"'...and she just looked... 'oh', you know, you could just see, it was like a total mental jolt for her (T: hmm)..and these are people with very, very broad attitudes and a lot of professional experience so you know...I mean it is a jolt, it takes months to...she didn't know what to say, I just said 'that's okay, I'll just use the "Gents" round here' (T: hmm) so she didn't say anything...

Mark suggested that in view of his female colleagues past knowledge of him as being female he had not expected to immediately gain their full recognition of him as man, but in respect of their otherwise '*broad attitudes*' he had been disappointed by their ambiguous and/or forgetful interaction with him. Depicting his female colleagues to perhaps be discrediting of him behind his back and possibly covertly in front of him, Mark portrayed them to comprise knowing audiences who he suspected were 'unwilling readers' of his new gendered selfhood and who thus were undermining of his male personal and professional identity which he was seeking to establish both with them and others in his

workplace.

Continuing to talk about his work colleagues Mark suggested that in contrast, the men at work had been easier for him to interact with and that with them he had more easily been able to gain their recognition of his manhood. He described his relationships with them as he recounted having recently attended a conference with some of the male engineers who worked in the wheelchair service team he managed:

...I've always been part of them anyhow, it's natural, it's just natural, they accept you somehow, you can't erm...you can't quantify it but you just know (T: hmm) you just observe how easy it is and how easy it is with them, more so than the other staff, there's this feeling...[-] and it was great 'cause we were sort of at the bar and eating and we'd all sit together and it was just easy to integrate with them, you know, (T: hmm) and I think it was the toilets, the gents toilets and a couple of times I met some of them and I thought...one of them he looked at me again, he did a slight you know, double take, but then just grinned and I thought...like you make it easy for people (T: hmm) and then they're okay, you say something like err 'drinking more beer may as well bring it in here' sort of thing and disappeared into the cubicle...

Although Mark considered that amongst the men he had been accepted as a man, he indicated that this, together with the 'naturalness' which he perceived as operating through their relations with one another, had not necessarily been experienced by the men themselves. Describing the interaction which had occurred between himself and one of the engineers in the *male* social space of the 'Gents' toilets, Mark suggested that in the engineer's '*double-take*' there had been an awkwardness rather than a 'naturalness' between them and that in this *definitive* gendered context, he had been perceived to be 'out of place' rather than as legitimately 'taking his place'. Through what Goffman (1959) terms 'face-

saving practices' in interaction which both Mark and the engineer had engaged in: the engineer's 'grin', a 'protective practice' in order to reduce Mark's embarrassment at his response and maintain Mark's definition of the situation of his being a 'man' in a 'man's' social space; and Mark's casual and joking remark about his beer, a 'defensive practice' to avoid further embarrassment for himself and the engineer, Mark indicated that underpinning his 'acceptance' from the men was perhaps the significance of his professional positioning and occupational rank in relation to them, rather than the perception of any 'naturalness' of his manhood.

As the manager of the 'Wheelchair Service' in which the men worked, the men were positioned as subordinate to him within the structures of the workplace and therefore had substantial investments in avoiding the generation of any animosity with Mark, who as one of their bosses, had particular influences and power to yield in relation to them at work. Thus arguably, in the men's positioning in relation to Mark and in the context of these interpersonal dynamics, unlike Mark's female colleagues, the men were both obligated to become and had personal interests in becoming 'willing readers' of his new gendered selfhood.

Throughout his account of his relationships with people at work, Mark suggested that he was negotiating his male identity and working to establish and maintain it within a context where the interpersonal dynamics being played out were complicated by both the gendered and hierarchical positions of staff within the workplace. In occupying a managerial but 'female' position in the structure of his particular working environment, Mark's transition would have had differing effects upon his female colleagues and male members of staff. Whilst as I have

suggested, through Mark's managerial positioning and higher rank in relation to the male staff, they were likely to have been predisposed to become 'willing readers' of his new gendered selfhood, at least in his presence, for his female colleagues it is possible that through his transition, he was seen as a potential threat to their gendered hierarchy which as female managers they would have an interest in maintaining. In the broader social context of heterosexual gendered relations, for Mark's female colleagues it was perhaps feared that by having Mark as a colleague who would liaise with customers and agencies who would be unknowing of his 'discreditable' male status, their own unique positions in their workplace would effectively be undermined. On this basis, Mark's female colleagues were perhaps predisposed *not* to become 'readers' and 'protectors' of Mark's new gendered selfhood, as in the context of their particular workplace, to do so would not have served their own personal investments and professional interests.

Conclusion

The strategy adopted in this chapter has been to locate the interviewees within the network of social relationships that they must negotiate both in seeking acceptance as men ('willing readers') and in seeking to maintain or transform the relationship against the loss of 'investments' in those relationships that remain important to them. In so doing, I have been constrained to consider a few, key, relationships: those with parents, children, siblings, intimate partners, personal friends and work colleagues. These relationships differ in terms of what is at stake (what each party stands to lose) in each relationship and in the *nature* of the

stake each has in the physical, sexed body and gender of the female to male transsexual individual.

In respect of their families, parents were those who the interviewees found most difficult and important to deal with and parents can be suggested to be those people with the deepest investments in their particularly embodied and gendered child. For those who cast their parents as 'accepting' of them, this did not entail *recognition* of their re-embodied manhood, contrary to Devor's (1997) conclusions. Rather, parents appeared to 'accept' their *child* and became willing participants in their child's new life, rather than 'willing readers' of their new gender. The interviewees were seen to use 'stories' of transsexuality, set against their life histories to enable parents to see the continuity of their personhood, which would facilitate this participation. For most of the interviewees, the 'acceptance' of their parents could be seen to have been earned through the 'identity work' which they engaged in with them. Significantly, it appeared to be mothers rather than fathers who were concerned with the potential 'discrediting' of their children, themselves and their immediate family group, through the attribution of 'courtesy stigma' and their feelings of 'inadequacy' in their parenting of a 'non-normative' child.

Siblings were readily distinguishable by gender in their responses to the interviewees' transitions, with sisters being more ready to 'accept' than brothers. It could be surmised that for the brothers the (re)embodiment of the transsexual sibling, to approximate both their own bodies and their own social positionings, but not to, in their view, really *be* men ('the same'), effectively placed the

interviewees outside of the possible gendered positionings the brothers could accept. Moreover, it could be argued that the investment which these brothers had in their sister's embodied gender (and their own) was so strong that they could not countenance its change. In contrast, the interviewees' sisters, shown through their greater willingness to accept their transition, could be seen to be *lightly* invested in their pre-transition embodied gender: as having less at stake in their sibling's transition.

For those interviewees who were in marital relationships, their husbands' 'acceptance' of them appeared to mirror that which the interviewees reported having received from their parents, that is, they were *accepted* but this did not involve *recognition* of them as men. From the accounts the interviewees gave of their relationships with their husbands it was suggested that their husbands persistently misrecognised them as 'women' or at least as their wives. The husbands evidently held deep investments in their relationships with their wives and appeared to be able to maintain the 'fiction' of their female gender, in the face of their changing physical bodies. Such perceptions could perhaps also be explained in some degree through the interviewees' continuation in the 'wifely' role and through their continuing also to undertake the emotional work in the family, especially that produced through their transition and its stigmatising potential. In this way, it could be argued that female to male transsexuals who *remain* married or partnered to men will have a very different experience from male to females, in that their pre-transition gendered roles and the social and inter-personal behaviours which accrue from them are widely divergent.

Interestingly, for the partner of one interviewee, Jack, who had only known him post-transition, her investment was in the male body and identity through which she had always known him. It was the pre-transition embodiment together with his female experiences that she found threatening to her sense of, and need for, his male identity. Whilst she fully accepted and recognised Jack as a man, this could only be sustained through the erasure of his past, signifying a potential problem that female to males may face as they establish relationships with previously unknown others. In such a circumstance it is possible that for some partners, the person who exists in the present *cannot* be the person who existed in the past.

For those interviewees who had children, ready acceptance and recognition of their manhood was afforded to them by the younger children who saw their transition as a move towards normativity, reducing the 'stigma' which they had felt through having 'masculine mothers'. Their (re)embodiment for these children was recognised as congruent with their sense of their 'mother's' social identity. For the older children, 'acceptance' with recognition was less forthcoming, indicating their more profound investments in their 'mother' as such a figure was deeply embedded in their own personal history (their birth and nurturing) and thus their personal and social sense of selfhood. Indeed, Eric had never told his sons of his transition, relying upon their unconditional acceptance of him *as* their mother and *not* as a man which he suggested had facilitated the continuation of their relationship.

For the friends of the interviewees, transition seemed to be readily accepted. For

the heterosexual friends, transition appeared to be recognised as enabling the interviewees to escape their past non-conformity as 'women' which may have implicated these friends in potentially stigmatising circumstances and relationships. With no emotional or sexual investments in the 'private body' of the interviewees, but more investment in their social presentation, the interviewees' (re)embodiment therefore signified the possibility of their shift into normativity and the 'normalisation' of social relationships. For those lesbian friends who presented themselves as masculine 'butch' lesbians and who had no sexual investments in the pre-transition bodies of the interviewees, their transitions did not pose a threat to their relationship, nor, in view of the friends' 'masculinity' produce the potential for social misrecognition (in their case as heterosexual women).

In respect of work, one's job and ability to support oneself and any dependants may be at stake through sex-reassignment, as was the case with James. The significance of this risk will vary, depending upon the kind of work done, the ease or difficulty of finding alternatives and the extent to which the self is invested in particular work identities. The relative ease (combined with carelessness) with which colleagues are reported to have responded suggests that there was no very heavy personal investment on their part in the gender identity or the sexed body of the person transitioning. However, the case of James is different. Although his transition was sympathetically received by the Headteacher, her investment, as was James', was not related to James himself, but in not bringing discredit to the school.

A second consideration in this context, however, relates to the extensive sex-segregation of the workplace which still exists. Several of these interviewees worked in predominantly female workplaces and in 'women's jobs', which, in the longer term could have the effect of compromising their masculinity. However, in the interviewees' accounts this potential was shown to be affected by their locations within the workplace hierarchy. For Paul, his positioning as a factory-floor worker meant that he was required to negotiate the 'humour' of female co-workers through which his masculinity was 'discussed'. He thus was not 'shielded' by status from what could be read as ridiculing comments by any deference which may accrue to a higher status occupation, such as that which Mark occupied. For Mark, in a more senior position, his masculinity was not so easily compromised by those subordinate in the hierarchy, but *could* be undermined in the 'careless' behaviour of female colleagues who may have felt that *their* hierarchical positions were threatened by his 'new' masculinity.

Across the relationships from colleagues to personal friends and then to children, siblings and intimate partners the *significance* of the other with whom the interviewees were in relationship was more intense with those who could not be readily displaced or discarded. It was with these that the most difficult negotiations of identity took place. As we move through these relationships, the importance of the *body* can be seen to increase – the interviewees' accounts suggested that significant others who had known them pre-transition (intimate partners, older children and siblings) had strong and long-standing investments in their *sexed and gendered bodies* and thus found it more difficult to achieve recognition of their (re)embodiment and masculine gender identity.

Conclusion

The analysis of the personal narratives I have undertaken in this thesis unequivocally casts doubt upon what may be termed the 'totalising' analyses of many of the theorists I have discussed above. Through the lenses of capitalist commodification, heterosexuality and the sex/gender binary, these theorists cast transsexuality as a 'master narrative', sufficient *in itself* to account for the identities of transsexual individuals, taking the medical symptomatic criteria as foundational to the structure of that master narrative. This has been shown to be reductive in the extreme. Through undertaking a narrative analytic approach, the perils of overplaying either structure (discourses, discursive practices and institutions) or individual agency are avoided, as through their narrative accounts the interviewees' locations within social contexts and personal relationships which function to both constrain and enable their actualisations of selfhood are exposed. Through the *form* of their narratives, the interviewees revealed their active construction of self in the context of the interview, whilst the *content* revealed their negotiations of those regulating and constructing discourses, discursive practices and institutions through which their lives (and all lives) are conditioned and lived.

Although the clinical diagnosis of their 'authentic' transsexuality was crucial to these interviewees as they made sense of their lack of fit into the place in the gender binary they were ascribed at birth and during their lives as girls and women, the 'symptomatic story' has been demonstrated to *not* be played out in all social contexts. Strategically, the interviewees utilised this 'scientific'

framework to validate their 'new' gender identities and re-embodiment in their explanations to close family members, using it to generate the sense of continuity they felt their families both required and demanded in the process of gaining acceptance. This strategic use does have the *effect* of validating medical 'scientific' authority and thus of perpetuating its primacy as an explanatory model in particular contexts. However, this is not the same as claiming that it is the 'true' or singular story of experience (Prosser, 1998) nor that it functions as a 'discursive hegemony' regulating transsexual self-representation and subjectivity (Hausman, 1995). Throughout the interviews each interviewee demonstrated a complex negotiation of the medical discourses, autobiographical texts and popular representations of transsexuality which purport to describe them, interactively constructing themselves as 'authentic' in their transsexuality but also in their individuality as they distanced themselves from formulaic representations.

However, the interviewees' narratives did not fully or straightforwardly support a 'queer' perspective on transsexuality which celebrates transgression, disruption and subversion (Stone, 1991; Stryker, 1994, 1998). In none of the narratives could the interviewees be construed as demonstrating the urge to transgress, disrupt or subvert conventional boundaries of hetero/homosexuality and gender. Nonetheless, this potential could be *read* in some of the accounts and even be said to be 'acted out' particularly in the lives of those who remained married, although this appeared to be against the interviewees' desire, being found rather in the reported responses of their husbands. In these relationships the interviewees clearly located themselves as men who were either hetero- or

homosexual, although *strikingly* their husbands appeared able to participate in the 'maling' of their 'wives' and 'accept' their masculine bodies, whilst at the same time continuing to relate to them as 'women' and seeing themselves as straightforwardly heterosexual men. Indeed, it could be argued that these husbands' very unwillingness or inability to 'read' their wives' new gender created the potential for the norms of sex, gender and heterosexuality to be read as disrupted. In this reading, 'queer' could be seen as not dependent upon an active claiming of an 'alternative' voice but as a passive product of recuperation itself. For a 'queer' reader, these relationships offer the potential for new configurations of gender, but for these (and all of the) interviewees striving for recognition *as men*, such a reading would be unacceptable. Throughout their accounts the interviewees revealed that misrecognition together with their non-normative social status as men was costly in both social and personal terms, placing them and their families in the position of managing the social attribution of 'stigma', rather than simply 'freeing' them to live and be apprehended beyond sex/gender constraints.

In it is in the context of 'stigma' management and the personal investments of those in relationships with the interviewees that the physical body was suggested to 'matter': both to the interviewees themselves and *differentially*, to a variety of others in a variety of contexts. None of the interviewees demonstrated that their families could 'disregard lifetimes of direct knowledge' and simply recognise them as having always been a man but wrongly embodied (Devor, 1997), in the same way that the partner of one of the interviewees, Mandy, could not acknowledge Jack as female embodied before she knew him as a man. The

attribution of gender made by the interviewees' family members, significant others, friends and work colleagues in general could be seen to be based wholly in *past knowledge* and *present investments*, rather than the cultural norms of masculine embodiment and/or self-presentation which the interviewees presented and which may be the basis of gender attribution by *unknown* others (as suggested by the work of Kessler & McKenna (1978)).

In this thesis, attention to what Halberstam (1994) calls the 'readers of gender' have been fine-tuned through the application of Goffman's sociological perspective within the contexts of the broader social and personal relationships in which female to male transsexuals are located. The analysis of the interviewees' narratives suggests that there cannot be an unequivocal answer to the question 'does the material sexed body matter' in signifying gender and that the answer has to be that 'it depends'. Whilst it *always* matters to the transsexual individual, because he depends upon others for the social recognition that he is 'really' a man, the narratives indicated that for others its significance is contingent upon the context (of the family, the workplace, in social environments or with friends), on the investments which they will hold in their relationships and, in their perceptions of the extent to which, in specific social relationships, there is a strong expectation that the occupant of a particular social position or role will be either male or female.

Moving 'beyond the text' (Plummer, 1995) and into the social world reveals female to male transsexuals as multi-faceted individuals who cannot simply be confined to a single story of selfhood. As embodied individuals with a history

and in long-term relationships with others also (differentially?) invested in that history, they are not merely involved in 'passing' as men, but in living out their lives with others who have previously known them and from whom they need to gain recognition as men. The gaining of such recognition (as distinct from acceptance) has been shown to be difficult to achieve and, for these interviewees, rare in their experience, although 'acceptance' on various levels was reported to have been gained. Through its sociologically informed narrative analysis, which has placed focus on relationships with known rather than unknown others, this thesis has gone some way towards extending the parameters of the debate concerning female to male transsexual subjectivities and embodiment. There is however further work which this thesis indicates needs to be undertaken: on the narratives of significant others, friends and work colleagues; on the ways in which in the duration of life beyond transition the body and identity continue to be negotiated in multiple contexts and with multiple others, and also how the transitioned body continues to impact upon the sense of selfhood of female to male transsexuals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Psychiatric Association. (1980) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM- III. - 3rd ed.*, Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association

American Psychiatric Association. (1995) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders : DSM-IV. - 4th ed., International version.* - Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association

Andermahr, S., Lovell, T. & Wolkowitz, C. (1997) *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* London: Arnold

Benjamin, H. (1953) 'Transvestism and transsexualism', In: *International Journal of Sexology* 7 pp.12-14

Benjamin, H. (1954) 'Transvestism and transsexualism as psychosomatic and somato-psychic syndromes' in: *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 8 pp.219-30

Benjamin, H. (1966) *The Transsexual Phenomenon* New York: Julian Press

Billings, D. B. & Urban, T. (1996) 'The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An interpretation and Critique' in: Ekins, R & King, D. (eds.) *Blending Genders: social aspects of cross- dressing and sex-changing* London: Routledge. Also in *Social Problems* (1982) 29 pp.266-82

Bordo, S. (1993) *Unbearable Weight: Femininity, Western Culture and the Body* Los Angeles and London: University of California Press

Bornstein, K. (1994) *Gender Outlaw*, London: Routledge

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Burgess, R. G. (1982) *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual* London: Routledge

Bury, M. (1982) 'Chronic illness as biographical disruption' in: *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 13 No. 4 pp.451-468

Bury, M. (2001) 'Illness narratives: fact or fiction? In: *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 23 No.3 pp.263-285

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* London: Routledge

- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* London: Routledge:
- Butler, J. (1991) 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' in: Fuss, D. (ed) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* London: Routledge
- Butler, J. (1997) *Excitable Speech : a politics of the performative* London: Routledge,
- Califa, P. (1997) *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* San Francisco, California: Cleis Press
- Cameron, L. (1996) *Body Alchemy: transsexual portraits* Pittsburgh, Pa: Cleis Press
- Cauldwell, D. O. (1949) *What's Wrong with Transvestism?* Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius
- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative data: Complementary Research Strategies* London: Sage
- Collins, P. (1998) 'Negotiating Selves: Reflections on "Unstructured" Interviewing' in: *Sociological Research Online* vol. 3 No. 3 [http: www. Socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/3/2.html](http://www.Socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/3/2.html)
- Cortazzi, M. (1993) *Narrative Analysis* London: Falmer Press
- Cosslett, T. (1991) 'Questioning the Definition of 'Literature': Fictional and Non-Fictional Accounts of Childbirth' in: Aaron, J & Walby, S. (eds.) *Out of the Margins: Women's Studies in the Nineties* London: Falmer Press
- Cromwell, J. (1999) *Transmen & FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders & Sexualities* Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press
- Davies, B., & Harre, R. (1990) 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves' in: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* Vol. 20 pp.43-60
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949) *The Second Sex* Trans. and edited By H. M. Parshley. London: Picador
- Denzin, N. K. (1989) *Interpretive Biography* London: Sage
- Devor, H. (1997) *FTM: Female-To-Male Transsexuals in Society* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press
- Feinbloom, D. (1976) *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views* New York: Delacorte Press

- Findlay, H. (1998) 'Losing Sue' in Sally Munt (ed) *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* London: Cassell
- Frank, A.W. (1995) *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press
- Foucault, M. (1980) *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* New York: Vintage Books
- Garber, M. (1992) *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* London: Penguin Books
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology* Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, Oxford
- Ginsberg, F. D. (1989) *Contested Lives: The abortion debate in an American Community* Berkeley: University of California Press
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* London: Penguin Books
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* London: Penguin Books
- Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame Analysis* Boston: Northeastern University Press
- Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of Talk* Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Halberstam, J. (1994) 'F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity' in: Doan, L. (ed.) *The Lesbian Postmodern* New York: Columbia University Press
- Halberstam, J. (1998a) 'Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum' in: *GLQ: A Journal Of Lesbian And Gay Studies* Vol 4 No 2 pp.287-310.
- Halberstam, J. (1998b) *Female Masculinity* London: Duke University Press
- Hale, C. Jacob. (1998). 'Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands' in: *GLQ: A Journal Of Lesbian And Gay Studies*. Vol 4 No 2 pp.311-348.
- Hale, J. (1997) 'Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans____.' At: <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~sandy/hale.rules.html>
- Hartsock, N. (1987) 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism' in: Harding, S. (ed.) *Feminism & Methodology* Milton Keynes: Open University Press

- Hausman, B. (1995) *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender*, Durham & London: Duke University Press
- Hewitt, P., & Warren, J. (1995) *A Self-Made Man: The Diary of a Man Born in a Woman's Body* London: Headline
- Jeffreys, S. (1994) *The Lesbian Heresy* London: The Women's Press
- Kessler, S. & McKenna, W. (1978) *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press
- Kitzinger, C., & Wilkinson S. (eds.) (1996) *Representing the Other* London: Sage
- Kitzinger, S. (1987) *Giving Birth: How it Really Feels* London: Victor Gollancz
- King, D. (1996) 'Gender Blending: Medical perspectives and technology' in: Ekins, R., & King, D. (eds.) *Blending Genders: social aspects of cross-dressing and sex-changing* London: Routledge
- King, D. (1981) 'Gender Confusions: Psychological and Psychiatric Conceptions of Transvestism and Transsexuality' in Plummer, K. (ed.) *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* Hutchinson: London
- King, D. (1987) 'Social constructionism and medical knowledge: the case of transsexualism' in: *Sociology of Health & Illness*, Vol. 9 No 4 pp.351-377
- Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews* London: Sage
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967) 'Narrative Analysis: Oral versions of personal experience' in Helm, J. (ed.) *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* Seattle: University of Washington Press
- Lapadat, J. C. (2000) 'Problematizing transcription: purpose, paradigm and quality' in: *International Journal of Research Methodology* Vol. 3 No. 3 pp. 203-219
- Lee, T. (2001) 'Trans(re)lations: Lesbian & Female to male Transsexual Accounts of Identity' in: *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol 24 (in press)
- Lewins, F. (1995) *Transsexualism in Society* Melbourne: Macmillan
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998) *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis and Interpretation* London: Sage
- Lothstein, L.M. (1983) *Female-to-Male Transsexualism: Historical, Clinical and Theoretical Issues* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

- Lucius-Hoene, G., & Deppermann, A. (2000) 'Narrative Identity Empiricized: A Dialogical Approach to Autobiographical Research Interviews' in: *Narrative Inquiry* Vol 10 No.1 pp.199-222
- Lukács, G. (1971) *History and Class Consciousness* London: Merlin Press
- Lupton, D. (1994) *Medicine as Culture* London: Sage
- Maines, D. R. (1993) 'Narrative's Moment and Sociology's Phenomena: Toward a Narrative Sociology' in: *The Sociological Quarterly* Vol. 34 No.1 pp.17-38
- Mishler, E. G. (1986) *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* London: Harvard University Press
- Mishler, E. G. (1992) 'Work, Identity and Narrative: An Artist-Craftsman's Story' in: Rosenwald, G. C., & Ochberg, R. L. (eds.) (1992) *Storied Lives* London: Yale University Press
- Nakamura, K. 'Narrating Ourselves: Duped or Duplicitous?' in Bullough, B., Bullough, V., & Elias, J. (eds) (1997) *Gender Blending* New York: Prometheus Books
- Namaste, K. (1996) "'Tragic Misreadings": Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity' in: Beemyn, B., & Elianon, M. (eds.) *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology* New York: New York University Press
- Nataf, Z. I. (1996) *Lesbians Talk: Transgender* London: Scarlet Press:
- Nelson, J. L. (1998) 'The Silence of the Bioethicists: Ethical and Political Aspects of Managing Gender Dysphoria' in: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol 4 Number 2 pp.213-230
- Oakley, A. (1981) *From Here to Maternity* Harmondsworth: Pelican
- Personal Narratives Group. (eds.) (1989) *Interpreting Women's Lives* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* Albany: State University of New York Press
- Prosser, J. (1998) 'Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity' in Bland, C. & Doan, L. (eds.) *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* London: Polity Press
- Prosser, J. (1998) *Second Skins: the body narratives of transsexuality* New York: Columbia University Press
- Plummer, K. (1983) *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Literature of a Humanistic Method* London: Allen & Unwin

- Plummer, K. (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories: power, change and social worlds* London: Routledge
- Raymond, J. (1979) *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* London: Beacon Press
- Raymond, J. (1994) *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* London: Teachers College Press
- Riessman, C. K. (1990) *Divorce Talk* London: Rutgers University Press
- Riessman, C. K. (1993) *Narrative Analysis* London: Sage
- Rose, H. (1983) 'Hand, Brain, and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 9 (1) pp.73-90
- Rosenwald, G. C., & Ochberg, R. L. (eds.) (1992) *Storied Lives* New Haven and London: Yale University Press
- Rubin, G. (1992) 'Of catamites and kings: Reflections on butch, gender, and boundaries' in: Nestle, J. (ed.) *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc.
- Rubin, H. S. (1998) 'Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies' in: *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Vol 4 no 2 pp.263-281
- Sclater, S. D. (1998) 'Nina's Story: An exploration into the construction and transformation of subjectivities in narrative accounting' in *Auto/Biography* Vol. VI, Numbers 1 & 2 pp. 67-77
- Scott, J. W. (1992) "'Experience'" in: Butler, J., and Scott, J.W. (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political* London and New York: Routledge
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1994) *Tendencies* London: Routledge
- Segal, L. (1994) *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* London: Virago
- Smith, D.E. (1987) *The Everyday World As Problematic* Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Standing, K. (1998) 'Writing the Voices of the Less Powerful: Research on Lone Mothers' in Ribbens, J. & Edwards, R. (eds.) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives* London: Sage
- Stoller, R. J. (1968) *Sex and Gender: on the development of masculinity and femininity* New York: Science House

- Stone, S. (1991) 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto' in: Epstein, J., and Straub, K. (eds.) *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* London: Routledge
- Shapiro, J. (1991) 'Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex' in: Epstein, J., and Straub, K. (eds.) *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* London: Routledge
- Spivak (1986) *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* London: Methuen
- Stryker, S. (1994) 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix - Performing Transgender Rage,' in: *GLQ* 1(3) pp.227-254.
- Stryker, S. (1998) 'The Transgender Issue: An Introduction' in: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol 4 Number 2 pp.145-158
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhour, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996) 'Affirmation and Resistance of Dominant Discourses: The Rhetorical Construction of Pregnancy' in: *Journal of Narrative and Life History* Vol. 6 pp.225-251
- Tanesini, A. (1999) *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies* Oxford: Blackwell
- Taylor, C. (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press
- Tully, B. (1992) *Accounting for Transsexualism and Transhomosexuality* London: Whiting & Birch Ltd
- Volcano, D. L., & Halberstam, J. (1999) *The Drag King Book* London: Serpent's Tail
- Whittle, S. (1996) 'Gender Fucking or Fucking Gender? Current Cultural Contributions to Theories of Gender Blending' in: Ekins, R & King, D (eds) *Blending Genders: social aspects of cross- dressing and sex-changing* London: Routledge
- Whittle, S. (2000) *The Transgender Debate* Reading: South Street Press
- Whittle, S. (1999) 'The Becoming Man: The Law's Ass Brays' in: More, K., & Whittle, S. (eds.) *reclaiming genders: transsexuals grammars at the fin de siècle* London: Cassell
- Williams, S. (2001) 'Sociological imperialism and the profession of medicine revisited: where are we now?' in: *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 23 No. 2 pp. 135-158

Williams, S., & Calnan (1996) 'The "Limits of Medicalisation?: Modern Medicine and the Lay Populace in "Late" Modernity' in: *Social Science and Medicine* Vol. 42 No. 12 pp.1609-1620

Wood, L.A., & Kroger, R.O. (2000) *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text* London: Sage

Wortham, S. (2001) *Narratives in Action: A Strategy for Research and Analysis* London: Teachers College Press

Young, K. (1987) *Taleworlds and storyrealms: The phenomenology of narrative* Boston: Martinus Nijhoff

APPENDIX A

DSM – IV

Diagnostic Criteria for Gender Identity Disorder

A. A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex). In children, the disturbance is manifested by four (or more) of the following:

- (1) repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex
- (2) in boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing
- (3) strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex
- (4) intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex

(5) strong preference for playmates of the other sex. In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as a stated desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex.

B. Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex. In children, the disturbance is manifested by any of the following: in boys, assertion that his penis or testes are disgusting or will disappear or assertion that it would be better not to have a penis, or aversion toward rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games, and activities; in girls, rejection of urinating in a sitting position, assertion that she has or will grow a penis, or assertion that she does not want to grow breasts or menstruate, or marked aversion toward normative feminine clothing. In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics (e.g., request for hormones, surgery, or other procedures to physically alter sexual characteristics to simulate the other sex) or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex.

C. The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.

D. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Code based on current age:

302.6 Gender Identity Disorder in Children

302.85 Gender Identity Disorder in Adolescents or Adults

Specify if (for sexually mature individuals):

Sexually Attracted to Males

Sexually Attracted to Females

Sexually Attracted to Both

Sexually Attracted to Neither

Source: <http://behavenet.org> Reprinted with permission from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth Edition. Copyright 1994 American Psychiatric Association

APPENDIX B

Transcription Conventions and Glossary of Analytical Terms

1. Transcription Conventions:

- [-]** Removal of section of talk and thus cut in extract
- ...** Pause in Speech up to two seconds in length
- (...)** Pause in speech up to four or five seconds in length
- []** Brackets placed around the replacement names of places and/or persons

2. Glossary of analytical terms:

Narrative Genres:

Habitual narrative:

Depicts the general routine of events/emotions over time rather than a specific past time event or emotion and where there is no peak in the action being conveyed

Hypothetical narrative:

Describes events that did not actually happen

Story narrative:

an abstract: the summary of the substance of the narrative

orientation: time, place, situation, participants

complicating action: the sequence of events

evaluation: significance and meaning of the action and attitude of the narrator

resolution: what finally happened

coda: where the narrator returns the perspective to the present

Interactional Genres

The Animator: the person who is currently animating the production of the words being spoken (this may not be the actual 'self' of the individual, for example, she or he might be repeating other words such as a passage from a novel).

•

The Author: the 'I' in the here and now - the individual who has selected the words being spoken and who is the creator of the speaking position being occupied.

Embedded Animator: the speaker quotes or summarises the words of another person which were spoken in a past time.

Embedded Author: the person in the present quotes or summarises words which had been spoken by their 'self' in the past.